Lessons from the field: What can we learn from early childhood education practices of settings in New Zealand and Wales?

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Abstract

The statutory early childhood curriculum in England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been described as a 'ready for school' model in which children are viewed as human 'becomings' – in terms of what they can do for society. This research project is underpinned by the premise that there is no one view of childhood but many views that are bound by context and involves a study of the early childhood curricula of settings in New Zealand (Te Whāriki) and Wales (the Foundation Phase). Both are based on sociocultural theory, a term developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978; 1986). They can also be defined as 'ready to learn' models in which learning dispositions are foregrounded over early formal learning.

The research was conducted as an interpretivist study using ethnographic methods. This methodology accepts that reality is subjectively conceived through a connection between the researcher and the field, and that any truths revealed are partial and situated. Fieldwork was carried out for three weeks in a kindergarten in New Zealand and one week in a school in Wales in order to understand the culture of each setting and to provide evidence-informed insights and contextualized knowledge. Data were collected through participant observation and the use of photography. They were analysed using three sociocultural planes: community, interpersonal and personal (Rogoff, 2003).

The study concludes that enculturation and mediation enabled the intentional development of learning dispositions, which were enhanced through extended learning periods, provocation and extensive communication, and that the sociocultural environment influenced the children's self-identity as capable and confident learners. The research maintains that a sociocultural play-based curriculum affords children the right to a childhood exempt from the pressures of 'becoming' whilst also promoting learning dispositions such as self-regulation that are likely to have an impact on academic achievement at school. These findings have the potential to influence practitioners in the independent sector at a time when exemption from EYFS has been announced.

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Glossary of Terms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
DCSF	Department of Children, School and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
LEA	Local Education Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPA	Planning, Preparation and Assessment
REPEY	Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years
TIMSS	Trends in International Maths and Science Study
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1: Rationale

1.1 Setting the scene

This research project arose when the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (England. Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008), the curriculum for children under the age of five in England, became statutory for all settings. This was a pivotal moment for me as an early childhood practitioner in an independent school because it was the first time that a compulsory curriculum had been imposed upon schools in the independent sector. I have had difficulties implementing EYFS, not just because of my compromised autonomy, but also because it appeared to contain fundamental contradictions. This view is echoed by others in the wider research community (Anning, 2009; Wood, 2010). On the one hand, EYFS refers to learning though play, which by its very nature focuses on the *processes* of learning, but on the other hand, EYFS is inherently an *outcomes*-based curriculum with each five-year-old measured against, and expected to achieve, 117[1] assessment points as part of the Foundation Stage Profile (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2003), the statutory assessment which must be completed when a child is five. Another contradiction is that EYFS refers to the value of child-initiated learning but at the same time the curriculum is divided into six subject domains that prescribe content knowledge, with practitioners expected to plan and deliver structured teaching activities. My concern was augmented by the pervading 'schoolification' (OECD, 2006) discourse within which EYFS was implemented. The national debate about improving children's performance in Key Stage 1 assessments[2] has led to a 'top down' approach in which formal teaching methods have been advocated for younger children (Wood & Bennett, 2006), including initiatives such as teaching synthetic phonics to all four-year-olds (England. Department for Education and Skills, 2007) in order to improve children's reading at Key Stage 1. A 'ready for school' culture emerged in which formal education practices for children under five

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[1] As a result of the Tickell's recommendations (2011), the Foundation Profile assessment points are due to be reduced to 20 from September 2012.

[2] Statutory tests for maintained schools for seven-year-olds but not statutory for independent schools.

were seen as a way to boost later academic performance (Rose, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009b). However, many researchers have pointed out that an early start to formal education can actually be detrimental to children's later performance at school (Elkind & Whitehurst, 2001; Sharp, 2002; Barnett, 2006; Stephen, 2006; Burger, 2010) even for children from deprived backgrounds (Alexander, 2010) for whom these measures are purported to be most beneficial.

I am not opposed to a statutory curriculum per se, although I did regret the lack of choice and compromised autonomy that became a reality. Rather, EYFS was not the curriculum that I would have chosen because of the view of childhood that it promotes. Embarking on the Doctor of Education programme afforded me the opportunity to survey other models of early childhood curricula, and for this thesis, I decided to examine *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand and the *Foundation Phase* in Wales because of the perspectives of childhood adopted by them.

1.2 Different views of childhood

> Children's lives are lived through childhoods constructed for them by adult understandings of childhood and what children are and should be. (Mayall, 1996, p.1)

In a review of the early childhood education policies of twelve countries, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) described the dramatic increase in attention on early childhood education. A decade later, early childhood education in England has not just been subject to attention but also to a rapid rate of change as politicians, policy-makers, researchers, practitioners and parents seek to construct a view of childhood through which children in England lead their lives. In particular, government involvement has intensified as early childhood education is seen as a way to enhance the social and economic infrastructure of a country (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p.1). In this way, childhood is conceptualized as *what it can do for society* in terms of the labour market – in encouraging women back to work as well as preparing children as members of a future workforce, particularly children from most the deprived

backgrounds – and for growth in the economy that this investment in human capital might promote (*ibid.*). The World Bank has provided significant investment for a range of early childhood services (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) and has arranged international conferences on early childhood (World Bank, 2007). The involvement of the World Bank suggests that investment in early childhood is seen as 'big business' for countries who wish to boost their academic performance in international league tables such as PISA (OECD, 2009) and TIMSS (Mullis *et al.*, 2008) and who wish for growth in the economy. In the UK, government spending on early childhood services quadrupled in the period 1997-2008 (Alexander, 2010) with particular investment targeted at those deemed to be underprivileged.

The philosophy underpinning this research project is a rejection of treating children only as redemptive agents (Moss, 2007) who can 'save the world' and solve the problems of society through the intervention of adults. This construction of childhood is akin to what Freire (1970) criticized as a 'banking' model of education in which children are empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge on their journey of realization from incompleteness to maturity (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, *op. cit.*). Whilst formal education for children may act as a preparation for adulthood, education should also recognize children as active agents in their own childhoods, co-constructors not receivers of knowledge, human *beings* rather than human *becomings* (Qvortrup, 1994). This ontological aspect of childhood will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. The starting point for this research is the inherent tension between a philosophy that views childhood as an important state in its own right and the reality of the prescribed early childhood curriculum in England, EYFS, which emphasizes childhood as preparation for school (Fleer, Anning & Cullen, 2009) and is implemented within dominant discourses.

1.3 Dominant discourses surrounding EYFS

EYFS is implemented within a neoliberal reform agenda, with its associated vocabulary such as "'development', 'quality', 'readiness for school', 'best practice',

'benchmark' and 'outcomes'" (Moss, 2007, p.229). Broadhead, Wood & Howard (2010) remind us that:

> ...we once had a theoretically based, educational play tradition in the UK which derived from the empirical work of, for example, Susan Isaacs and Margaret McMillan, and their followers...This educational play heritage was subsequently eroded by the culture and climate of educational reform from the late 1980s onwards (Broadhead, 2004), to the extent that the status of play in education has been at its lowest point in twenty years (p.180-181).

The reform agenda that emphasizes the importance of the outcomes rather than the processes of education has been described as a dominant discourse (Moss, 2007). Dominant discourses, or what Foucault termed "regimes of truth", are instruments of power that serve a regulatory function (Dalhberg, Moss & Pence, 2007) which generate an authoritative consensus about what needs to be done and how it should be achieved (MacNaughton, 2005). Ball has described how the reform agenda requires individuals to respond to targets, indicators and evaluations to an extent that:

> We become uncertain about the reasons for actions. Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? (Ball, 2003, p.220).

A view of childhood influenced by the reform agenda is one in which 'outputs' and notions of 'quality' can be measured in a way that the processes of education, such as learning through play, are not easily quantifiable.

A further dominant discourse within the field of early childhood education is that of developmental psychology (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This discourse, described as having been at one time the most influential paradigm in early childhood education (Anning, 2009), is a linear conception of development that occurs in a series of sequential stages. The role of adults within a developmental paradigm is de-emphasized (Fleer, Anning & Cullen, 2009) with knowledge acquisition individually constructed (Edwards, 2005) as the child, who is the 'lone scientist', explores his or her environment in order to understand the world. Developmental psychology, particularly as influenced by the work of Jean Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1972), sees

child development as universal (Lubeck, 1985). EYFS is based on the premise that a "universal set of standards" (England. Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p.7) can be applied to all settings. Conversely, from a postmodern viewpoint knowledge is seen as "perspectival and ambiguous, contextualised and localised, incomplete and paradoxical, and produced in diverse ways" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p.55), which would suggest that child development is not universal but is bound by context.

1.4 Contrasts to EYFS in England

An alternative view of childhood in which development cannot be separated from its context is sociocultural theory (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2009). Sociocultural theory, based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978; 1986), sees learning and development as products of society and culture so that there is not one universal view of child development but many versions that are contextually-bound (Edwards, 2003). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, and is central to this project because of the way in which it allows childhood to be defined locally.

Two case studies were constructed which contrast with the prevailing view of childhood in England. New Zealand was chosen as a case study because of the sociocultural underpinnings of its early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, (Soler & Miller, 2003) and because it does not conceptualize children as human 'becomings' that need to develop skills that will make them ready for school (Smith, 2003b). Wales was chosen as a case study because its curriculum for three to seven-year olds, *the Foundation Phase*, can also be considered as sociocultural in its view of the child (Aasen & Waters, 2006) and because of its philosophy of children learning through play until aged seven, compared to England where formal learning – that is the introduction of formal teaching methods through differentiated subjects – officially commences when children are aged five, but in reality starts before this. In addition, both the New Zealand and Welsh curricula are centred on children acquiring positive dispositions for learning rather than focusing primarily on

content knowledge as a preparation for school. Learning dispositions are defined as "learning … strategies that have become habits of the mind, tendencies to respond to, edit and select from, situations in certain ways" (Jordan, 2009, p.40). I became interested in a curriculum that explicitly aims to promote learning dispositions, that is locally situated, and the contrast that this offers to EYFS in England. I also wanted to explore how focusing on learning dispositions provides an alternative means of preparation for school than early formal learning.

In selecting case studies in New Zealand and Wales, this research project embraces the postmodern position in which knowledge is not universal but is partial and situated. There is not one truth about childhood but many truths that lead to different constructions of childhood defined by context. Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007) advise that pedagogues and researchers should strive to 'unmask' regimes of truth in order to become more aware and critical of alternative stances. Foucault (1980) suggests that we can choose the truths that we privilege and that the element of choice enables the possibility of disrupting a regime of truth. My aim is to provide a space for critical and reflective thought, to disrupt the dominant discourses within early childhood education, and to offer an alternative view of childhood to the one prescribed by EYFS in England. It is not my intention to propose a simplistic 'good/bad' comparison in a way that creates a binary opposition. Nor do I aim to produce a model of 'what works' for generalization to other settings. Instead, I want to focus on the issue of choice and diversity:

> Education is about choices – for example, choices to 'do' curriculum in particular ways, choices to prioritise one set of goals over another and choices to address an issue or not. Each of these choices is linked to a set of meanings about who a child is, what education is for and who should make decisions about what the child needs (MacNaughton, 2005, p.79).

1.5 New knowledge

There is an apparent paucity of evidence relating to different early childhood curricula and "little hard evidence…to guide policy and practice" (BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003 p.33). Fleer, Anning & Cullen (2009) remind us that

because early childhood education is "subject to political influence it is imperative that researchers contribute an analytic and evidence-informed perspective on policy" (p. 203). This research project aims to contribute to the evidence-base and to do so by examining the curricular practices in situ. Moss claimed that whilst there has been an "explosion of cross-national studies comparing early childhood services in different countries" (1997, p. vii), the studies have mostly focused on policies at a macro-level rather than studying culture and practice. My research involves studying local culture and practice, using Lubeck's definition of culture:

> Culture, however, is more than a group's art, music, and movement. It is the patterns of organization that hold diverse people together and the systems of beliefs and meanings to which the group subscribes (1985, p.7).

In studying the sociocultural curricula of settings in New Zealand and Wales and in attempting to uncover the meaningful systems of beliefs and practices, I aim to consider the following broad questions: What does a sociocultural curriculum look like in practice? What is the role for practitioners in such a curriculum? My more focused research questions which incorporate the emphasis of learning dispositions are:

1. What strategies do practitioners use for the intentional promotion of learning dispositions?
2. How do learning dispositions develop in terms of robustness and sophistication?
3. What role does the sociocultural environment play in the development of learning dispositions?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Literature Review is divided into four sections. The first analyses the current situation of early childhood education in England, related to government policy and the reform agenda within which policy is implemented. I describe how childhood is defined in England and how early childhood education is concerned with preparing children to be 'ready for school' with a focus on formal learning as a means of addressing the perception of falling academic standards. The second section contains a discussion of Vygotsky's theories of learning, and how his sociocultural theory provides an alternative model of conceptualizing childhood. The third section considers 'ready to learn' as an alternative to England's 'ready for school' model and I describe how the development of learning dispositions has been suggested as a means of promoting a successful transition to school. The final section of the Literature Review focuses on early childhood education in Wales and New Zealand with a discussion about the need to pay heed to culture when involved in the process of 'policy borrowing'.

2.1 Early childhood education in England

Early childhood education in the UK has been subjected to a succession of rapid changes in recent years. This has been replicated globally as early childhood services in many countries have received increased investment and been exposed to a high level of government involvement in curriculum content and assessment (Wood & Bennett, 2006). These changes have come about due to consistent international evidence of the positive educational and societal effects of high-quality early childhood provision, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Melhuish, 2004). Governments have encouraged women into paid work, and children into non-parental childcare, as a means of potentially reducing the number of children in poverty (Leach, 2011). The global agenda for early childhood education has therefore centred on increasing educational performance and thereby breaking the cycle of poverty by producing a skilled workforce. Funding provided for early childhood education has been seen as a future investment not

only for its *yield* in economic and social returns (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009) but also for its *savings* in later social, health and justice systems (Sylva & Pugh, 2005).

Within the context of equality of educational outcomes and social reform, the New Labour Government, which came to power in 1997, initiated changes to early childhood education in England. Planned investment for education was revealed in a white paper, *Excellence in Schools* (England. Department for Education and Employment, 1997), which outlined intentions to raise standards and give every child a firm educational foundation. This vision for early childhood education was realized through policies such as: the *National Childcare Strategy* (England. Department for Education and Employment, 1998) which extended the free nursery place scheme, and aimed to improve the quality of childcare provided; *Sure Start* (*ibid.*) which ear-marked large amounts of funding aimed at combating poverty and inequality; and *Every Child Matters* (England. Department for Education and Skills, 2004) and the subsequent *Children Act* in 2004 which promoted early intervention through the integration of services for children and their families.

In addition to policies relating to spending, the New Labour Government brought about changes to the curriculum for young children. The *Desirable Outcomes for Young Children* (School Curriculum Assessment Authority, 1996), a framework for early childhood education introduced by the previous government, was replaced by the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000), a curriculum framework for three to five-year-olds. In addition, non-statutory guidelines for the under threes were introduced in the form of *Birth to Three Matters* (England. Department for Education and Skills, 2002). With practitioners still adapting to new policies and attempting to translate them into practice, both of these initiatives, together with the *National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding* (England. Department for Education and Skills, 2001), were subsequently amalgamated and replaced by *The Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (England. Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008) which set out legal requirements and statutory guidance for learning, development and welfare for children under five in all settings. The current version

of EYFS contains sixty-nine early learning goals that define the knowledge, skills and understanding that children should acquire by the end of the academic year that they turn five. EYFS is accompanied by a statutory assessment for five year olds, the *Foundation Stage Profile* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2003). In 2011, Dame Clare Tickell published her review of EYFS and recommended reducing the number of early learning goals to 17 and Foundation Stage Profile assessment points to 20, and re-organizing the six subject domains into core and prime learning areas (Tickell, 2011). Subsequently, the Department for Education published a revised version, and invited consultation (England. Department for Education, 2011a) before producing the new version of EYFS (England. Department for Education, 2012a).

One of the purposes of an intense focus on early childhood education was that research nationally and internationally has revealed that attendance at a high-quality pre-school programme is not only beneficial for children's attainment and social outcomes but that these benefits can be long-lasting (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Alexander, 2010; Camilli *et al.*, 2010). For practitioners, despite having to react to a rapid rate of change, the fact that EYFS recognizes the value of play in young children's learning and development has been welcomed (McGillivray, 2007). Reference to learning through play had been absent from the *Desirable Outcomes for Young Children* (School Curriculum Assessment Authority, 1996) which outlined the original curriculum framework for children under the age of five. In the UK there is a long tradition of a play-based pedagogy in early childhood education, which can be traced back to the work of Froebel (May, 1997). There is also a "wealth of research findings regarding the benefits of different forms of play to learning and development" (Wood, 2010, p.9). Increasing entry of four-year-olds into reception classes in primary schools had led to concerns about inappropriately formal instruction for children who are under statutory school age. EYFS was therefore seen as a solution to this concern which would enable 'best practice' of play-based learning to be replicated in all settings and from nursery settings to reception classes (Adams *et al.*, 2004). The increased government interest in early childhood education has also been met positively because of the recognition placed

on the sector and the increased investment after many years of perceived low status and levels of funding (Palaiologou, 2010). However, despite its welcome by many practitioners, enactment of EYFS has not been without problems.

One of the biggest difficulties is that EYFS has been implemented within the context of a 'reform agenda', which can be characterized by a discourse of 'improved standards', 'targets', 'quality' and 'outcomes'. The reform agenda has been referred to as the "paradigm of regulatory modernity" (Moss, 2007) in which there is tight regulation of measurable outcomes for education. Neoliberal government policies that call for competitiveness and accountability have had an impact on early childhood education and the way in which EYFS can be implemented. Learning through play is not particularly 'measurable' in terms of 'quality' and 'outcome'.

Two key manifestations of the reform agenda are inspection and assessment (Alexander, 2010). Inspection of EYFS is carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), whose role is to check regulatory requirements as well as to evaluate settings, focusing on outcomes for children. The Foundation Stage Profile is an assessment summary that must be completed for all five-year-old children. It was designed for practitioners to use observation as a tool for assessment, but is also perceived as a "mere checklist" (McGillivray, 2007) that measures effectiveness as children are rated against assessment points. The inspection and assessment requirements that are associated with EYFS, and the time spent on these, arguably obscure the *process* of learning through play in favour of the *outcomes* of the curriculum as part of the reform agenda. The effect of an outcomes-based curriculum is potentially damaging to young children as "play cannot and should not be subordinated wholly to educational policy agendas that privilege narrow constructs of effectiveness and defined outcomes" (Broadhead, Howard & Wood, 2010, p.2).

Another concern about EYFS relates to the appropriateness of the learning outcomes for young children (Evangelou *et al.*, 2009). Although EYFS claims to offer a balanced approach to educating the 'whole child' and to promote learning through play, some suggest that it still places too much emphasis on subject

knowledge (Anning, 2009) and is described as being prescriptive (Moss, 2007). Children in England begin compulsory schooling earlier than their European counterparts, officially at aged five in England, but a recent review of the primary curriculum recommended the September after a child's fourth birthday as a suitable age to start school (Rose, 2009), compared to aged six in most of Europe (Sharp, 2002). The prescriptive nature of EYFS and the early start to compulsory schooling mean that children in England are embarking on subject-based, formal learning at a comparatively young age.

The Cambridge Primary Review, a large-scale enquiry into English primary education edited by Robin Alexander, stated that:

> ...policy in England appears to be premised on the questionable principle that the younger children start formal schooling the better they will eventually do (Alexander, 2010, p.239).

Some of the contested formal requirements of EYFS include early literacy outcomes for children between the ages of forty and sixty months, such as:

- Read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently;

- Use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words;

- Write their own names and other things such as labels and captions, and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation (England. Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008).

A further review of the English primary curriculum, commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education and conducted by Sir Jim Rose (2009), was thought by some to be a pre-emptive measure to Alexander's Cambridge Primary Review (Bangs, McBeath & Galton, 2011). One of Rose's objectives was to evaluate the latter two of the above statements due to their contentious nature (Edgington et al., 2008). Rose recommended that they should be upheld and that practitioners need better

guidance as to how to achieve these goals with their pupils, rather than agreeing that they were inappropriate for young children (Rose, 2009).

Furthermore, there was concern about the suitability of the recommendations of Rose's previous review, which focused on synthetic phonics (Rose, 2006). In this review, he advocated the teaching of a systematic programme of phonic work for all children when they start reception *aged four* despite concerns that there was insufficient research evidence to make this universal recommendation (Wyse & Styles, 2007).

Such pressure for an 'early start' to formal education came about as a means to address poor academic performance of English school children, as revealed in international comparisons such as PISA (OECD, 2009) and TIMSS (Mullis *et al.*, 2008). It has been justified as a way to raise educational standards as part of the reform agenda despite queries about the validity of PISA and TIMSS and the processes involved (Lau, 2009; Mortimore, 2009). EYFS is unusual in prescribing early literacy and numeracy for pre-school aged children (Bertram & Pascal, 2002a), but the English Government is not isolated in bowing to political pressure perceived as a means to reverse failing academic standards. The Head Start programme in the US "gave rise to the pernicious belief that education is a race – and that the earlier you start, the earlier you finish" (Elkind & Whitehurst, 2001, p. 10). The subsequent 'No Child Left Behind' legislation (Bush, 2001) promoted the teaching of literacy and numeracy at a younger age. Indeed, educators "across the globe face the same pressure to start teaching academic skills at a progressively younger age at the expense of traditional early childhood activities...caused by concerns about...children falling behind in their later academic learning" (Bodrova, 2008, p. 358).

There are doubts as to whether exposing children to a formal curriculum at a younger age generates the desired results of better performance later in their schooling. It would appear that an earlier start to formal learning can give rise to gains in the short-term (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009b; Camilli *et al.*, 2010) but long-term benefits are not sustained (Elkind & Whitehurst, 2001; Sharp, 2002; Barnett, 2006;

Stephen, 2006; Burger, 2010; National Audit Office, 2012). My concern is that an early start to school and early formal skills may be ineffective in the long-term; moreover it also involves the omission of other important learning experiences which could have serious implications for future learning. Evidence has indeed suggested that this is the case: "earlier exposure to academic skills appeared to be associated with higher anxiety, lower self-esteem and less motivation towards learning" (Sharp, 2002, p.11); and too much formal learning at too young an age stifles young children's "learnacy" (Claxton, 2000), which is a term that describes the desire to learn and willingness to continue to do so. In addition, the formal nature of some young children's experiences has been at the "cost of their natural curiosity, creative expression, confidence and love of learning" (Aasen & Waters, 2006 p.123). These claims are concerning not least because exposure to early formal learning would be pointless if the benefits are not long-lasting and if it *adversely* affects children's dispositions and motivation to learn. With this in mind, the next section will examine how this concern could be addressed by a different approach.

2.2 Different approaches to early childhood education

A purpose of this thesis is to study the early childhood curricula of settings in New Zealand and Wales to provide alternative views of childhood to the one represented by EYFS in England. In considering this intention, it is important first to reflect on the aims underpinning curricula and what views of childhood are promoted. We are reminded that "curricula can become 'sites of struggle' between ideas about what early childhood education is for, and what are appropriate content and contexts for learning and development in early childhood" (Soler & Miller, 2003 p.57). This struggle has been compounded by the weak empirical evidence base underpinning early childhood education (Wood & Bennett, 2006; Anning, 2009) and the many diverse views regarding the effective approaches for educating young children.

In England, a consequence of the reform agenda is its ontological stance on childhood. Seeing young children as a means to improve a country's economic competitiveness places them within the paradigm of 'becoming' first school children and then active adults in society (Aubrey, 2002) and as "redemptive agent[s], who can be the means of resolving many societal problems" (Moss, 2007, p. 229). The implication of conceptualizing children as human 'becomings' is that children are somehow lacking and must be "educated and developed before they can become 'real' people" (Mouritsen, 2002, p.33). What this position ignores is a possibility of early childhood being important in itself, for itself, rather than as a preparation and investment for the next stage of life. An additional problem with the 'becoming' model is that it views children as incompetent, with competence being achieved in adulthood, as expressed in relation to adults' praxis (Qvortrup, 2002). Whilst adults do acquire competencies that come with maturity; it is too simple a mechanism to view their development on a continuum from birth to adulthood. An alternative model is one in which children are defined as human 'beings' who are reliant on adults for physical and emotional needs but who are also active and competent agents with their own agenda and interests in their own time and space (Qvortrup, 1994).

Different societies have different constructs of childhood and we are reminded that "childhood is the life-space which our culture limits it to be" (Qvortrup, *ibid.*, p.3). The OECD (2001), in a review of the early childhood education policies of twelve countries, referred to a range of societal views in the human becoming/being debate. The report identified one view in which children need to be readied for school so that "they can eventually take their places as workers in a global economy" (*ibid.*, p.41) and another in which childhood has importance as its own life phase and "children are increasingly seen as a distinct group in society" (*ibid.*,p.42). The latter is linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in which children have their own rights and a 'voice' in expressing their points of view. In a follow up to this report, detailing twenty countries' construction of childhood, England is described as having a 'ready for school' model in order to prepare children for the next stage of schooling (OECD, 2006), which

places childhood within the 'becoming' model. In contrast, Scandinavian countries have recognized early childhood as a phase with its own value and purpose (Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005). The latter model is described as "social pedagogy" (OECD, 2006) in which the "emphasis is on the lived experience of childhood, rather than on a narrow concern with preparing children to cope with the demands of school" (Parker-Rees, 2010, p. 201).

The OECD reviews (OECD 2001, 2006) provide a range of information about early childhood in many countries. However, it has been suggested that they only reveal a partial account of early childhood services because of the limited number of countries involved (Moss & Bennett, 2006). Further studies would be welcome to confirm or refute the claims made by the OECD. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) has defended the claim made by OECD (2006) that England has adopted a 'ready for school' model in which early childhood education has been subject to 'schoolification'. She claims that many of the outcomes prescribed in EYFS are general in nature and in common with approaches in other countries.

The being and becoming debate, with its opposing stances on childhood for the present or the future, is to some extent a false dichotomy. It should be possible to create an early childhood environment in which children can be active agents in the 'here and now' of their lives *at the same time* as providing opportunities that will enable them to be prepared for the next stage, be it schooling or adulthood. Early childhood education could recognize children for what they are now *and* for what they will become (Montgomery, 2009) so that being and becoming can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory stances (Uprichard, 2008). The challenge of this position is the balance between the two aims and to what extent one might be foregrounded over the other. An examination of EYFS reveals that the 'being' stance of a competent child in the 'here and now' is present: "A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right" (England. Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p.7); and "every child is a competent learner from birth" (*ibid.*, p.8). However, as already discussed, the reform agenda within which EYFS is implemented has led to prioritizing children being 'ready for school'. This has resulted in EYFS being described as an "instrumental" curriculum (Soler &

Miller, 2003) in which the needs of the individual child are over-ridden by the authority of the adult and the needs of society. Furthermore the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (England. Department for Education, 2012a) that will become mandatory in September 2012 presents a much more overt 'becoming' viewpoint than in the previous document, with explicit references to school readiness; a clear statement on the Coalition Government's current stance on the purpose for early childhood education in England.

Decisions about the appropriate aims and approaches of curricula, which are influenced by the way in which childhood is conceptualized, also raises "fundamental epistemological issues about curriculum goals and content, whose knowledge is prioritized, what knowledge is selected, and how that is represented by young children and with young children" (Wood & Bennett, 2006, p. 5). Perhaps the most persuasive epistemological influence has been the developmental theories of Jean Piaget. Piaget viewed children as learning through child-initiated, first-hand experiences in a series of ages and stages (Piaget & Inhelder, 1972). Within this paradigm, knowledge construction is seen as individually created with the child viewed as the 'lone scientist'. MacNaughton (2005) suggested that developmental psychology's influence has been pervasive on the early childhood pedagogies of the Minority World[3] and that developmental practice has become a 'regime of truth'. Regime of truth is a term conceptualized by Foucault, who theorized about the link between discourse and truth:

> ...each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those which are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p.131).

An epistemological problem with developmental psychology is that its discourse is built around 'the truth' about children from the Minority World in a way that "seeks to build universally applicable, factual and correct statements about how children

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[3] MacNaughton (2005) describes the Minority World as those who are Western, white and middle class, and are the minority of the world's overall population.

develop" (McNaughton, 2005, p. 18) whilst ignoring the Majority World views of childhood. It neglects the possibility that knowledge and any notion of 'truth' is bound by the context in which it was produced and instead is premised on a theory in which knowledge is objective, decontextualized and therefore equally applicable to all cultures. However, MacNaughton reminds us that from a post-structural perspective knowledge is "inherently and inevitably contradictory, rather than rational...and...that many different truths of the world are possible" (*ibid.*, p. 17).

Developmental theory resonates with the main philosophies of the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) (Wood, 2007) which advocated child-centred and progressive education in the UK. This report emphasized the play-based and experiential nature of children's learning. It recognized that early childhood should be an important stage in its own right. However, a progressive style of teaching was later heavily criticized by the 'Three Wise Men' report (Alexander, Rose & Woodhead, 1992) which called for a return to 'subjects' at the heart of the curriculum as an antidote to address the perceived failings and low educational standards of child-centred education.

In contrast to child-centred education, teacher- or subject-based learning is a model in which knowledge transmission occurs through direct instruction of the teacher. It conceptualizes pupils as passive in their receipt of knowledge, as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge and skills. It has been suggested that this model is like a journey of realization:

> ...from the incompleteness of childhood to the maturity and full human status that is adulthood, from unfulfilled potential to an economically productive human resource. The child is in the process of becoming an adult, and represents potential human capital awaiting realization through investment, he or she is that which is yet to be (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p.45).

In other words, this model of knowledge acquisition is a 'becoming' model in which childhood is the "first rung on the ladder" (*ibid.*) in preparation for school and adult life. This model places great emphasis on adults' agency rather than children being active participants in the construction of knowledge.

In terms of its epistemology, it has been suggested that EYFS gives "ambiguous messages" about how children learn and acquire knowledge (Wood, 2010) by having a subject-based approach that conflicts with child-centred learning. It is hard to envisage how these two extremes could be incorporated into a complementary pedagogy. The debate about teacher- or child-centred learning has been a battle of binaries, with one extreme placing too little emphasis on the role of the learner and the other underplaying the role of the teacher. From a postmodern viewpoint, dualisms such as these are "inadequate for understanding a world of multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities" (Lather, 1991, p.21). In the complex, non-linear, postmodern world, "there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting 'out there' to be discovered...Instead the world and our knowledge of it are seen as *socially constructed*" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p.23, original emphasis). Within this paradigm, knowledge is not transmitted, as in a teacher-centred model; nor is it discovered by the lone child, as in the child-centred model; nor is there a universal view of knowledge or truth, as in the developmental psychology model. From the postmodern perspective, knowledge is viewed as contextually bound and socially constructed by all actors within that context.

In the next section, I shall focus on the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky that aligns with this paradigm of knowledge construction. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which foregrounds the cultural and socially constructed nature of learning, powerfully disrupts the dominant discourse of developmental psychology in early childhood education (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2009).

2.3 Vygotsky's theories of learning

Sociocultural theory is based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), largely unheard of in the West until his work was translated into English in the 1960s. Within the sociocultural paradigm, learning is seen as more than an individual process (Anning, 2009). Instead it is thought that knowledge is

socially mediated through interactions between individuals and in collectives. Sociocultural theory rejects the notion of the child as a 'lone scientist' who is required to "understand the world by way of rediscovery of the principal explanatory laws already discovered by human kind" (Karpov, 2003, p. 66). Instead, social interaction with adults or more-able peers plays a vital role in learning and development, not through a 'transmission' model but through collaboration and co-construction. Accepting that knowledge is socially situated also implies that knowledge is culturally bound:

> Vygotsky's argument suggests that any given community will hold a series of beliefs and knowledge practices regarding the manner in which the world operates that have developed over the generations that collectively represent its history (Edwards, 2005, p. 38).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory therefore represents a paradigm shift from developmental theory. Instead of one "grand description for all human development" (Edwards, 2003, p. 256) in which children of all cultures develop in age-defined stages that rest on a "biological...and inappropriate metaphor" (Penn, 1997, p. 122), Vygotsky's model of development is contextualized and defined by the sociocultural context in which it occurs. Each community will have collectively developed its own set of truths that are situated within that specific context. His theory also differs from developmental theory because he believed that effective learning is the driver of development rather than learning having to 'wait' until a developmental milestone is reached.

The notion of learning leading development places practitioners at the heart of Vygotsky's theory, not as transmitters of knowledge but as mediators of children's learning. Vygotsky's view was that instruction is vital but that it must be of the right kind: "The only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 188). To conceptualize the idea of instruction marching ahead of development, Vygotsky described the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) which defines the difference between what a child can do independently and what she can do in collaboration with others:

> It [ZPD] defines the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85).

An important role for practitioners within sociocultural theory is the co-construction of knowledge within an individual's ZPD so that mediation and instruction can benefit a child's maturing higher mental functions, such as memory, attention, logic and abstract thinking. Crucial to Vygotsky's theory of ZPD was that everything is learned on two levels. First, through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individual's mental structure:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

As well as mediation through adults and peers, Vygotsky also believed that psychological tools are powerful mediators in children's learning. Tools such as knives and levers are used by humans for physical tasks and in a similar fashion Vygotsky proposed that humans invented psychological tools to develop mental abilities. As such, psychological tools are described as "devices for mastering mental processes" (Daniels, 2005b, p. 8) and they include "signs, symbols, maps, plans, numbers, musical notation, charts, models, pictures and language" (Dolya & Palmer, 2004).

The most important psychological tool, according to Vygotsky, is language, and he believed that language mediates cognitive development. Language starts as a means of communication (on the interpsychological plane), is later internalized as 'inner speech' (on the intrapsychological plane) which in turn influences higher mental functions through organising thoughts and planning complex actions. This places language as an imperative precursor to cognitive thought: "Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 218).

Vygotsky's theories have not been without criticism, not least that many of his ideas were under theorized (Karpov, 2003), and fragmented (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). This could be because he died aged thirty-seven and did not have sufficient time to elaborate all of his theories. However, various colleagues and followers, such as Elkonin, Galperin, Zaporozhets and Venger, developed Vygotsky's original theories, particularly in relation to how they could be applied to children (Kozulin *et al.*, 2003).

Concerns have also been raised about Western interpretations (or indeed misinterpretations) of Vygotsky's ideas, for example understanding ZPD as an "autocratic/transmissive" or "democratic/participative" model (Wood & Bennett, 2006, p.13), and how they have been "glorified" by some without critical comment (Daniels, 2005a). It has also been reported that practitioners misunderstand ZPD because they lack key information about its under-lying theory (Gredler, 2012) and apply it in a technical rationalist manner. The translation of Vygotsky's work is still comparatively new and better translations and more in-depth critique will only come about through time (Gredler, 2012) and through reflection and dialogue. Rey (2011, p.273) believes that even now certain elements of Vygotsky's work have overshadowed some of his less-known writings and that it is necessary "to go beyond the dominant and fashionable interpretations of Vygotsky's legacy to discover and elaborate new paths of his legacy".

There are those who hold the view that Vygotsky placed too much emphasis on language and its role in development (Rey, 2011). Spoken language was considered by Vygotsky as just one of the psychological tools that act as a mediator for children's learning but admittedly he considered it the most important. The reason for prominence placed on language was because speech is an act of communication that is vital to the interactions that occur between individuals as part of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky theorized that this social form of speech is then internalized as egocentric speech which mediates the process of thought. Vygotsky's theories reflect his belief that higher mental processes are derived from the mastery and subsequent internalization of social processes (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992).

Despite these criticisms, the relevance of Vygotsky to this project is upheld and substantiated in both my practice and findings. Vygotskian theory offers a powerful alternative to a Piagetian model and it does not reduce practitioners to (mere) transmitters of knowledge. My practice to date has led me to the opinion that children can learn through a transmission model but this style of teaching leads to over-reliance on adults rather than active participation in learning. The teacher's role is not only to impart knowledge but also to provide opportunities for children to develop knowledge and ideas collaboratively, including with their peers. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a framework for my commitment to children learning through active collaboration and communication, having been frustrated with a construction of childhood in which children learn individually. Vygotsky's writings about play are another reason that practitioners and the wider research community have become interested in his work.

Although the importance of children learning through play is a widely held view (Whitebread *et al.*, 2009b, p. 40), and used in early childhood documents and policies in England and other countries, it is not always clearly understood or defined by practitioners or policy makers (Moyles, 2010). There are concerns that play "is still conceived very narrowly by some involved in early childhood education as something that can be 'used' as a teaching tool" (*ibid.*, p. xii). Practitioners often focus on 'instrumental' justifications of play which "attempt to demonstrate what play does for children in relation to imparting the knowledge and skills which form the foundations of subjects and school work" (Brooker, 2010, p. 33).

For Vygotsky, play is not just a feature of childhood but a "leading factor in development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 101). He thought that play can create a ZPD for a child and thus increase higher mental functions:

> ...play creates a zone of proximal development in the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself (*ibid.*).

Specifically, Vygotsky's theories focused on imaginative play, of which two aspects were considered key. Firstly, he emphasized the importance of symbolic

representation in children's play. A stick becoming a horse, for example, increases a child's ability to move from concrete to abstract thought. To think abstractly, which is a higher mental function, depends on symbolic representation. Secondly, when children play imaginatively, it is not necessarily an unrestricted, free activity, but invariably one full of constraint as they follow a set of rules that are dictated by their role within the imaginary game. High levels of motivation when playing imaginatively leads to an ability to abide by the rules, despite a child's desire to do otherwise (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Goswami & Bryant, 2009). Vygotsky believed that acting against one's immediate impulses and exercising self-control is a higher mental function. It is not enough that a child might have the *motivation* to control her thoughts and actions; she must also have the *ability* to do so (Bronson, 2000). The ability to exercise self-control is what has been termed 'self-regulation'.

To be able to regulate one's own actions in the way that Vygotsky conceives is more than simply controlling one's behaviour. This is an important dimension but focusing on this aspect alone is reducing self-regulation to behaviourism. The ability to control one's cognitive systems, for example: to be attentive; to direct one's thinking; to engage in independent problem solving are also crucial aspects of self-regulation (Bronson, 2000). Metacognition, the process of understanding one's own cognitive skills through 'thinking about thinking', is also a component of self-regulation (Duckworth *et al.*, 2009).

For Vygotsky, the development of self-regulation occurs first on the interpyschological plane through interactions with others before transferral to the intrapsychological plane. He identified three stages of development to allow the internalisation of self-regulation:

1. External direction by adults;
2. Being able to direct peers and be directed by peers;
3. Being able to direct oneself (Fox & Riconscente, 2008).

Regulation by others emphasizes the shared, sociocultural nature of this concept as children act as both *agents* and *subjects* in mutual regulation of each other's

behaviour. This does not take place in a behavioural approach of one 'controlling' another but through a co-construction of ideas and the transmission of psychological tools, primarily language, for thinking through social interaction (Bronson, 2000).

Self-regulation has received much interest amongst researchers and practitioners because of its effect on children's achievements as they transfer from early childhood education to school. In a literature review undertaken by researchers at the Institute of Education in London, it was concluded that there is a positive correlation between self-regulation and academic achievement (Duckworth *et al.*, 2009). This report also suggested that curricula and assessment practices that are too tightly defined and too prescriptive have caused a decline in children's self-regulation. Using six longitudinal data sets, a team of researchers from USA, Canada and England found that levels of self-regulation predict school success over and above levels of cognition (IQ) or family background (Duncan *et al.*, 2007). Children's ability to self-regulate before they start school appears to have an impact on academic achievement *beyond* early school years and into later schooling, adolescence and even adulthood (Duckworth *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, the benefits of early formal learning do not appear to be maintained in the long term (Suggate, 2011) and certainly my own practice upholds this view. A large part of my professional role is in helping parents to understand the kind of skills that young children could develop to help them make the transition to formal learning. I often advise that "being the first to read does not make you the best reader" and I have observed how some children who have learned to read before they start school have been overtaken in their reading proficiency by other children within the first few years of schooling. Instead of focusing on early formal skills such as reading, I have encouraged parents to consider the value of learning dispositions such as curiosity and perseverance, and engaging in play-based activities that will promote self-regulation. In line with the research described (Duncan *et al.*, 2007 and Duckworth *et al.*, 2009), I have found that motivated children who are able to regulate their learning behaviour tend to make an easier transition to formal

learning at school and can make better academic progress than children who have not had an opportunity to develop these dispositions.

Certain conditions are key for the development of self-regulation. Firstly, children should be allowed to choose their activities and games, and this is seen as one of the "optimal conditions for the development of self-regulation" (Duckworth *et al.*, 2009, p. 25). Choice encourages autonomy and ownership which in turn are thought to promote more time on task and greater levels of persistence and concentration. Secondly, the role of adults in developing self-regulation is important, and their presence needs to be purposeful yet subtle, supporting and participating in children's play but mindful of the positive effect of children mediating this process for each other. Whitebread *et al.* (2009a, p. 73) revealed that "unsupervised small groups of children working collaboratively were observed to engage more in 'other' or 'shared' regulation than when working with an adult". Being able to self-regulate without interference is the desired outcome because of its perceived benefits on later academic achievement.

2.4 Towards conceptualizing an alternative to the English model of 'ready for school'

The Vygotskian concept of self-regulation provides a powerful opposing discourse within EYFS in England, which advocates early formal learning as a means to ensure that children are 'ready for school'. The purpose of early childhood education should not be solely to prepare children for their next stage in life, such that 'becoming' has more significance than 'being'. This does not mean that children should not embark on their school life without the necessary skills to thrive. However, it is questionable as to whether the 'ready for school' model is providing children with these skills since it appears to have failed within its own remit of boosting academic achievement later in school. Reviews of the research literature into the benefits of early formal learning have suggested that any early advantages are not sustained in the long-term (Sylva, 1994; Sharp, 2002).

A confident transition from pre-school to school is clearly desirable. In England, the majority of children are at school full-time from the age of four, and many also experience their nursery year aged three in a school environment. A more important transition is the one from play-based learning (as part of EYFS) to formal learning (that takes place when children start Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum). Children need to be prepared for this transition by having the skills to be 'ready to learn' in such a way. As described previously, an emphasis on *early* formal learning as part of a 'ready for school' model is considered to be damaging to children's readiness to learn.

Claxton & Carr propose a 'learning curriculum' as an alternative model to preparation for school which provides instead a focus on generic skills for being an effective learner, described as learning dispositions. Their model is one that promotes "a combination of learning inclinations, sensitivities to occasion, and skills" whereby the pupils are *"ready, willing* and *able* to engage profitably with learning" (Claxton & Carr, 2004 p. 87, original emphasis). Learning dispositions can be defined as "relatively enduring habits of the mind and action...not an 'end state' similar to the mastery of a piece of knowledge or the command of a particular skill" (Katz & Chard, 2000, p. 34). Bourdieu suggested that one's *habitus* – that is a system of lasting dispositions that require schemes of perception, thought and action – is "an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55). Although there have been attempts to categorize learning dispositions in a definitive list, such as Bertram & Pascal (2002b) who identified four dispositions indicative of effective learners: independence, creativity, self-motivation and resilience, Bourdieu's claim would mean that learning dispositions are situated and defined in context and that there are no universally applicable learning dispositions. Different cultures may have dispositions in common, but are likely to value and promote different combinations of dispositions. Claxton & Carr (*op.cit.*) support this view and asserted that each educational site will have its own priorities and will make their own value-laden choices about learning dispositions.

A 'learning curriculum' places learning dispositions as part of an 'intentional' curriculum so that acquisition is a deliberate aim, rather than as part of an 'incidental' curriculum in which acquisition would be left to chance (Whitebread *et al.*, 2009b, p. 41). Intentional promotion of learning dispositions must also provide opportunities for development in terms of robustness, that is "the extent to which they persist as situations become less familiar or auspicious", and sophistication, that is "how rich and differentiated they have become" (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 12). My proposition is that the intentional mastery of learning dispositions, which would include self-regulation, in early childhood might be a better aim to enable transition to and achievement at school than, for example, acquisition of skill sets such as formal literacy and numeracy, because it would equip children with the attitudes and dispositions that could make them receptive to learning.

A National Foundation for Educational Research review (Sanders *et al.*, 2005), focusing on the transition from play-based learning in Reception to formal learning in Year One in English primary schools, revealed many teachers' anxiety about pupils' transitions to school and their ability to 'access' the formal curriculum. The researchers carried out a national sample of telephone interviews and case-study visits, and teachers reported that several children experience difficulty in this transition due to lack of independence and inappropriate behaviour, particularly during formal literacy and numeracy lessons. Teachers surveyed in a nationally representative sample in the US also raised concerns relating to poor self-regulation on entry to school (Blair & Diamond, 2008) and in a similar study in Australia, teachers responded that children's disposition to school, that is their attitude towards learning, was the key factor in determining readiness for school, rather than academic ability on entry (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Needing adult direction to carry out tasks and not being able to show self-control of behaviour would suggest that prior educational experiences of the children being described did not allow for the development of sufficient self-regulation prior to starting formal education.

The transition for children from play-based to formal learning is not necessarily easy. The Cambridge Review of the primary curriculum in England suggested a continuation of some of the play-based practices of EYFS into the first few years of

schooling (Alexander, 2010). My point is that the issues of transition could also be addressed by a Vygotskian approach to early childhood education; a curriculum in which children learn through play but also benefit from the intervention of adults and more-able peers to mediate their learning. These conditions could promote self-regulation and learning dispositions that could facilitate a better transition from play-based to formal learning. With this point in mind, the next section is concerned with alternative early childhood education models from countries other than England that could provide useful comparisons.

2.5 Looking abroad for inspiration

2.5.1 Wales

Devolution from Westminster has allowed individual countries within the UK to set their own educational agenda. Wales has used this authority to provide a different approach to early childhood education. It is a relatively small country with an estimated population of just under three million people (Office for National Statistics, 2010). There is a comparatively large number of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which has led to some difficulty in providing coherence of service, particularly in interpreting government recommendations (Palaiologou *et al.*, 2010). Wales has its own language which is experiencing a resurgence; the 2001 census revealed that 20.8% of the population claim to speak Welsh, with a significantly large portion of these under the age of eighteen. In common with England, children in Wales officially start statutory education in the term following their fifth birthday, but in reality the vast majority start school earlier than this (Wyn Siencyn & Thomas, 2007).

Also in common with England, the Welsh education agenda aims to address poverty and prepare children to "become active citizens within their country" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, p.10). High levels of child poverty (Palaiologou *et al.*, 2010.) and the change in economic structure, since industries like coal, steel and copper are no longer major factors in the Welsh economy, have led to policies

for children to have equality of access and to be successful citizens of the future. The *Flying Start* initiative (similar to *Sure Start* in England) was launched in 2005 to focus on families from the most deprived areas of Wales (Wyn Siencyn & Thomas, 2007).

Whilst there are some similarities with England, the Welsh Assembly claims to implement policies that recognize and address the local and situated needs of those living in Wales:

> We share strategic goals with our colleagues in England – but we often need to take a different route to achieve them. We shall take our own policy direction where necessary, to get the best for Wales. It's right that we put local authorities, local communities and locally determined needs and priorities at the centre of the agenda for schools (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2001, p. 2).

Daugherty & Davies (2008) claim that one such example of contextualized social policy is an emphasis on co-operation rather than competition to underpin initiatives, which is grounded in the legacy of industrialisation in Wales. The abolition of statutory tests at seven, eleven and fourteen, as recommended in the Daugherty Report (2004) could be viewed as an example of the trust afforded to the relationship between the citizen and the state in Wales[4].

One of the biggest divergences from English policy is the creation of the Foundation Phase (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). The inception of this early childhood curriculum drew evidence from across Europe (including Reggio Emilia in Italy and Forest Schools in Denmark), and further afield from Australia and New Zealand (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2003). In contrast with EYFS, the Foundation Phase curriculum is for three to seven-year-olds. It delays a formal curriculum until aged seven and places learning through play and well-being at the heart of its intentions, with an emphasis on outdoor learning. The rationale for this radically different approach was claimed to address the perceived negative effect of early formal learning (Maynard & Chicken, 2010) on young children's curiosity,

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[4] Amid concerns about poor levels of literacy in a significant minority of schools (Estyn, 2011), particularly compared to reading performance measured against the rest of the UK and other countries, accountability will be re-introduced through national reading tests for six to fourteen-year-old children from September 2013 (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2012).

creativity and enthusiasm. A particular concern was with regard to children being introduced to formal reading and writing "before they are ready" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, p. 5). To counter this problem, the aim of the Foundation Phase is to "help children how to learn; develop thinking skills; and acquire positive attitudes to lifelong learning" (*ibid.*, p. 12) rather than focus on early literacy and numeracy.

This aim resonates with a 'ready to learn' model that promotes the acquisition of learning dispositions before formal education commences. What particularly distinguishes the Foundation Phase is the length of time afforded for learning dispositions to develop, compared to the English system. Children in England begin formal schooling and the National Curriculum at the start of Key Stage 1 when aged five. However, in Wales, whilst children are in compulsory schooling when they are five, inspiration has come from models of education from Europe which delay formal learning until later. The Foundation Phase can still be conceptualized as a 'becoming' model, but the recognition that play is so important to childhood also suggests that 'becoming' has not been privileged over 'being'.

The Foundation Phase is organized into seven learning areas, which are not described as subjects, but in common with EYFS the learning areas are subject-oriented. The only major difference between the learning areas of the two documents is that the Foundation Phase includes 'bilingualism' and the Welsh language as one of its areas.

Formative assessment takes places at the end of the Foundation Phase. Reflecting the social policy described previously, the assessment is of a documentary and narrative nature that is not a 'check list' style of assessment like the English Foundation Stage Profile (Wyn Siencyn & Thomas, 2007). Accountability also takes place in the form of inspection, which is carried out by Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. The inspection framework for primary schools contains references to 'accountability', 'standards' and 'quality' (Estyn, 2010).

The Foundation Phase has been evaluated formally (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2006) during the piloting phase of the curriculum. The result was positive, with reported enthusiasm from practitioners regarding the play-based and active approach to learning and development, and the identification of some excellent practice. Concerns were linked to the need for policy clarification and staff training on issues such as bilingualism, outdoor education, and understanding the term 'play'. It is somewhat ironic that a curriculum innovation whose purpose was to promote learning through play did not give practitioners enough firm pedagogic understanding of this term. This is consistent with the insecurity expressed by practitioners in England and other countries as described in section 2.3.

The timing of the evaluation taking place during the pilot study meant that policy makers could address any concerns raised before the policy was implemented nationally. Issues regarding training of practitioners resulted in the national implementation being delayed and then introduced incrementally over a four year period. By September 2012, all children up to the age of seven will experience the Foundation Phase in Welsh schools. At this stage it is too early to assess the full impact of the Foundation Phase and whether the transition from play-based to formal learning is better facilitated at aged seven rather than aged five. A recent report by Estyn (2011) revealed the positive impact of the Foundation Phase on children's well-being, motivation and attitudes to learning, but raised concerns about low levels of reading and writing in a significant minority of schools. Their recommendation was that schools and local authorities should evaluate the effectiveness of their practice, including how reading and writing is promoted within the principles of the Foundation Phase.

Whilst the Foundation Phase in Wales is not explicitly sociocultural in its outlook, the curriculum framework and associated documentation contain signposts that place it within a sociocultural paradigm. References are made to interactions to mediate learning: "children should have more opportunities to work as members of large and small groups" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, p. 17). Reference is also made to the role of adults in children's learning through

"sustained thinking" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a, p. 6,) with

indirect reference to working within children's ZPD:

> Teachers and other adults should continue to work alongside groups of
> children and individuals, responding simultaneously to their needs and
> interests and challenging them to the next stage in their learning (Wales.
> Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, p. 17).

Reference to the social and mediated nature of learning is one reason why the

Foundation Phase in Wales "can and should be considered as based within a

sociocultural view of the child" (Aasen & Waters, 2006, p.126).

2.5.2 New Zealand

A second contrast is provided by the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, Te

Whāriki (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 1996). The New Zealand economy is

largely dependent on agriculture and timber, with increasing reliance on

information and service industries (Meade & Podmore, 2002). Compulsory

education starts at six, but in reality most children begin school on or near their

fifth birthday (*ibid.*). Unlike the UK, there is no termly or annual 'cohort' of children

starting school. Early childhood education was the subject of a political agenda

when a Labour government was elected in 1984 with a manifesto that focused on

early childhood and the perceived impact on society:

> Access to quality early childhood care and education services is a human
> right and providing these has social and economic benefits for society (New
> Zealand. Department of Education, 1984, p. 2).

In New Zealand, high quality early childhood education is seen as an investment in

the country's future. The Ministry of Education pays a grant to all registered early

childhood settings based on the number of children on roll and hours of

attendance, with extra funding offered for children under two. A means-tested

subsidy is given to those that provide services for families who meet a low-income

criterion, which shows how children who are considered most at risk from poverty

are targeted for support. However, despite funding at a government level, the vast

majority of early childhood services are run by non-government organisations

which are either private, or community-based. The latter rely on a high level of

community involvement, voluntary fee contributions, and fund raising (Meade & Podmore, 2002). This means that not many early childhood services can be offered free of charge.

New Zealand has long associations with Great Britain: James Cook first arrived in New Zealand in 1769, and the historic *Treaty of Waitangi* was signed in 1840 between Queen Victoria and the Maori people, making it a British colony. The colony became self-governing in 1852 and a Commonwealth realm in 1947. The population, estimated at 4.39 million people (Statistics New Zealand, 2010), is largely of European descent with English being the most prevalent language. Maoris make up the largest ethnic group at 14.8% (*ibid.*).

However, it would be wrong to assume that New Zealand has cultural similarities with Britain. Despite its colonial background, the way in which the early childhood curriculum has been conceived demonstrates New Zealand's distinct cultural heritage. The development of Te Whāriki and its associated assessment framework "enjoyed a long period of consultation, development, and trialling, with the involvement of the academic and practitioner communities" (Wood & Bennett, 2006, p. 7). Participation of all vested parties was to promote cultural sensitivity to both the European and Maori cultures. The name Te Whāriki means "a woven mat for all to stand on" (Meade & Podmore, 2002) and provides a useful metaphor as individual settings are encouraged to develop (or weave) their own distinctive programme based on Te Whāriki's guidelines. It is thus a sociocultural curriculum, not just because it takes into account the localized needs of its bicultural population, but because it also overtly embraces sociocultural theory in the way in which children learn.

In contrast to EYFS in England, Te Whāriki is concerned with developing an overall enthusiasm for learning rather than "being pre-occupied with specific skills, which children do or do not have when they go to school" (Smith, 2003b, p.5). Te Whāriki emphasizes the importance of recognizing childhood as a stage in its own right and that children are "capable people and competent learners" (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 1996, p.30) which places it within a 'being' model. However, it also

has elements that resonate with a 'becoming' model in stressing the development of learning dispositions that enable children to be ready to learn when they transfer to school. To achieve this aim, Te Whāriki has a learner-centred approach as opposed to the curriculum-centred one of EYFS (Wood & Bennett, 2006). Therefore, it has not been subject to 'schoolification' and the 'becoming' intentions have not been foregrounded over those of 'being'. Carr (2000), who has been a key figure in the initial inception and subsequent development of Te Whāriki, has identified five domains of learning dispositions:

1. Taking an interest;
2. Being involved;
3. Persisting with difficulty or uncertainty;
4. Communicating with adults;
5. Taking responsibility.

Te Whāriki is underpinned by four principles which reflect its sociocultural philosophy: empowerment; holistic development; family and community; and relationships. There are five strands which shape the outcomes for children: belonging; well-being; exploration; communication; and contribution. However, the principles and strands of Te Whāriki are descriptive rather than prescriptive. As Wood & Bennett (2006, p. 7) observed: "...they are holistic in the sense that they transcend subject boundaries, and are not hierarchically organized". In creating a curriculum with such aims, Te Whāriki has avoided the "top-down approach to the learning and teaching of infants and young children" (Meade & Podmore, 2002, p. 29). Its lack of subject content means that priority can be given to children becoming "confident and competent communicators and learners" (*ibid.*). The development of children as learners has resulted in international attention on Te Whāriki (Cullen, 2009).

Assessment practices relating to Te Whāriki take the form of a structured, narrative 'learning story' that documents children's learning dispositions through practitioner observation and interpretation of critical incidents in a child's learning (Carr, May & Podmore, 1998). It is not a checklist or summative assessment but is used to

support and deepen children's learning experiences. This style of assessment has been described as sociocultural because the activities of the learner are linked to the context in which the learning takes place (Carr, 2001).

Te Whāriki has not been without its difficulties and has received criticism. Firstly, some concerns have been raised that it does not contain guidelines for teachers about content knowledge relating to subject (Hedges & Cullen, 2005) and that there is no defined relationship between aims and content (Broström, 2003, reported in Wood & Bennett, 2006). However, the philosophy underpinning Te Whāriki is that developing children's learning dispositions is more important than subjects. Young children who have acquired learning dispositions can gain content knowledge and embark on a subject-based curriculum at a later date but formal learning in early childhood is seen as detrimental to the acquisition of learning dispositions, as described in section 2.1.

Another perceived difficulty is the transition to school. Staggered entry to school for each child as they reach their fifth birthday means that teachers of 'new entrance' classes (the first year of primary school) have to manage new pupils individually rather than as part of a larger cohort. This can be positive because more attention can be given to a new pupil but the reality for some children has been that it can be bewildering to join an established group of peers unless systems are in place for their induction (Peters, 2010). The transition to school has also received attention because of the difficulty for children moving from the learning-focused early childhood experience to the subject-focused, formal school experience. This is in line with other countries who are also examining the transition between early childhood education and school (May, 2009). The response of the New Zealand Government has been a ten year strategic plan aimed at aligning the approaches of the two sectors (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 2002). Their approach was not 'top-down' or 'schoolification' of early childhood but to "support schools to use the best evidence about effective teaching and learning in early childhood settings to influence quality teaching in the first years of school" (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 2008). The result was a reduction in the

school curriculum content with an emphasis placed on 'key competences' that promote children as life-long learners (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 2007).

There has also been some suggestion that early childhood educators have not found it easy to adapt to the proactive role that is required by a sociocultural philosophy (Anning, 2009) and that many practitioners' beliefs are still located in developmental theory (Meade, 2000; Jordan, 2009). The fragmented nature of early childhood provision in New Zealand means that, although there is a degree-level qualification required for early childhood educators, in-service training is infrequent and not often co-ordinated centrally (Meade & Podmore, 2002). Despite the overt reference to sociocultural theory in the Te Whāriki documentation, teacher education and continuing professional learning must address this concern to ensure that educators in all settings have a sophisticated understanding of different approaches to childhood learning.

Inspection of early childhood services in New Zealand is undertaken by the Education Review Office (ERO). Their mission is to monitor quality through the dual process of external review and self-evaluation, thus serving to bring about accountability and educational improvement (ERO, 2002). Whilst Te Whāriki is democratic in its design and implementation, the notions of 'quality' and 'accountability' as the second part of the inspection process are not completely avoided in New Zealand.

2.5.3 Policy borrowing

Looking abroad for inspiration to influence domestic policy reform is known as 'policy borrowing'. The term has been defined as the "conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another" (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 774) as a permanent feature, rather than the transience that the term borrowing implies. Policy borrowing is not a new concept and anthropology has long served the purpose of studying alternative examples with the view to learning about the cultures of others. However, publication of international surveys such as PISA (*op. cit.*), TIMSS (*op. cit.*) and child well-being (UNICEF, 2007) have intensified the

interest in policy borrowing as nations attempt to improve their position in these international league tables by choosing to copy the perceived advantages of 'more successful' nations. Phillips & Ochs (2003) inform us that what could be considered an uncomplicated process of identifying successful practice elsewhere, and introducing and then assimilating it within the home context, is actually very complex. Falling into the trap of believing that policy borrowing is a straight-forward activity is defined as 'cherry picking' (McGrath 2001, p.398). Thomas & Quinn point out the importance of "the role of situated knowledge as a means of avoiding the danger of adopting a very simplistic approach of 'cherry picking' ideas from other countries and transplanting them with little or no cognisance of the national or local context" (2007, p.5). Instead, what is required is a detailed analysis of the policy in question within its local context in order to appreciate fully why that policy is successful before it is adopted in another context.

There are examples of governments and even practitioners adopting policies from other countries without paying heed to the situated knowledge and contextual factors in which that policy is embedded. One such example is 'free schools', a Swedish innovation that has since been launched in the UK. The free school proposal was advocated by David Cameron, the British Prime Minster, following a visit to Sweden when he was the Opposition Leader (Nelson, 2008). The premise behind the UK's adoption of the free school model is to allow new schools to be established in areas where there is parental demand, with the extra benefit of raising standards in schools by promoting more competition for pupils. However, there is some debate as to whether the creation of free schools has impacted on school and pupil performance in Sweden. Research evidence is not largely convincing and points to only a minor, if any, difference in performance (Björklund *et al.*, 2004). Other studies suggest a moderately positive impact of free school growth on academic performance in Sweden, with the biggest impact on children from highly educated families, and the effect on those from low educated families and immigrants almost negligible (Allen, 2010). One has to question why a policy has been adopted that might not provide the desired outcomes? It would suggest that an in-depth examination of the context of this policy was not carried out

before it was borrowed. Politicians have long been accused of 'educational tourism' in which brief fact-finding missions to the countries in question occur, but in-depth analysis and interpretation of contextual factors that influence the situated nature of a policy are largely ignored (Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

Another such example of 'cherry picking' is the widespread interest in Reggio Emilia, a region in Northern Italy that has received much international attention for its distinctive early childhood education programme. Reggio Emilia encompasses a number of important elements including: children having control over the direction of their learning; a highly organized classroom environment that stimulates all the senses; and providing many ways for child expression (see Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998 for further explanation). Travelling exhibitions have brought the Reggio Emilia philosophy to countries around the world and interest amongst practitioners in the US has been particularly high. However, practitioners have been criticized for adopting *parts* of the Reggio Emilia approach that fit with their own pedagogic stance without an analysis of the local context to which Reggio Emilia is tightly bound. For example, practitioners in the US have adopted ideas about the aesthetics of the classroom environment and the way in which children's teaching and learning is documented, believing that they are 'doing Reggio Emilia' whereas the success behind Reggio Emilia is attributed rather to the "socialist political beliefs" of the connection between school and community (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009) that is not demonstrated by the same practitioners in the US.

2.6 Concluding comments for Literature Review

In this chapter I have contextualized the policies and political discourses within which EYFS is implemented in England. The desire for an outcomes-driven curriculum in which formal learning is advocated for young children as a means of preparing them for school can be conceived as damaging their potential for academic success at school. I then examined how Vygotsky's sociocultural theory can be considered as an alternative model, one in which self-regulation is promoted, which is purported to be a better preparation for school than early

formal learning. I focused on the early childhood curricula of Wales and New Zealand specifically and how their play-based 'ready to learn' approach aspires to equip children with learning dispositions to influence their transition to school and academic achievement. The final section of this chapter has indicated the perceived perils of naïve policy borrowing and the examples of Swedish free schools and the Reggio Emilia philosophy both serve to emphasize the importance of paying attention to situated knowledge and context sensitivity when attempting to 'borrow' the perceived success of a policy. This point provides a vital caveat for this research project, which aims to examine and learn from early childhood education practices outside of England. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the methodology for examining the practices of my case studies in New Zealand and Wales in such a way that honours the context and culture of these two settings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The Methodology Chapter evaluates ethnographic methods and why they were chosen as a means to study settings in New Zealand and Wales, with a discussion of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. An articulation of the method of fieldwork is provided, in particular the practice of participant observation, which involves observation whilst also being part of the research, and the use of photography as a method. Reliability of data is discussed with regard to the process of reflexivity, which is vital in research that recognizes multiple views of reality. There is further discussion of the research design and the analytical framework. The final section explains how the cases for research were selected, including ethical considerations.

3.1 Selecting a methodology

For my research to have credence and for it not be dismissed as educational tourism, it must pay heed to the cultural contexts that underpin early childhood practices in New Zealand and Wales. It has been suggested that culture should be the "starting point" of any comparative study (Stenhouse, 1979). Culture has been defined as "the patterns of organization that hold diverse people together and the systems of beliefs and meanings to which the group subscribes" (Lubeck, 1985, p 7). The problem with studying culture is that it is not a straightforward process and the belief and meaning systems are not necessarily visible. Culture is perceived to comprise complex "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) that are somewhat intangible: "culture is not something that can be known once and for all....these elusive, will-o'-the-wisp targets slip in and out of view, appear in many apparitions, look different from different angles" (Van Maanen, 1988, p.119). However, studying culture, whilst difficult, is not impossible. Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke (2000, p.92) inform us that "[s]ome aspects of culture are visible, including food, art, music, literature, festivals and important celebrations" but the more complex, seemingly invisible aspects of culture can be discernible through careful analysis of "personal

behaviour (the way we sit, stand, walk or gesture) [and] interactional behaviour (personal space, eye contact, use of gesture, the rules followed)" (*ibid.*).

In order to be able to understand both personal and interactional behaviour, I needed to employ a research approach that would enable me to experience culture first-hand and, for this purpose, I chose to use ethnographic methods to gather data. Ethnography has been used in numerous education studies, both early childhood and beyond (for example, Lubeck, 1985; Reay, 1995; Woods, 1996; Penn, 1997; Webb *et al.*, 1997; Aubrey, 2002; Brooker, 2002; Burnard *et al.*, 2006; Jeffrey, 2006; Traianou, 2007; Troman *et al.*, 2007; Golden, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Tobin, Hseuh & Karasawa, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2010). My work has been conceptually informed by these studies but my limited time in the field means that I cannot claim to have undertaken an ethnographic study. Traditional ethnographic studies are longitudinal and take place over a prolonged period of time. The time-scale can be open-ended with exit from the field only determined when "nothing new is being learned" (Delamont, 2002, p. 161). Practicality dictated that I could only spend three weeks in the field in New Zealand and one week in Wales. Therefore, I did not have the luxury of waiting until nothing new was revealed before I exited the field. Instead I have adopted ethnography's related methods to carry out my research.

Ethnographic methods can be used to study "the unfamiliar, the new and the different" (Robson, 2002, p.487) with the purpose of rendering the strange familiar. This is achieved through "uncovering the masked, the latent, the unconscious" (Crapanzano, 1986, p.51) and ensuring that "the silent and unknown is given voice" (Atkinson, 1992, p.39). Having explained that policy borrowing must pay heed to local context and situated knowledge, using ethnographic methods provided me with the means to render the strange familiar and analyse the meaningful systems and practices that are part of the studied cultures. Thus, I wanted my research to take place 'in the field', allowing close examination of the aspects of culture that are immediately visible, as well as those that require deeper scrutiny. My aim was to attempt to generate meaning from the unfamiliar practices with due regard to the familiar context of my own professional practice. I decided that ethnographic methods would provide a suitable medium through which to examine the culture

that underpins the settings in New Zealand and Wales with an acceptance that my limited time in the field would provide a 'snapshot' of practice that would lead to more tentative findings than might be achieved through a sustained period of immersion in the field. The findings, whilst not generalizable, could be used as part of a professional enquiry that would lead to evaluation and critical reflection of my own professional practice.

The interpretivist nature of ethnographic methods has a specific theoretical and philosophical framework that makes it suitable for my research. Firstly, it is acknowledged that studying social behaviour is subjective. This viewpoint asserts that reality is not 'out there' as a neutral, objective and observable entity but is constructed through the researcher's interactions with the social setting under study. Secondly, having proposed that reality is not objective, there is recognition that knowledge is situated and contextual, with an aim "to make it possible for you to see how different realities and ultimately different aspects of psychological functioning are tied to meaning systems" (Shweder, 1997, p.161). Robson (2002) informs us that "the task of interpreting these meanings and experiences can only be achieved through participation with those involved" (p.314) and that "the primary data are the interpretations by the observer of what is going on around him [sic]" (*ibid.*).

Adopting an interpretivist approach means that I have accepted, and even embraced, the connection that lies between me and my research participants. The knowledge gained is imbricated: deeply and intricately interwoven into the behaviours and interactions of those under study. Furthermore, an interpretivist approach accepts that the process of interpretation is pluralistic (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Walford 2009) in producing "portraits of diversity" (Van Maanen, 1998 p.xiii). My study is an interpretation from one moment in time as "'[c]ultures' do not hold still for their portraits" (Clifford, 1986, p.10). A portrait is also open to a second level of interpretation through those who view it, in the same way that written accounts can be re-interpreted by the reader in addition to what has been presented by the author. Whilst the use of ethnographic methods can "facilitate new knowledge" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.236) "there is no way of seeing,

hearing or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct" (Van Maanen, *op. cit.* p.35) and each representation will characterize a partial, rather than complete, picture (Wolcott, 2008).

Interpretivist studies can be criticized for their lack of scientific rigour and being too subjective. Pole & Morrison (2003) admit that these challenges are not without foundation but that the criticisms tend to come from those who have adopted a positivistic stance. Interpretivist studies are not objective like positivistic research claims to be but this is not a weakness. For this research, the subjectivity is essential in order to be able to understand human experiences and interactions, which do not exist in an objective, detached reality.

Another criticism is that its small-scale nature can impede making generalizations:

> One of the limitations often raised … is that because only a single case, or at any rate a small number of cases, is studied, the representativeness of the findings is always in doubt. (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.32)

To counter this view, Pole & Morrison (2003, p.112) suggest that 'usefulness' can be categorized in ways other than generalization, namely "critical insight into educational processes and practices...[and]...development of theory that is grounded in empirical evidence". In deriving critical insight and developing theory, the small number of cases becomes an advantage in allowing for greater depth of analysis and understanding to create a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). In this way, one can aim for 'particularization' rather than generalization:

> ...take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (Stake, 1995, p.8)

Despite these methodological criticisms that arise from positivism, this thesis is influenced by a post-modernist stance, and conducting an interpretivist study resonates with my view that knowledge is not universal and objective, but is partial, contextualized and socially-constructed. These very criticisms are the reason why it is a suitable methodology for studying the cultures underpinning the settings in

New Zealand and Wales as part of a professional enquiry. The next section will discuss the ethnographic methods which I have selected.

3.2 Ethnographic methods

3.2.1 Fieldwork and participant observation

Van Maanen (1988) defined fieldwork as:

> ...a form of enquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing activities of some individual or group for the purpose of research. Fieldwork is characterized by personal involvement to achieve some level of understanding that will be shared with others (Wolcott, 1995, p.66, in Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.10).

Fieldwork can enable the researcher to produce an *inside* view of the culture for those on the *outside*. Hannah Arendt's writing on representation provides a useful conceptualization of gaining an insider's view whilst retaining an outsider's perspective. She describes representation as a "process...[that] does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective...[but involves] being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not" (Arendt, 2006, p. 237). In other words, to be an outsider gaining an insider's view, one is not seeing the world through someone else's eyes but is seeing with one's own eyes from an unfamiliar position.

Fieldwork involves considerably more than just observing others and also entails a level of participation with those being researched. This dual approach is known as participant observation and the phrase came about through the work of the Chicago School of researchers who studied the people of their own city through participating in their lives within their own settings (Pole & Morrison, 2003). This connection between the researcher and the researched is described by Coffey (1999, p.56) as "the very essence of fieldwork". Although this project is not directly feminist in its inception, the feminist viewpoint that emphasizes relationships when carrying out fieldwork is particularly pertinent here. This rejects the notion that a social scientist should be value-free and detached from her or his research (Hesse-

Biber, Leavy & Yaiser, 2004). From a feminist (and poststructuralist) perspective, we are reminded of the importance of "attachment" of the researcher to the research process and the role of personal experience. For fieldworkers, relationships are necessary in order to gain access and develop trust which in return influences the quality of data collected because:

> Emotions are always present in personal interactions in ... fieldwork. Here the feminist perspective is useful in reminding us that emotions can form an important basis for understanding and analysis. (Naples, 2004, p.379)

Therefore, establishing social interactions and building relationships are vital constituents to the quality of the data collected. I do not believe that such richness of data could be gathered from a position of a 'neutral outsider' as there would be little opportunity to engage and converse with those in the field in such a way that could deepen and clarify understanding. The more tacit aspects of culture will require probing and that could come about through the *dialogic* relationships that result from being connected to the research.

There is some debate about the balance between participation and observation for those engaged in fieldwork. Positions range from the total immersion of a complete participant to the detached operation of a complete observer. Both of these extremes are said to reduce the effects of reactivity (Davies, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, given that a sense of connectedness between the researcher and researched is a necessary component of fieldwork, the complete observation model would not be appropriate in trying to establish relationships in the field. A position between the two extremes was more suitable for my research. As a practitioner-researcher, being able to participate *and* observe allowed me to realize both aspects of my identity in the research field. In participating, I could see and experience the world from an unfamiliar position, and being an observer enabled reflection on my experiences. The technique of 'distantiation' (Perselli, 2004) was used to take a step away from my everyday life as a practitioner in order to reflect on my experiences as a researcher. This was achieved through being reflexive in the daily writing and reviewing of field notes and thinking critically about my observations and experiences in relation to my own practice. In tune with

my own experiences over time, Naples (2004) considers the insider-outsider debate "a false separation" (p.373). She claims that the two identities are not static but fluid and ever-shifting, and that researchers can never be fully inside or outside of a community.

Being both a participant and observer at the same time is referred to as "stepping in and stepping out" of culture and society (Powdermaker, 1966, p.19); the dual role enables one to be part of the social and cultural setting in order to examine it from the inside, but also outside of it in order to analyse one's experiences. Coffey's (1999) view is that the most important issue is not about an either/or situation but in acknowledging and being reflexive about the position of the 'self' in the ethnographic process. Reflexivity in the research process will be a theme discussed later in this chapter.

The social interactions thus developed in the field can create conducive conditions for the collection of quality data but they can also become an integral part of the actual data. Such data can include an ethnographic style of interview, which lacks the structure of other types of interview and may even be perceived as a conversation by those being researched. However, the researcher is likely to have an agenda and usually structures these interactions "in accordance with a systematic research design" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.30). This type of interview can serve the purpose of uncovering new information and also clarifying and illuminating data gathered through participant observation. They allow the fieldworker "to explore the educational worlds of actors *from their own perspectives*" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.30, original emphasis).

In conducting interviews, it is important to be analytical about the status of data that is generated from these interactions. It can be the case that what people say is not the same as what they do, and, whilst not being consciously deceptive, it is possible for respondents to give answers that they think a researcher wants to hear. In answer to the question, "How do you know if your informant is telling the truth?" Atkinson & Coffey (2003) explain that the possible "contrast between what people do and what they say (they do)" (p.118) can be understood by recognizing

that events that are observed and accounts that are narrated are both enactments and any contrast between the two is because they are different kinds of social action. In accepting this point, they believe that one can escape the erroneous view that action is more authentic than talk. If someone can fabricate what they say, it is reasonable to assume that they can also fabricate what they do. Action should not have primacy over talk (p.110) but as social actions they can both be analysed within the context they were produced.

The close association between fieldworkers and the subjects of their research is a key factor in generating data that attempts to understand a culture from the inside. But this connectedness also raises an issue about the effect of the researcher on the results: "...questions arise as to whether the results of research are artefacts of the researcher's presence and inevitable influence on the research process" (Davies, 2007, p.3). Reactivity of the researcher is often unavoidable as the researcher has to be inside the research process, and with this approach there is "no such thing as unbiased data" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.102). In addition, not only is the researcher's presence in the field going to influence the data collected but the researcher does not come with a value-neutral position. In his classic text, *Ways of Seeing*, Berger (1972, p.8) stated that "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe". A fieldworker is therefore an 'invested knower' (Lather, 1999, p.4) in the research process. My own 'invested' knowledge will be explored further in the Research Design section (3.4).

The researcher's value-laden position can be unearthed and understood through reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined as "a making visible of the suppressed culture of research activity as opposed to the making visible of only its public formal face" (Grace, 1998, p.204). Through being reflexive, a researcher can be aware of and understand how their presence may have shaped the data. During the data collection stage, reflexivity can be achieved through the use of recorded field notes. Delamont (2002) provides useful guidance on different types of field notes to record one's experiences in the field. She describes 'on-the-spot' shorthand notes that are taken in the field; 'out-of-the-field' expanded versions of the shorthand notes that are written outside of the field (Pole & Morrison (2003) recommend that

these are written as soon as possible after the observation, preferably at the end of each day); and analytical memos, which Delamont describes as a "review of what you are doing, why you are doing it, where you are going next" (2002, p.171). These analytical memos provide insights, inferences, interpretations and reflections from the in-the-field and out-of-the-field notes as well as providing feedback for the next stage of data collection.

The analysis of data *during* the data collection phase, rather than as a separate, self-contained phase *after* data collection is complete, is an important aspect of using ethnographic methods. The relationship between data collection and analysis is hermeneutic: the analysis of data continues throughout the research process and feeds back into the research design and data collection. Van Maanen refers to this cyclical act as a "continuous dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted" (1988, p.93).

3.2.2 The use of photographs in research

The use of photography and other visual forms of representation such as video and hypermedia, is growing in its use as a method by social researchers (Pink, 2007; Coffey *et al.*, 2006; Bolton, Pole & Mizen, 2001). The practice of using visual methods is not new and has its roots in the nineteenth century (Prosser, 1998). However, despite its increase in prevalence, the use of photography and other visual methods still presents methodological and practical challenges (Coffey *et al.*, 2006).

One methodological challenge is the criticism that photographs are considered to be subjective and that they "distort what they claim to illuminate" (Prosser, 1998). However, from a postmodernist view, one accepts that photographs are subjective and can never be a complete record of reality (Pink, 2007). Clifford suggested that written accounts are 'fictions', not in a way that implies falsehood but incompleteness: "... truths are...inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete" (1986, p.7, original emphasis). The same applies to visual representation as to

written. It has been suggested that just as language can be considered ambiguous, photographs are polysemic:

> ...whilst a photograph might be intentionally focused and taken to reveal a particular aspect or item within a visual field, in pursuit of one analytical theme, it will automatically and inescapably always reveal others (Ball, 1998, p.142).

Emmison & Smith add to this debate by stating that although "photographs are signs which bear an iconic resemblance to the reality they represent" (2000, p.3) they are not windows on the world but are social constructions of "not what the camera can record but what the eye can see" (*ibid*. p.4). There is undoubtedly photographer bias in terms of how photographs are framed and choices relating to which photographs to take, but "to acknowledge the presence of the photographer is not necessarily to deny totally that you can still see *something* of the world" (Winston, 1998, p.66, my emphasis). In this way, Harper proposed that photography can be used to "create a dialogue around the competing and contemporary meanings of images" (2003, p.244) in a way that accepts and welcomes the subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative research, rather than claim "this is what is".

Acknowledging the presence of the photographer requires reflexivity in considering the role of the researcher and the process by which the photograph comes to be taken (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Prosser & Schwartz (1998) recommend a scrutiny of the photographer's fallibility and selectivity in order to establish reliability of images. The photographer's bias in the choices that are made about framing and taking photographs is no different from the choices made by a researcher in collecting other forms of data. The salient point is the need to be explicit about what choices were available and why a particular decision was made (Prosser, 1992).

A further concern about the use of photography as a viable form of data is authenticity. On the one hand is the old adage that 'the camera never lies' but on the other hand there have been famous incidents of faked photographs, such as the Cottingley fairies case in which two children claimed to have captured images of

fairies in their garden (Winston, 1998). With the advent of photo editing software, the legitimacy of photographs can be questioned. Pole & Morrison remind us that authenticity is not an issue isolated to the use of photographs and is applicable to every data collection method. Their advice is to "analyse and interrogate visual data with the same degree of detail as we would any other data" (2003, p. 68).

Despite these challenges to the use of photographs, Pole & Morrison (2003) propose that photography can make a significant contribution to research. To consider how photographs would assist in this process of providing detailed description and interpretation of an observed social reality (*ibid.*), one should remember that using ethnographic methods leads to the creation and representation of knowledge through the researcher's own experiences. It is a multisensory practice in which the visual plays a major part in 'viewing' and experiencing another culture, yet the rich visual aspect is often translated into a word-based account. Ruby (1996) suggests that the visual-pictorial world is not robust enough to convey such abstract ideas as knowing another culture which accounts for the prevalence of a logocentric approach.

Rather than debate the merits of word versus image, the two can be regarded as complementary methods in which images are a further source of triangulation. Having both word-based and visual forms of data is useful in testing and confirming theory as it emerges in the field. Images can be incorporated when it is "appropriate, opportune or enlightening to do so" (Pink, 2007, p.6) in a way that Harper (1998) has described as a 'natural marriage'. The inclusion of images within a written account has advantages. The use of photographs can allow the audience to be part of the process of interpretation, as one image can mean different things to different people (Pink, 2007). Bolton, Pole & Mizen (2001) also claim that photography within a text "has the capacity to produce unique data sets and to facilitate analysis which may tell us more about social phenomena than analysis of textual, verbal or observational data" (p.516). An additional reason for incorporating photographs into my text was that as well as adding to my position of 'being there' they also provide the audience with a visual glimpse and brief experience of 'being there'. Harper (2003) quoted Katz (2002, p.71) as saying that

interpretive data are rhetorically effective when they take readers to places with exceptional intimacy, and Harper claims that the combination of words and images produces this sense of intimacy, an insider's view, a sense of 'being there'. Prosser & Schwartz elaborated this point:

> Like our field notes and other forms of empirical data, photographs may not provide us with unbiased, objective documentation of the social and material world, but they can show characteristic attributes of people, objects, and events that often elude even the most skilled wordsmiths. Through our use of photographs we can discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle or easily overlooked. We can communicate the feeling or suggest the emotion imparted by activities, environments, and interactions. And we can provide a degree of tangible detail, a sense of being there and a way of knowing that may not readily translate into other symbolic modes of communication (1998, p.116).

In deciding to use photography as an additional data source, I now turn towards a discussion of the types of photograph to take during the data gathering stage of my research. Scott (1990) describes a typology of photographs that identifies three categories of photographs:

1. Idealization – this focuses on formal posing such as weddings and other family events;

2. Natural portrayal – the intention to record events as they actually happened, with the understanding that photographs are a representation of reality as seen through the eyes of the researcher;

3. Demystification – in which the photographer seeks to take candid photographs of their subjects, for example when sleeping or in other revealing situations.

Using this typology, my elected plan was to take as many 'natural portrayal' photographs as possible and was the reason why I purchased a camera with a sizable zoom lens to enable me to take 'natural' shots from a distance. I did not plan to take 'demystification' shots, as when photographing young children it did not feel ethical or moral to capture embarrassing or otherwise compromised moments in their lives. I also did not plan to use many 'idealized' images in order to

minimize any suggestion that the photographs were staged and not least to avoid too much disruption to the settings. I wanted to take as many shots as they happened, in the action, without attempting to set up or fabricate the arrangement of photographs for a specific purpose. At the end of each day in the field, the photographs were downloaded onto my laptop, dated, titled, filed and analysed alongside my field notes. Very early in my visit to New Zealand, I found another advantage of using photographs to collect data: the photographs became a visual record of the day's field work in what Prosser & Schwartz described as an "extra-somatic memory" (1998, p.122). Spending whole days in the field with so much activity around me made it difficult to record all of my observations in a field diary. The photographs thus became an 'aide-mémoire' for the day's events.

Having presented and justified the methods that I have chosen to gather data whilst in the field, I now turn to how field notes and photographs can be synthesized into an interpretation of the cultures underpinning Te Whāriki and the Foundation Phase. Decisions relating to how the data will be represented are vital because they will also influence the way in which the data are collected and analysed.

3.3 Representation of data

The synthesis of field data into a textual account can be fraught with difficult decisions and requires skill:

> ...how to translate this intimate experience [field work] into a piece of writing....has become a most disturbing question for field workers....Cultural description is still a worthy objective but such a description....cannot erase the presence of the role played by emotion, presupposition, and artistry (Van Maanen, 1988, p.12).

In producing an account, Van Maanen believes that the invisible aspects of culture are only made visible through its representation (*ibid.* p.3). An important question for fieldworkers is how much personalisation should be involved in the account? In making a decision, I recognized that if I have placed my 'self' in the field as a *participant* observer then I should also be 'present' in the final text. To distance

myself from the data in a quasi-scientific manner would not only be misleading as to my place in the field but also does not allow for reflexivity.

I chose to adopt a style of writing that Van Maanen (1988) refers to as a 'confessional tale'. This type of representation "emphasizes the role of the self in the process of research" (Coffey, 1999, p.116). Many confessional tales have dealt with problematic aspects of fieldwork, but can also deal with the successes of fieldwork (Walford, 2009). In making this decision I wanted to acknowledge fully my role in the research and I aimed to combine and interweave descriptive text with personal narrative in my representation. This is not an entirely new approach and two anthropologists of the past, Raymond Firth and Bronislaw Malinowski, deployed both narrative and descriptive discourse, and furthermore moved "freely and fluidly between the two, introducing anecdote constantly to illustrate or elaborate on the ... generalizations" (Pratt, 1986, p.38). In adopting a similar approach it is important to remember that personal narrative should not be privileged and that my research is not an autobiographical account. The aim is to make sense of the social world of others, not to make the self the focus of fieldwork (Coffey, 1999).

As an interpretative act, my account cannot claim to uncover *the* 'truth', or at least never the whole truth. Instead, the aim is to establish an authoritative text that is perceived to be meaningful and reliable. Reliability for the fieldworker hinges on two key issues: reflexivity and triangulation.

The highly situated nature of the researcher can help to establish the authority of the research findings (Jones *et al.*, 2010). Geertz's notion of 'being there' suggests that fieldworkers establish authority because of their position 'there' as opposed to the reader who is 'here'. He believes that the researcher's role is not just to present facts but also their personal experiences:

> The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another

form of life, of having, one way or another, truly 'been there' (Geertz, 1988, p.299).

'Being there' in the research requires deep reflection and reflexivity about how one's presence affects and shapes the data. Reflexivity applies to all stages of the research process; it begins before research commences in identifying one's values and prior knowledge, and continues throughout the research into the writing stage, when one must identify how the data might have been shaped by the investigator and also how much of that personal experience to include in the final text. Delamont (2002) claims that reflexivity promotes reliability through examining *in what way* the data have been influenced by the researcher and being explicit about this process. This transparency of reflexivity is essential in allowing the reader to make a quality judgement about how the data have been reliably filtered through the researcher into a convincing representation.

Triangulation can also add to the reliability of the research findings. Triangulation means "having two or more 'fixed' [sic] or 'sightings' of a finding from different angles" (Delamont, 2002, p.181). This can come about firstly *within the methods* of participant observation and using photographs and *between methods* so that hypotheses tentatively formed in one method can be tested in the other.

Early analysis of the data revealed something of a paradox. Whilst I understood from my field notes the highly interactive and deliberative nature of the roles of adults in both settings, they did not feature prominently in the photographs. In this sense the photographic data is arguably quite deceptive. Although the photographs provide authenticity and reliability, their role in offering an insight into the pedagogy of the two settings is incomplete without triangulation with the accompanying field notes. Through a process of reading and reflecting on the different forms of data I aimed to present an insight into pedagogy that was not apparent in either the field notes or photographs alone. Further reflexive discussion on my use of photography, including my identity as a photographer, my choice of photos and the absence/presence paradox of the adults' roles in the children's learning – as elicited from these data – will be developed in the next chapter (section 4.6).

I have explained how my intention was to produce a reliable account that draws on data gathered from my methods and interweaves personal account to the narrative so that my position within the research is acknowledged and visible. The next section illustrates how the research was designed so that I could achieve that aim.

3.4 Research Design

Due to the limited time in the field, it was important that my research was designed so that the early days of data collection were structured. I could not afford to spend too much time in the beginning stages being non-selective in my observations. Although Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) warn that the development of research questions is rarely completed before fieldwork begins, I needed to make my data collection focused and structured from the very beginning in order to gather enough rich data in the time that I had. At the same time I could not lose sight of the important fact that the use of ethnographic methods requires an open-ended research design and that "initial interests that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even transformed over the course of the research" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). As issues in the field are revealed in more detail, flexibility in collecting data is required so that one can be ready for surprise (Shweder, 1997), alert for the possibility of paradox, and allow the hermeneutic interplay between analysis and collection of data.

In order to construct a design for the initial stages of data collection, I considered Delamont's (2002, p.92) suggestion to acknowledge explicitly one's preconceptions before the data collection phase:

> It is important to think through what your preconceptions are before you begin data collection and to write them down in the 'out-of-the-field diary' before you forget them or get swamped by your findings. It is also necessary to plan your early days of data collection around your 'before-you-began' hypothesis...Preconceptions are not a bad thing as long as they are made explicit in your diary...and you test them systematically and are reflexive about them. The danger lies in preconceptions that are implicit, unacknowledged and unexamined.

She proposed that preconceptions might include 'vaguely theoretical' ideas derived from literature as well as 'common sense' from one's own knowledge (*ibid*. p. 93). I realized that whilst identifying preconceptions are a vital part of being reflexive about my research, they could also form the basis of the initial research design, by testing the preconceptions systematically as Delamont suggested. With this in mind, what were my preconceptions before I began data collection in New Zealand and Wales? They are described below:

- Any learning activity can have outcomes that are intentional and incidental (Whitebread *et al.*, 2009b). Learning dispositions possibly develop incidentally for some children in activities for which they were not intentionally planned as outcomes. If left to chance, however, learning dispositions may not develop systematically for all children. Te Whāriki does not 'leave it to chance' and takes the unique approach that the development of learning dispositions should be at the heart of the planned and intentional curriculum. Likewise, the Foundation Phase places an emphasis on learning dispositions, which take a much more prominent role as intended learning outcomes than the 'formal' skills of reading and writing.

- Children's learning dispositions can also vary in their robustness – persisting in the face of difficulty – and their sophistication – transferral to other situations (Carr & Claxton, 2002). Te Whāriki and the Foundation Phase allow for robustness and sophistication of learning dispositions to develop.

- Learning dispositions are further developed through: adult mediation, in the form of sociocultural interactions such as "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978); child-initiated learning; and peer collaboration.

Based on these preconceptions, the early days of data collection were planned around the following questions:

1. How do practitioners plan and deliver activities that intentionally promote learning dispositions?

2. How do practitioners observe, monitor, record and assess children's progress so that they can plan further activities that allow learning dispositions to develop in terms of robustness and sophistication?

3. How do adult-mediation, child-initiated learning and peer collaboration contribute to the further development of learning dispositions?

In identifying my preconceptions, I acknowledged that as a practitioner-researcher my starting position could not be a-theoretical or value-neutral and that I brought clearly defined views and values as an invested knower to the research process. It was also important not to assume that I knew everything in advance and accept that my *pre*conceptions may well be *mis*conceptions. However, using my preconceptions as a starting point allowed me to utilize my limited time in the field to the full, whilst daily analysis of field notes inevitably led me to refine the research design as I gathered data that either confirmed or refuted my initial ideas.

During the data collection phase in New Zealand, which took place eight months before the data collection in Wales, I amended my research questions. Figure 1 shows the initial and amended versions of the research questions and the reasons for the changes. The initial research questions became unworkable and through a process of daily analysis and interpretation of my field notes, I began to formulate new research questions that would allow me to make sense of the data that was unfolding. In this manner I was reacting to the research environment and demonstrating the importance of flexibility in research design. The initial questions served their purpose but they needed amendment in order to gain more insight into what was unfolding.

Initial research question	Amended research question	Reason for amendment
How do practitioners plan and deliver activities that intentionally promote learning dispositions?	What strategies do practitioners use for the intentional promotion of learning dispositions?	The practitioners in the setting in New Zealand did not actually 'plan and deliver' activities in the form of 'lessons'. Their actions to promote learning dispositions were intentional and the new research question was designed to be more inclusive of all kinds of intentional teacher action.
How do practitioners observe, monitor, record and assess children's progress so that they can plan further activities that allow learning dispositions to develop in terms of robustness and sophistication?	How do learning dispositions develop in terms of robustness and sophistication?	I found that the initial question was posing answers within the question and it also suggested that practitioners 'plan' lessons, which was not so in the case study in New Zealand. The new research question was designed to be more 'open' to what was observed in practice.
How do adult-mediation, child-initiated learning and peer collaboration contribute to the further development of learning dispositions?	What role does the sociocultural environment play in the development of learning dispositions?	Adult-mediation, child-initiated learning and peer collaboration started to emerge as themes for research question 1 and this third question became redundant. Instead, a new research question was formulated because it became apparent that the sociocultural environment was a potential mediator for the children's learning dispositions.

Figure 1: How the research questions were amended during my visit to New Zealand

The amended research questions were then employed when I visited Wales so that I could be focused in my observations from the very start of my visit, a necessity given the reduced time scale for this phase of the research. I was prepared for the possibility of further amendment during my visit to Wales but found that, although the questions were formulated as a direct result of my experience in New Zealand, the new research questions were open-ended enough to allow me to gather rich and comparative data in Wales in a way that recognized the setting's unique characteristics.

Having constructed research questions, it is important to consider practical strategies for collecting and gathering data. Decisions must be made as to what and how to tell, and to whom, which influences the data collected. Van Maanen points to the intricacies of this decision-making process:

> ...ethnographic writing of any kind is a complex matter, dependent on an uncountable number of strategic choices and active constructions (e.g. what details to include or omit; how to summarize and present data; what voice to select; what quotations to use) (1988, p.73).

Wolcott (1981) proposes four strategies for deciding what to look for and how to go about observing:

1. Observations by broad sweep;
2. Observations of nothing in particular;
3. Searching for paradoxes;
4. Searching for the problem(s) facing the group.

Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, p.35) also discuss practical strategies "about where to observe and when, who to talk to and what to ask, as well as about what to record and how". They call this sampling within a case and suggest three dimensions for sampling: time, people and context.

Even using the strategies identified, the in-depth nature my study could potentially lead to large amounts of collected data that could be unmanageable to contextualize into a cultural interpretation that is accessible and relevant to the reader. Robson (2002 p. 488) provides advice as to how to achieve reduction and

interpretation of data in order to produce an account that is descriptive and explanatory:

> *Looking for patterns*: Establishing patterns of thought, action and behaviour; understanding of a culture is acquired through observing and analysing the patterns of everyday life.

> *Key events*: In every social group, there will be key or focal events which can be used to analyse a culture. They provide a lens through which it can be viewed, and in many cases a metaphor for their way of life or social values.

> *Triangulation*: Testing one source or set of information against another.

Using the research questions and data collection strategies enabled me to be both productive and strategic in my gathering of data. The next section addresses the analytical framework that was chosen to collect and analyse my data.

3.5 Analytical framework

Within a sociocultural perspective, Rogoff has identified three interconnected planes of analysis which I have adopted as an analytical framework for the collection and analysis of my data:

1. Personal plane in which the focus is on the individual;
2. Interpersonal plane in which the focus is on the social context;
3. Community/institutional plane in which the focus is on the whole cultural/institutional context. (Rogoff, 1998, p.688).

Rogoff described these as "inseparable, mutually constituting planes comprising activities that can become the focus of analysis" (2008, p.58). She considered that none of these planes exists separately in the way that developmental research tends to regard the individual and the environment as separate identities. The unit of analysis is an 'activity' or 'event' rather than an individual, so that the relationship between the individual and the social and cultural environment can be conceptualized. Each plane can be foregrounded at the same time as understanding the position and influence of the other two planes. This was an important reason

for using these planes of analysis, in recognition of how individuals are connected to the social context of their learning environment.

Rogoff also identified developmental processes corresponding to the planes of analysis. Within the community plane, she proposed the model of 'apprenticeship' in which there is "active participation with others in culturally organized activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation in the activity by less experienced people" (Rogoff, 2008, p.60). This is a process in which newcomers go through a period of apprenticeship but, Rogoff points out, not in the model of an expert-novice dyad but as small groups operating within a community.

Within the interpersonal plane, Rogoff identified the concept of 'guided participation' in which she describes the "process and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity" (*ibid.*, p.60). She detailed all types of interactions, including face-to-face and side-by-side joint participation, hands-on involvement, intentional instruction and observation.

Within the personal plane, Rogoff has used the term 'participatory appropriation' to describe how "individuals change through their involvement in one or other activity, in the process of being prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities" (*ibid.*, p.60). She conceptualized this as a process in which active participation leads to on-going development.

Using Rogoff's sociocultural lenses and related processes of development, I was able to build a framework for analysis for my research questions. Through a lengthy process of thinking about, sifting through and making sense of the different forms of data, and in considering the multiple possible versions of reality that the data suggested, patterns and themes began to emerge within the framework, with examples from the data that illustrated these themes. I operationalized concepts such as Bourdieu's work on 'habitus' (1990) and Rogoff *et al.*'s (2003) writings about 'intent participation' to support and extend the themes that were identified and described.

3.6 Practical considerations

The final section of this chapter is concerned with three practical considerations relating to the project that needed to be resolved before research could commence: piloting methods, selecting cases and ethics.

3.6.1 Piloting methods

I have read that working with the ethnographic methods is not an easy option for the beginner (Robson, 2002) so it was important that I piloted my methods. This took place in May 2010 by observing the nursery class (three and four-year-olds) within my own school for six half-day sessions. From this experience I learned that fieldwork is hard for the beginner but not impossible. Time in the field goes very quickly and it took a while to reach the stage of building theory and being more focused in my observations. As stated previously, it was essential to make efficient use of the three weeks that I had in the field in New Zealand and the one week that I had for visiting Wales. The process of forming initial research questions before I commenced the research was imperative so that I had initial theories that I could start testing as soon as I arrived. I understood entirely that these theories could turn out to be unfounded, in which case I now had the tools available to look for and test new theories.

3.6.2 Settings used as cases for the research

One of the main purposes of this research is for me as a practitioner, and for the wider educational community, to learn from the early childhood practices of New Zealand and Wales. I wanted to find out what can be achieved through their sociocultural approaches to learning that foregrounds learning dispositions over the more 'formal' skills of reading and writing. The nature of the methodology means that providing a 'thick description' requires depth rather than breadth of study and one setting was chosen for each country. With this in mind, I wanted to ensure that the settings I visited displayed 'best practice' or were an 'exemplar' of sociocultural theory in action.

Fully realizing the subjectiveness of this statement, I contacted Wendy Lee, a researcher in New Zealand, to help me find a setting for this aspect of the project. She suggested that I carry out my research in Northmont, a kindergarten run by Carrie Robinson in the suburbs of Auckland. The setting was one of the designated 'Centres of Innovation', selected by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2002) on the basis that they were using effective approaches and innovative practice to improve teaching and learning processes. An important role for Centres of Innovation was to disseminate their innovative practice to other settings. On this basis, I was happy to carry out my research in this setting and to consider it as a possible 'exemplar' of good practice.

Setting up a case to study in Wales came about from a previous day-visit to Wales to observe the Foundation Phase in one of the original pilot schools, where I met Jane Anderson. Pilot schools were selected according to Welsh Assembly Government prescribed criteria (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2006) in which practitioners were deemed to have proven records of 'quality' and the capacity to manage change. Pilot schools were expected to lead other schools in their implementation of the Foundation Phase, with exemplars of their practice used in curriculum guidance. When I was later researching possible settings for this research project, I contacted Jane Anderson, who was about to move to Castleton, although this was not a pilot school. She was willing to be involved in my research and I knew that her status as one of the pilot teachers would enable me to consider her practice as an 'exemplar'.

Further information about both settings, with an analysis of my observations, will be included in the next chapter.

The case studies were very different from each other, and there were two key differences that warrant discussion. Firstly, the children in Northmont, New Zealand were aged between three and five-years-old whereas the children in Castleton were between five and seven-years-old. I decided that this would not be a problem as the purpose was never to make direct comparisons between Northmont and Castleton, but to highlight how their practices provided an illuminating alternative

to practice in England. As well as illustrating in both settings what sociocultural pedagogy looks like in practice, the younger aged children at Northmont served as an example as to how a curriculum operates without the pressure of early formal learning, as a direct comparison to EYFS. The slightly older children at Castleton served as an example of how a play-based curriculum can be extended into Key Stage 1, as would be my own preference in England.

Secondly, the amount of time spent gathering data in each setting was not balanced: three weeks in Northmont, New Zealand and one week in Castleton, Wales. The main reason for this decision was pragmatic. I visited New Zealand during my long summer break when I did not need any time away from school. For the majority of the first week in New Zealand, I was in the process of modifying my research questions, as already described, having realized that the initial questions were not practical for my purpose. Once the research questions were amended, it took me some time to feel confident in collecting data, including the use of photographs. When visiting Wales, the school holidays at Castleton were nearly identical to my own and I had to request time off work; one week was the most that could be arranged and certainly three weeks would not have been acceptable if I had required parity of time spent in the field at the two settings. However, I was much more productive in my data collection in Wales, having already honed my research questions and become more adept in the method of participant observation. As already stated, the purpose was not to make direct comparisons between the two settings but to be able to respond to the research questions dialogically through data gathered in situ.

3.6.3 Ethics

Prior to the data collection phase of the thesis, ethical permission was sought and granted from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee following university guidelines (Kingston University, 2006) and those published by other research groups (BERA, 2011; ESRC, 2011). Selecting research participants within each setting involved seeking informed, voluntary consent of the parents on behalf of their children with an acceptance that withdrawal would be possible at any time. This consent

included the use of photography of their children as well as verbal forms of representation. The same form of consent was gained from practitioners working within each setting. Information was supplied as to the aims of the research and about my credentials, including my suitability to work with young children as supported by my enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and through keeping data securely stored.

Both settings accepted my presence in a trusting manner and did not take up the offer of checking my CRB form, pursuing a local equivalent check, or taking up professional references. Jane Anderson at Castleton School in Wales had met me once before but those at Northmont Kindergarten in New Zealand had only emailed me and I had spoken once to Carrie Robinson on the telephone. Carrie did not initially see the need to seek consent from the parents of the children in the kindergarten, stating that their parent body was "very relaxed" and used to their children being involved in similar research projects. Jane was more understanding of the need to gain consent, particularly because of the use of photographs in the research. Consent was eventually gained from the vast majority of parents in both settings, which meant that I had ample children whom I could observe as part of my research.

Informed consent was not sought from the children because of their young age. Einarsdóttir (2007) explained that permission from young children is problematic not least because of issues of language. She described how the use of children's non-verbal actions and gestures in the field can be an indication of whether or not they wish to participate. Being aware of children's non-verbal behaviour involved me drawing on my experience as a practitioner to be attuned to the children's actions and gestures and to be self-critical about my identity and position in the field (Dennis, 2010). In this respect, I recognized a point made by Beach & Eriksson (2010) that consideration of ethics is an integral part of research itself and not just about a set of principles agreed prior to research. As Bell (2008, p.8, original emphasis) pointed out, a researcher must consider 'researcher ethics' alongside 'research ethics'. The former involves recognizing the relational aspect of research

(Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), and that relationships are negotiated and constantly shifting (Smith, 2007). Bauman (1993) referred to this as 'postmodern ethics' in which there is no universal code but many different ways of behaving ethically. Dahlberg & Moss (2005) discussed how ethical behaviour involves making choices and accepting personal responsibility. Reflection about my on-going ethical behaviour and choices in the field, and the ethical responsibility that I experienced are included in the next chapter, in section 4.6.

3.7 Concluding comments

In this chapter, I have presented and justified my chosen methodology and methods. Although interpretivist studies can be criticized for being subjective, I have argued that this very subjectivity is an essential part of the analysis of the cultures that I have chosen to study in order to render the strange familiar. My position as a subjective participant connected to the research is also vital to develop relationships in the field in order to gather quality data and produce a 'thick description' of Te Whāriki and the Foundation Phase. I could have chosen a more objective methodology but I have argued that the realities that I wished to understand are not scientifically 'out there' for observation by a neutral outsider. Through fieldwork, I was able to be inside the research, seeing the world still from my eyes, but from somewhere else, gaining a view of reality that is admittedly partial and interpreted through my value-laden position. My research design has been built on my preconceptions, providing transparency and reflexivity, at the same time as allowing for the experience of actually 'being there' to influence the research questions.

My study could also be criticized for its small-scale nature and the lack of generalizations that can occur as a result of only visiting one setting in each country for a limited amount of time. Although the ethnographic methods, as employed in this research, arguably represent a 'snapshot' of the two practice settings, the objective is to provide critical insight and reflection in the context of a professional enquiry into my own practice, rather than the production of 'truths' to be

generalized or applied across the early years educational sector. What follows in the next chapter is description and analysis of the two settings as contextualized examples of alternative practices that can lead to a more theoretically and pedagogically informed evaluation of my professional setting.

Chapter 4: Description and Analysis

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides contextualizing descriptions of the two research settings – Northmont Kindergarten in New Zealand and Castleton School in Wales. The second section considers the three research questions and uses Rogoff's three planes of sociocultural analysis to examine the meaningful systems of beliefs and practices that are a part of the culture of each setting. The final section contains a reflexive account of my position within the research which pays due regard to my dual status as an insider and outsider.

4.1 Description of Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand - Information about the setting and its structure

Northmont Kindergarten is a government-funded kindergarten that is located in a suburb of Auckland. It is not an affluent area of the city and the local primary school has been given a socio-economic rating of just below the national average. There were three full-time teachers, Carrie Robinson (the manager), Gabby and Lisa, and all three were qualified early childhood teachers. The children at kindergarten came from diverse ethnic backgrounds and many were from families who were new to New Zealand. Forty-five children attended morning sessions for five mornings a week and these children were four to five-years-old. A further forty-five children aged three to four-years-old attended afternoon sessions three times a week.

On arrival at the kindergarten, the resources on offer and the environment in which the children played seemed reassuringly familiar to a visitor from overseas. There was a large indoor area that contained a home corner, play dough table, a mat area, several tables and chairs, some computers, a discovery corner, a jungle-themed play area, a face-painting area, construction stations, bookshelves, jigsaws, painting easels, and a large variety of toys and equipment. The displays on the wall consisted mainly of photographs of the children and their families. The outdoor area had a large sandpit, a water area, some climbing equipment, containers for growing plants and vegetables, and an area of grass with some trees.

The morning children started arriving from 8.45am and their parents helped them to self-register. This was the only formal registration that occurred each day – at no stage did the kindergarten stop to call out names from a register. Whilst families were gently reminded not to arrive before 8.45am, there was no problem in arriving after this time and on some mornings children were seen to arrive as late as 10.30am. When I commented on the apparent tardiness of some of the children and their parents, Carrie explained to me how much she valued the naturally-created staggered start time and how she thought that it added to the calm atmosphere at the kindergarten. She felt strongly that forty-five children all arriving and choosing an activity at once could be disruptive, whereas children arriving at different times, and encountering others who had arrived before them already involved in an activity, helped to instil a sense of purpose and busyness in the other children as they arrived.

As children arrived and registered, they selected an activity to do. The majority would do this independently and immediately; some would take a few minutes to watch what was happening around them; a few would join an activity at the suggestion of the adult who accompanied them; and very occasionally a child might need a teacher to help them to make a choice. Situated near the entrance was a 'choosing board' that contained photographs of the activities on offer at kindergarten and there were times that children either stood by this board to help them make their own decision or were directed to this board by a teacher. The teacher's comment would usually be along the lines of, "What are your plans for today? Go make some plans." Having a planned, purposeful day was considered extremely important by the teachers at kindergarten.

There was no fixed structure to the mornings other than tidy-up time and mat time approximately half an hour before the session ended. Each day, morning tea occurred when the children could have snacks such as toast and fruit, participating when and if they felt hungry enough to do so. The unstructured morning afforded children the time to get very involved in one extended activity that might last the whole morning or have the time to join in several activities of their choosing. The teachers did not lead any formal teaching times during the session. Instead, the

curriculum was child-led and children would choose what they wanted to do rather than have a teacher ask them to do a task. The children worked independently and often collaboratively on tasks of their choosing.

The afternoons were similar in structure to the morning sessions. The children arrived with an adult at various stages during the afternoon and chose their own activity. Parents often stayed longer than in the morning sessions, particularly those parents whose children were new. There was no imposed 'separation' at this kindergarten and very few tears due to children missing their parents or carers. I noticed almost straight away that many of the afternoon children would gravitate towards an adult and that the teachers spent more time playing alongside these younger children than during the morning sessions. The afternoons also had no obvious structure other than tidy-up and mat times half an hour before the end of the session. The only activity not on offer in the afternoon compared to the morning was mosaic tiling. Carrie told me that this was because the afternoon children were not yet independent enough in their play whereby she could spare one adult to stay continuously with a couple of children making mosaic tiles.

4.2 Description of Castleton School, Wales - Information about the setting and its structure

Castleton is a small church primary school in a village in mid-Wales. The pupils live in the surrounding areas, and several come from outside the school catchment area. At the time of my visit, there were eighty children on roll from three to eleven years of age. The families of the pupils were from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds but it was not a particularly deprived area, as measured by free school meal allocation which was 9% at this school compared to 20% nationally. English was the predominant first language of the pupils with no pupils at that time speaking Welsh as their first language.

When I arrived I was given a tour of the school by Jane Anderson, the teacher of Class 2 (five to seven year olds), and Sharon Willis, the Head Teacher of the school. There was a large central 'break-out' area from which the four classrooms led, with a staff room, hall, office and storage areas. The school had been spaciously designed with large inside and outside space. There were two playgrounds and a natural area with grass, trees and climbing equipment. Class 2 had plenty of room for tables and chairs, as well as a large role play area that had been themed as a castle, a reading corner, a sink, storage areas, a separate cloakroom and displays of children's work on the wall. Jane was assisted by Anne, who at times would support individuals or small groups of children whilst Jane taught a lesson, and at other times would teach a group or even the whole class. In addition, for the week that I was present, Jane had a student teacher, Carol, who was expected to teach 50% of Jane's timetable.

At the beginning of the school day, parents would either drop their children at the front entrance of the school or briefly accompany their children inside. In general, parents did not tend to linger, but most mornings a parent or two would make their way to one of the classrooms to give a message or have a chat with their child's teacher or teaching assistant. They were always welcomed warmly and

conversation would tend to meander onto general chat as well as about the child in question.

The day began with registration and the completion of administrative tasks such as taking the day's lunch orders and collecting any lunch money. This was a time when the class gathered together and responded in Welsh to the call of names from the class register and the children also requested their lunch in Welsh. This time also included an opportunity to discuss today's date and weather in Welsh. Registration was followed by an assembly, a time of collective worship. The day was split into four main 'teaching blocks' with breaks and lunch in between. Each session might involve whole group activities, such as one observed on the maths day when children were practising their sequencing and numeracy skills in a circle; small group work, such as the physical development day when the children worked as a team to make up a game using the PE equipment in the hall; individual tasks, such as on the communication day when the children had to write an alternative ending to the Jack and the Beanstalk story; or child-initiated activities, such as groups of children playing in the castle role play area.

At the end of each day, the children were dismissed at the door of the classroom to their parents who were waiting outside in the playground. Jane, Anne and Carol stayed after school to plan and prepare activities for the following day. There were also meetings many days after school, some of them administrative and some relating to professional development, such as one about promoting creative writing through drama which occurred the week I was present.

4.3 Analysis: What strategies do practitioners use for the intentional promotion of learning dispositions?

The first of my research questions was to uncover the deliberate and systematic ways in which learning dispositions can be part of an intentional curriculum so that acquisition is not left to chance as part of an incidental curriculum.

4.3.1 Analysis through a community lens

Fleer and Richardson (2009, p.135) provide insight as to the focal points when using a community lens:

> This is symbolically represented by the artefacts being used in the context. However, the discourse of schooling, the codes of behaviour and ways of learning are all part of this...lens. For instance, the taken-for-granted practices of the staff, the centre, as well as the policies, are all considered when...[this]...lens is applied to the context.

In both New Zealand and Wales, the discourse of schooling involves the promotion of learning dispositions. Te Whāriki, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, has been designed with the specific intent of developing learning dispositions (Smith, 2003b). Similarly, the Foundation Phase, the early childhood curriculum for Wales, has as an intended aim for children to: "acquire positive dispositions to learning" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, p.10). To achieve these aims, learning though play is considered of vital importance. Te Whāriki states the significance of children experiencing "an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised" (New Zealand. Ministry of Education, 1996, p.84) and the Foundation Phase asserts that "[c]hildren learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of 'play' providing the vehicle" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a, p.4).

Habitus of each setting

Underlying the discourse of education in which children learn through play that is embodied in the formal curriculum documents, Northmont and Castleton both had a community 'habitus' that defined 'the way we do things here'. Bourdieu (1990)

used the term habitus to define a system of dispositions which constitute an often unexamined background set of assumptions about the world (Cole, 1996). Carr (2001, p.10) points out that habitus can include:

> ...a learner's assumptions about what is expected in early childhood settings and schools, and, reciprocally, it includes the early childhood setting and school's assumption about what is expected of the learner or student.

The following section contains an examination of the habitus and assumptions of Northmont and Castleton.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, the majority of the day involved child-initiated play with a short time at the end of each session, called 'mat time', led by a teacher. This was a deliberate act on behalf of the three teachers and, when I queried the rationale for this decision, Carrie told me that she believes that learning dispositions develop through child-initiated play. The learning dispositions that they valued were displayed on the wall of the kindergarten classroom and in the teachers' office as part of a chart (see Figure 2) that was titled 'This is how we view assessment and learning' that had been taken from professional development material provided by Margaret Carr (1998).

Through this framework, the teachers at Northmont promoted the view of the child as an active and confident participator in their environment as exemplified in the teachers' requirement that children had to 'be busy'. It was an expectation that children had a purpose for their day and a frequently heard teacher question was, "What's your plan for today?" Answers to this question were varied, from Sam, who would often come into kindergarten in the morning with a definite idea for something that he wanted to construct: "I'm going to make a cat"; to Shamil, whose response was less specific but nonetheless considered by the teachers equally as valid: "Me and Shrey [his best friend] are going to explore." Children who could not provide an answer to the question were directed to the 'choosing board' which had photographs of several different activities on offer so that they could think about what their plan was going to be. For the teachers, it was the choice that the child

made, not one imposed on them by an adult, which would lead to development of learning dispositions. Through making their own choice, Carrie explained that the children would feel more motivated to learn and were more likely to persist for a longer period.

Strands of Te Whāriki	Learning Dispositions	Actions and Behaviour	Learning Environment will be	Children's Questions
Belonging (Mana Whenua)	Courage (and Curiosity) (to find something of interest here)	Taking an Interest	Interesting	Do you know me?
Well-being (Mana Atua)	Trust (and Playfulness)	Being Involved	Trustworthy	Can I trust you?
Exploration (Mana Aotūroa)	Perseverance To tackle and persist with difficulty and uncertainty	Persisting with Difficulty, Challenge and Uncertainty	Challenging	Do you let me fly?
Communication (Mana Reo)	Confidence To express an idea, a feeling or point of view	Expressing a Point of View or Feeling	Listening	Do you hear me?
Contribution (Mana Tangata)	Responsibility For justice and fairness and the disposition to take on another point of view	Taking Responsibility	Collaborative	Is this place fair for us?

Figure 2: Taken from Carr (1998) and on display at Northmont Kindergarten.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton School, the day's activities were planned by Jane, but there was ample opportunity for the children to learn through play and first-hand experience. The Foundation Phase Curriculum Framework does not provide a definitive list of learning dispositions in one place, but an analysis of the document does reveal that qualities such as perseverance, attention to detail, concentration, self-awareness and independence are recognized as being important dispositions for young children. These dispositions were evident in the activities that Jane planned and the way in which the children behaved in the classroom. Perseverance was often on display, like the time that Kelly was drawing and colouring a picture of the Jack and the Beanstalk story and, even though she somewhat ruefully admitted that she thought she had made her picture 'too large', she insisted that she carry on until she had finished, even when children around her were playing. Attention to detail, independence and concentration were apparent when the children were making clay castles and they included additional features to the main parts of a castle. Self-awareness was highly regarded by Jane and I observed several aspects of her pedagogy that promoted the children's awareness of their identity as a learner, including a 'targets board' that displayed self- and peer-set targets and a 'learning wall' on which the children had written what they knew about a topic prior to its commencement, what they wanted to find out, and what they had learned as a result. With an opportunity to observe Jane's practice, I could also see a key disposition that she was trying to develop with the children was confidence. She told me that she did not feel that any other learning would be effective if the children did not have confidence in themselves as learners. Anne, Jane's teaching assistant, and Richard, a supply teacher who covered Jane's PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time, both remarked to me that an increase in confidence was the biggest change in the children since Jane's arrival two terms ago. In addition, Jane valued collaboration and communication, as shown through the many group and paired activities that required children to talk to and listen to each other.

Apprenticeship to each setting

Having seen how the teachers at both settings valued and promoted certain kinds of learning dispositions that created a 'habitus', I could then see how Rogoff's notion of 'apprenticeship' worked in context. Rogoff explained that apprenticeship can be observed by the way in which "people engage in culturally organized activity in which apprentices become more responsible participants" (2008, p.61).

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

Newcomers to Northmont Kindergarten started in the afternoon as and when a place became available. This meant that it was rare for more than one or two new children to start at the same time, although Carrie informed me that due to a mistake she once had five new children on the same day. I witnessed that it was more often than not another child who provided 'initiation' for a new arrival and this was a deliberate act on behalf of the teachers. Carrie felt that in an environment that promotes active and independent children, what better initiation into a community could be provided than an established member of the community, one of the children, taking a new child under their wing? In the case of Northmont, the culturally-organized activity that required apprenticeship was child-initiated learning through play in which the children were expected to be active, confident and communicative participants. One afternoon, I observed Georgia, a friendly and self-assured member of the afternoon sessions, as she helped Kiera, a new pupil. Georgia was busy face-painting when Kiera, who had only been at kindergarten for a short time and had not yet been able to leave the side of one of the teachers or initiated any activities for herself, intently watched as Georgia painted her face and then hands. Kiera was fascinated as Georgia transformed herself into a tiger cub and chatted through her design with me. With Georgia's encouragement, within minutes Kiera was painting her own hands and then face. Georgia seemed oblivious to the importance of Kiera having the courage to try something new but was keen for Kiera to join in. When Kiera started working on her face, Georgia offered her the mirror with the information that this would make it easier for Kiera to see what she was doing. The two girls painted side-by-side for

some time with Kiera laughing and enjoying herself in a way that the teachers had not witnessed before. Kiera might have got to this stage eventually but with Georgia's help she had come out of herself sooner than she might have done.

Photograph 1: Kiera (on the left) is apprenticed to Georgia.

In discussion about the usefulness of children helping each other, Gabby told me about two Maori principles that were an important part of the apprenticeship process. She explained that Te Whāriki is a bicultural curriculum into which Maori learning principles have been 'woven' (the word Te Whāriki is a Maori word for a woven mat). The first principle was 'tuakana teina' which is an integral part of Maori society whereby an older or more expert family member helps and guides a younger or less experienced relation. A literal example was found one day when Terri, who attended afternoon sessions, showed me how she could swing across the monkey bars independently. I had previously seen her practise repeatedly and was pleased to offer praise for her efforts. Gabby was particularly impressed because she recognized that this was a new achievement for Terri. On questioning, Terri revealed that her older cousin Jason, who attended morning sessions, had come to the kindergarten with her in the recent holidays and had taught her how to swing.

There were not many same family members such as Terri and Jason but the principle of 'tuakana teina', which Gabby said was encouraged at kindergarten for all children, was seen in abundance with examples of children with an expertise teaching those who were less adept than themselves. This often happened with one of the teachers first demonstrating a new skill or routine to one of the children and in turn that child would teach other children. This happened on a day that Jill, who used to work at Northmont and was covering whilst Gabby was unwell, showed Jake how to use the laminator, who in turn taught Tom, who then instructed Colin and Rhys.

Photograph 2: Tom teaching Colin how to use the laminator. Jill remains in the background, discretely observing the proceedings.

This leads to the second Maori principle, closely related to the first, which was 'ako': a reversal of the learner-teacher roles in recognition of the importance of reciprocal learning. The teacher one day could be the learner the next and at Northmont, Gabby said that they remind themselves that everyone can be a teacher. The principle of 'ako' was seen in many situations with the teachers being

a learner so that the children could adopt a teacher mode. For instance, Akash taught Lisa, and indeed many other children, the rules of 'rippa rugby' (a non-contact version of rugby). This game was very popular and Lisa responded to their interest by using her sewing machine to make tags for them to use when playing the game.

Photograph 3: Levi, Dylan, Jake and Navin playing 'rippa rugby' with Lisa's tags.

The reciprocity between roles of teacher and learner seen at Northmont was a theme of Freire's work, that is, an antidote to the 'banking' model of education in which the teacher is a transmitter of knowledge and the learner is a receptacle waiting to be filled with knowledge:

> Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* learners (Freire, 1970, p.53).

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, apprenticeship into Jane's classroom habitus had been more difficult to manage, because being new to the school all of the children were new to Jane when she started in September. When I asked her about moving to a new school

she told me that she was intentionally proactive to reinforce the kind of learning context that she valued, with the staff as well as the children. She felt that having a class that comprised two different ages was an advantage in that the older children (Year 2) had mostly been quicker to develop the kinds of attitudes she was promoting and had acquired her classroom rules and routines quicker than the younger children (Year 1). In that respect, she made use of the older children to help the younger children in Rogoff's style of apprenticeship. There were times when Jane organized these interactions directly, like during a collaborative PE lesson when she asked Amanda, a Year 2 pupil, to join a group of predominantly Year 1 children who were struggling to act as a team. Amanda fulfilled this role with expertise and encouraged the younger children to take turns to give their ideas and to listen to everyone before making a decision. There were also times when older children automatically assumed this role without prompting.

On one occasion, during a period of 'free-choice' in which children were expected to choose and complete their own tasks, Lena, a Year 2 pupil, read a Welsh story book to a group of Year 1 pupils. This book had been read to the class by Jane the previous day and Lena paused at the same places that Jane had so that her audience could supply the next part of the repetitive story. This was another example of Freire's (1970) reciprocal learning in which Lena had been the learner one day and the teacher the next. Although the principles of 'tuakana teina' and 'ako' are Maori constructs, the underlying processes of experts and their apprentices involved in culturally-set activities were present in Castleton. When I spoke to Jane about this, she expressed that she was looking forward to next September when her Year 1 children would become the older children in her class and they would be able to help her initiate the new children who would be joining her from Reception. She felt that the apprenticeship model would be more effective when her older, more established members of her community will have already spent a year adopting her classroom ways of learning.

Photograph 4: Lena (on the right) reads a story in Welsh to some younger pupils.

4.3.2 Analysis through an interpersonal lens

At the same time as uncovering the process of apprenticeship at a community level, on the interpersonal plane it was also possible to observe 'guided participation' which Rogoff defined as "the mutual involvement of individuals and their social partners, communicating and coordinating their involvement as they participate in socially structured collective activity" (Rogoff, 2008, p.62). Guided participation can take place in many forms, the first of which is adult mediation. Knowledge construction within a sociocultural framework is understood to be mediated through social interaction. This process of adult mediation is completely different to the view of transmitting knowledge through 'taught' activities and the following section illustrates adult mediation as observed in the two settings.

Adult mediation

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, the lack of teacher- led activities and the promotion of child-initiated learning did not mean that the teachers had no role in mediating the

children's learning. However, their role was not as immediately obvious and took longer to uncover. Their role with the younger children in the afternoons was more overt and, at these times, I could clearly see that the teachers played *with* the children on activities chosen by the children. One visible effect of this was that it seemed to make the children play and sustain concentration for much longer periods of time. When I asked Carrie about the differences in her role in the mornings and afternoons, she explained that the purpose of playing with the younger children was to improve the quality and not just the quantity of their play. One afternoon she had involved a group of boys in singing and doing the actions for a song based on the book 'We're going on a bear hunt' and she had also helped them to play along with instruments. She was pleased when three boys, Matt, Zach and Kevin, had the idea to go on their own bear hunt. She followed them on their adventure and stepped in when she thought that they lost focus or started getting too boisterous.

Photograph 5: Matt, Zach and Kevin's bear hunt game with Carrie in the background.

When I asked Carrie about this episode later, she told me that her ultimate aim was to get the children to initiate their own learning but these boys had not yet reached

that stage. She thought that they had lots of energy and enthusiasm but had not yet learned how to channel it into purposeful play. She wanted them to be able to think for themselves and sustain their own play and she was helping them along that journey until they could do it for themselves. Carrie saw her role as mediating their development through a process of interaction and collaboration.

During the morning sessions, not so many children required this level of adult mediation to regulate their play. At these times, the teachers would target children who they felt needed intervention regarding a particular learning disposition. During the morning sessions, the teachers were also available as and when the children required them. For example, one morning Colin arrived at kindergarten and said that he wanted to make a catapult. Carrie immediately responded to Colin's idea and she told me afterwards that it was because she wanted to support and extend his learning dispositions. Using her laptop, Carrie and Colin looked at pictures of various different catapult designs and talked through which aspects Colin liked and how he thought he was going to make each component.

Photograph 6: Colin making his catapult, mediated by Carrie.

Through listening to their exchange, I observed that Carrie ensured that she and Colin were equal partners in the project as they jointly conceived ideas and evaluated the progress. At no stage did Carrie take over Colin's catapult; it was his idea in both inception and construction but she helped him to extend his thinking and clarify his ideas through questions such as: "What could you use to make this part? Have you thought about using elastic? Is that working properly? How are you going to stick them together?" In turn, Colin asked Carrie questions such as: "What do you think of this part? Do you think that is strong enough? How about we try it this way?" and they both pondered the answers to each other's questions. This episode illustrates the proactive role for teachers within a sociocultural paradigm, in mediating the children's learning in a way that children are co-constructors of knowledge.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, whilst the children were engaged in activities, Jane also adopted the role of mediator for the children's learning. Her intention was to set up collaborative activities for the children that would invariably lead to challenge. One example was when she worked outside with a group that had to establish which pathway would lead a knight to the castle in the least time – there were several pathways which all had twists and turns to varying degrees.

Jane's role whilst the children were trying to work out how to solve this problem was encouraging them to bounce ideas off each other and her involvement was limited to asking strategic questions to make them think more critically. Through this process, they developed and built on each other's ideas and they worked as a team to solve the problem practically. At no stage had Jane put the final solution into their heads but she had guided them towards this way of thinking by her occasional questions. The children completed the task with independence, helped with suggestions from Jane such as, "Do you have everything you need? Do you know what everyone needs to do?"

Photograph 7: Jane mediating the children's problem solving.

'Absence' of an adult

In the above examples from both settings, as the children were engaged in community-bound and culturally-valued activities that promoted learning dispositions, the adults upheld the values of that setting. Carrie supported and publically endorsed Colin's interest, involvement, persistence and communication. Jane promoted and perpetuated the learning dispositions that she valued with the group solving their problem, such as collaboration, perseverance, communication and independence. Through guided participation, the children were being initiated into the sociocultural values of their setting.

The adults in both settings also used their absence as a means to develop the children's learning. At Northmont, it initially appeared that the numbers of children (forty-five in each session) with usually only three adults meant that it was a necessity that children worked without the presence of an adult. At Castleton, even

though the ratios were more generous, with twenty children in the class and two adults, it also seemed inevitable for children to have to share the adults' time. As I observed earlier (p.64), when considered in isolation the photographic data give the impression that the adults were largely absent from the children's interactions with each other. However, conversations and observations extracted from my field notes at both settings revealed that the deliberate absence of an adult led to more incidences of peer mediation, examples of which follow. As already discussed, for self-regulation to come about children need to progress from a position of adult direction, to peer direction before being able to regulate themselves.

Collaborative play

Examples of collaborative play in the absence of an adult were apparent in both settings. Through their playful activities, the children at both Northmont and Castleton were seen to mediate each other's learning.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, guided participation and peer mediation often took place in the form of 'tuakana teina', as already described, in which a more-experienced peer mediated another child's learning. This transpired on the day of 'Bush Kindy' which occurred on Fridays when the whole session took place outside on the nature reserve behind the kindergarten. Travis had asked me to help him tie a rope around a tree in order to help him to climb it. Asha, a student teacher, told me that Travis had spent weeks trying to conquer this particular tree with no success yet. I helped Travis with his rope but then withdrew my presence. Later in the morning I returned to find him, triumphant, at the top of his tree alongside Edward. In discussion with the two boys, I found out that Edward was considered a 'champion' tree climber and had helped Travis to scale the tree by winding some additional rope around the bottom of the trunk to help with grip. I witnessed as Edward expertly descended back to the ground and then guided a still slightly anxious Travis as to where to put his feet and hands in order to make it to the ground safely.

Travis had achieved with assistance from Edward what he might never have
achieved by himself.

Photograph 8: Travis (on the right) climbing a tree with Edward.

Castleton School, Wales

*At Castleton, there were many rich examples of guided participation by peers in the
absence of an adult. One morning I watched as Callum led a group of children in a
game of guarding the castle from attackers. I had seen that Callum had struggled to
maintain focus during the more 'formal' activities such as writing. Yet in this game
with his friends he remained committed to his role of guarding the castle and being
very persuasive in ensuring that his friend John showed the same commitment.
John would have happily wondered off and was frequently distracted by the games
of some of the other children in the group, but Callum never gave up in keeping
John on task. The collaborative and playful nature of the game contributed to*

Callum and John showing a level of involvement that they might not have done on their own or for a different kind of activity.

At Castleton, some of the structure of the day also took the form of teacher-led activities and individual, rather than collaborative, activities. Peer-mediated learning also transpired at these times even if the task was directed by the teacher or if children were expected to complete it on their own. The children automatically chattered and collaborated as they undertook every task and during my visit I did not hear Jane ask them to work without talking. When writing an alternative ending to the Jack and the Beanstalk story, the table of children with whom I sat chatted mostly about spelling as they worked. Before they could ask an adult how to spell a word, the children were expected to attempt it for themselves in their 'have-a-go' books. This process of 'having-a-go' often led them to making suggestions to each other about spelling. For example, when Jason attempted the word 'sugar' Lena showed him the correct spelling that had already been written in her book and they commented to each other that it did not have the expected 'sh' letter pattern at the beginning; in return, Jason helped Andrew with 'away' by reminding Andrew that it was one of their spelling words which made Andrew realize that he could write it after all. Whilst the children were not engaged in a play activity, learning dispositions such as collaboration, communication and perseverance were still evident.

Intent participation – learning by observing

Guided participation does not always involve 'hands-on' contribution and can include observation. As Rogoff pointed out, "a person who is actively observing and following the decisions made by another is participating whether or not he or she contributes directly to the decisions as they are made" (Rogoff, 2008, p.63). Rogoff *et al.* (2003) defined this form of observation as 'intent participation' and stressed that this powerful form of learning has received little research attention. A key aspect of the concept is the expectation of subsequent involvement which requires a level of observation quite different to when watching incidentally:

...learning is based on participation in ongoing or anticipated activities, with keen observation and listening. Learners observe to figure out processes they expect to engage in. They seek understanding far beyond that needed for simple mimicry; their roles in shared endeavors [sic] often involve coordinating with others, not simple imitation (Delbos & Jorion 1984). Observation is often, but not necessarily, accompanied by pointers from more experienced companions and conversation embedded in the ongoing activity (Rogoff *et al.*, 2003, p.191).

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

Intent participation was illustrated by Molly, a pupil at Northmont, on her first visit to Bush Kindy. Initially hesitant, she followed some children to an area of trees where Lisa had tied some ropes for them to climb across. Molly stood completely still and silent as she intently observed a handful of children take their turn. She looked at what they were doing with their hands and feet. After a while she approached the rope and touched it with her hand. She seemed to be assessing the situation, learning from the others, ready for when she would have a turn.

Photograph 9: Molly (on the left) touching the rope before she had a turn.

In a very short space of time she took her turn and grinned as she made it across. She undoubtedly would not have been so successful in her first attempt had she not had the time to watch and study her peers first.

Carrie informed me of how much she encourages and recognizes intent participation [she called it 'watching'] as an important stage of the learning process. She thought that it allows children the space to assimilate what is happening and to make mental plans for their own learning. We discussed Zara and Mina, two girls who I had noticed tended to 'watch' activities but did not seem to progress to joining in. I asked about intervening with these two girls but Carrie informed me that she had deliberately chosen not to intervene and force these children into hands-on participation, and said that patience is often required. Her view was that children will make the transition from watching to doing when they are ready and it has just taken these two girls a little longer than others to be ready. Forcing the issue, that is making them join in, would be counterproductive in her opinion. I was initially unsatisfied with her answer as it seemed to fit with a developmental model of the child in which learning cannot occur until he or she is developmentally ready and appeared in opposition to the socially and culturally mediated view of childhood. However, on reflection, Bruner's words about 'readiness' clarify what Carrie meant: "it turns out one *teaches* [original emphasis] or *provides opportunities for its nurture* [my emphasis] and does not simply wait for it" (1966, p.29). Carrie was not simply *waiting* for Zara and Mina to be ready to make the transition from watching to doing, she was *providing opportunities* for this to happen, through an environment that valued active involvement in collaborative play. Towards the very end of my visit, I witnessed one example of how Zara and Mina turned observation into participation by playing Pelmanism having spent time observing other children playing this game.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, I also observed intent participation in action. During a free choice session, Siobhan and Ian decided to play a phonics game that Carol had taught them. I knew that this was a new game and had as yet only been taught to a few

children. Gemma and Annie, who did not yet know how to play the game, watched Siobhan and Ian play and once finished, Gemma and Annie took the game and played it for themselves.

Photograph 10: Siobhan and Ian playing a phonics game watched by Gemma and Annie.

Within Jane's teaching, she made the children aware of the importance of watching others before having a go. This was apparent in a PE lesson where her on-going commentary contained advice such as, "Watch who goes before you. See what they are doing. Look how Josh is using his hands! Think about what you are going to do when it is your turn." Jane was providing pointers from more experienced companions in order to make the observation and subsequent participation process go "far beyond mimicking what they see and hear" (Rogoff *et al.*, 2003, p.177).

4.3.3 Analysis through a personal lens

Through adult mediation, collaboration with a peer, or intent participation, children are able to achieve and do things that they could not do on their own. Rogoff described this individual development as 'participatory appropriation', one in which "individuals change through their involvement in one or other activity in the

process of being prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities" (Rogoff, 2008, p.60, my emphasis). As a result, children handle a later situation in a different way due to their participation in a previous activity. Rogoff stressed that participatory appropriation does not take place in a static 'acquisition' model but rather the dynamic and active participation in activities makes it a 'becoming' model, where the outcome of individual development is situated in the local context:

> The direction of development varies locally (in accord with cultural values, interpersonal needs, and specific circumstances); it does not require the specification of universal; or ideal end points of development *(ibid.,* p.68).

As described, analysis through community and interpersonal lenses has shown that both settings valued and required active participation in culturally-bound activities that would develop children's learning dispositions.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

Children at Northmont were required to be busy and to have purpose. Through their 'busyness' the teachers wanted the children to develop their learning dispositions. Travis, who was assisted in climbing a tree by Edward, was changed by this collaborative experience, demonstrated a few days later when Carys was having trouble climbing a tree in the kindergarten outdoor play area and Travis showed her how to use a rope at the bottom of the tree so that she could get a better grip. He showed that his participation in a previous situation had led him to handle a subsequent situation differently.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton the children were required to take part actively and confidently in a variety of first-hand activities that Jane designed to promote learning dispositions. Tina was described by Anne, the teaching assistant, as having 'no confidence' at the start of the year, but was reported to be growing in assurance almost daily. One morning during my visit, Anne marvelled at how Tina volunteered answers during a maths game. She told me that this was a first for Tina, who apparently was very

anxious about 'getting things wrong', but through the active experiences that Jane was providing she was becoming more willing to 'have a go' regardless of the outcome. Another morning I watched as a group of children were completing illustrations on the computer. Carys was expressing frustration about not being able to draw a knight. Tina turned to her and offered advice about starting by drawing a stick man. When Carys was doubtful, Tina replied, "It's OK, you can change it if you need to."

Photograph 11: Tina working on the computer after helping Carys.

Tina's change in attitude through participatory appropriation could be conceived as a change from what Carol Dweck (2006) has termed a 'fixed' to a 'growth' mindset. Rather than seeing her ability as fixed, Tina was developing dispositions such as confidence and perseverance so that she was willing to try without worrying about failure. Her comments to Carys showed that she knew that things can be altered if necessary. Tina had needed support from apprenticeship and guided participation,

but from my 'snapshot' of observation in the field there appeared to be signs of individual development and progress.

4.4 Analysis: How do learning dispositions develop in terms of robustness and sophistication?

The development of learning dispositions requires skills to become embedded so that these habits of the mind can be enduring qualities. Carr & Claxton (2002) suggest that learning dispositions need to be *robust*, that is that a learner can rely on them in more challenging situations, and *sophisticated*, that is that they can be used in a variety of different situations. My second research question aimed to examine the experiences that possibly influenced this development with an appreciation that meaningful changes in learning dispositions take place over a longer period time than I had in the field.

4.4.1 Analysis through a community lens

Extended learning periods

In common with each other, the teachers at Northmont and Castleton advocated the place of extended learning periods as vital for robust development of learning dispositions so that the children could be intently involved in their activities without unnecessary interruptions. Through the process of apprenticeship, they were initiated into an environment in which extended learning periods were valued, which the teachers believed would allow the children's learning dispositions to be applied deeply in a variety of situations.

Northmont Kindergarten, Wales

At Northmont, the children could play for a whole session without interruption. Only 'tidy-up time' was the signal that their activities must cease for the day. The curriculum was child-led so that the teachers did not impose any activities and this was a deliberate act. When I asked Carrie her views, she told me that she felt that child-initiated activities would lead to greater levels of intrinsic motivation, higher levels of involvement and therefore improved learning dispositions. An example that I observed first-hand was when Mara arrived at kindergarten one morning announcing that she wanted to make a 'frock' and succeeded in doing this for

herself within minimal support from Gabby. She independently decided that she would use the floor for her design as the table was not big enough, requested larger scissors than the ones normally used by the children, and improvised with plastic thread usually used for making necklaces to sew her frock together. This was a challenging activity, to which Mara remained focused throughout despite the difficulties she had. There were also a number of different components and stages of the activity. In the account written for Mara's learning story, Gabby concluded that Mara had shown that her learning dispositions were developing, and, from my limited observations, the child-led curriculum that allowed Mara to spend the whole morning persevering on her frock had helped to facilitate this change.

Photograph 12: Mara making her frock with Gabby. Gabby's camera is positioned so that she can take photographs for a learning story.

The child-led curriculum meant that children could revisit tasks on subsequent days which also helped their learning dispositions to become more robust. Terri

practised her skills on the monkey bars for a part of every day that I was present, showing how persistence and regular practice are beneficial when learning a new and challenging skill. Matthew and Moses chose to practise their netball skills for several days in succession because they wanted to improve and knew that they had to persevere despite the difficulty of the task.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, Jane operated what she called an 'extended' day in which she made one area of learning the main focus. A crucial aspect of her daily plans was allowing for flexibility so that any activity could overrun if she felt that the children were very involved. For example, on the day that the children wrote alternative endings to the Jack and the Beanstalk story, the activity took place over two sessions rather than the planned one, due to the fact that the vast majority of children were motivated to finish their work and displayed a real sense of pride when they had done so.

Photograph 13: Jason finishing his 'Jack and the Beanstalk' writing.

Even Callum, for whom writing was his least favourite activity, and Amanda, who told me her negative feelings about her slow style of writing, completed their

stories and looked very pleased at their achievements. Being allowed to complete the task gave these children the opportunity for their persistence to develop.

Children at Castleton also revisited learning on further occasions. Sometimes this was because Jane had planned it that way, for example the weekly PE lesson had had the same theme of devising team games for a number of weeks because she wanted the children's skills to develop more robustly. Sometimes children chose to return to tasks, such as Lena revisiting an activity in the castle role play area because she told me that she 'did not get it right' the first time.

Photograph 14: Lena revisiting an activity in the castle role play area so that she could improve her previous effort.

Provocation

Teachers at both settings provided a variety of different and challenging resources as a way of supporting robustness and sophistication of learning dispositions. Fleer & Richardson (2009) remind us that artefacts used in context are a symbolic representation of the community plane. In both settings, teachers also made use of resources, types of artefact, as a form of provocation for children's learning.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, there were a variety of resources available for the children with a view to them accessing a range of activities and transferring their learning dispositions from one activity to another. Many were also intended to provide challenge so that the children's learning dispositions became more robust in the face of difficulty. Examples of this included tree-climbing and a construction area that contained hammers, saws and nails. These tools were 'real', not child-like versions, and when I expressed surprise Carrie explained to me that this was to enable the children to feel competent and confident, something she did not feel would be achieved with 'safe' children's versions of these tools.

Organization of resources was constantly evolving according to the way in which the teachers observed the children using them. The teachers did not plan in advance; instead, as a result of the children's preferences and behaviour, they wrote 'stories of interest', a form of reactive planning, responding to the current needs and interests of the children. The stories of interest also described the role of the teachers in providing *provocation* for the children's learning. This involved making available images and materials that would extend the children's learning, as described in the story of interest that documented how the threading area had been developed:

> As a teacher I saw my role as one of support for Poppy because she was already an expert at directing her own learning and discovering new and exciting challenges for herself. I did however wonder how I could provide further provocation for Poppy and her friends so I downloaded a whole lot of images of necklaces and bead-work from the internet for them, hoping that this would add to the interest. This was a huge success and Poppy pointed out to me that she could see 'patterns' being used in the photos. This encouraged Poppy to explore the possibilities of creating her own patterns and the word 'designing' was used to express how she was going to create her necklace.

Another form of provocation for the children's learning was their 'learning stories', which are narrative assessments written by a teacher that describe how a child is applying learning dispositions in action. Carrie explained how during their daily debriefing session the teachers would share information that might contribute

towards a child's next learning story and I witnessed some of these sessions for myself. Completed learning stories were available as an individual 'profile' for each child and the teachers considered that it was extremely important that they were written in such a way that made the learning visible, meaningful and accessible for the children. For this reason the learning stories were full of photographs and even DVDs of the children's learning, the reason why the teachers always had a camera to hand.

Photograph 15: Nahal and Poppy looking at and talking about their learning story profiles.

Revisiting learning through looking at learning stories was felt by the teachers to help the children to reflect, as described in the story of interest about glue guns:

> We have discovered that when children are able to see many different types of documentation that show their successes they are empowered to see themselves as *capable and competent* [original emphasis] learner/teachers. We have seen that this type of provocation spurs our children on and encourages them to continue to *deepen and share* [original emphasis] their knowledge.

A further form of provocation for the children's learning was the use of photographs taken when the children were at play. The walls had numerous of

these on display and photographs of that day's activities were often shown during 'mat time' using a projector screen.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, Jane planned a variety of activities for children to develop their learning dispositions in different and challenging situations. The castle role play area had a number of 'enhanced activities' that had been set up by Jane and were designed to enrich children's learning in the topic of knights and castles. Even during my one week visit, the children frequently participated in these tasks, either alone or with friends, and also made up some of their own. I observed Jane and Anne discussing which activities the children had accessed and to what level of success. The children's level of interest and involvement were factors as to whether tasks would be removed, remodelled or replaced.

Jane also used photographs as a form of provocation and this often happened at the beginning of a session. I questioned Jane about the examples that I had observed and about this practice in general. She told me that sometimes, photographs shown would be of the same kind of activity as the one they were about to commence, such as before the children started making castles out of clay, Jane displayed photographs on the interactive whiteboard of them using clay the week before so that they could review what had gone well and what they might do differently. Jane told me that she planned these sessions for learning dispositions to become more deeply embedded and reported that she thought that this had been successful for her since she had started at the beginning of the academic year.

Jane explained how she also used the end of sessions as a discussion time for the children's work. Photographs might be displayed so that the children could evaluate their own and each other's contributions. I observed how the children were encouraged to reflect at these times, particularly discussing what went well, what they found hard, and how they might approach a similar task the next time, which was also encouraging participatory appropriation in the suggestion that participation could change their subsequent response.

In a research project aimed at uncovering aspects of children's self-regulation and metacognition, Robson concluded that "knowing about their own and others' learning, knowing about and being able to remember tasks, approaches and strategies, and being able to talk about these with others, are important areas for development in young children" (2010, p.239). This is exactly what the children at Castleton were encouraged to do, which I observed directly. For Jane, metacognitive experiences were seen as a way of developing the robustness and sophistication of learning dispositions. Vygotsky explained that the process of becoming *conscious* of one's actions is responsible for this change:

> In perceiving some of our acts in a generalizing fashion, we isolate them from our total mental activity and are thus enabled to focus on this process as such and to enter into a new relation to it. In this way, becoming conscious of our operations and viewing each as a process of a certain *kind* – such as remembering and imagining – leads to their mastery (1986, p.170-171, original emphasis).

Photograph 16: Jane and the children reviewing photographs of their clay lesson.

Jane and Anne would observe and take notice of the children's responses during times of reflection and evaluation. They explained to me how this led them to notice that Carys had very little confidence in her own abilities, a judgement that

they felt was unfounded. They were therefore able to ensure that they could intervene with Carys and help her to verbalize and become conscious of her own abilities and I saw evidence of her ability to do so during my visit.

4.4.2 Analysis through an interpersonal lens

The community plane of both settings revealed how extended learning periods with minimal interruptions enabled the children to participate in a variety of activities using resources that were designed to provoke their learning. The impact of this learning environment on the interpersonal plane was the quantity of interactions that occurred.

Northmont Kindergarten, Wales

At Northmont, I observed how children had time to engage deeply in activities of their choice, often in collaboration with others. Carrie designed the day to allow extended periods of guided participation either with an adult, with peers, or as intent participation, to facilitate the process for children to become more robust in their approach to activities. At key points in their play, when difficulties arose, I witnessed how children had the opportunity to persevere and to seek others to help them with their challenging situation. The curriculum was not delineated into separate subject areas and the teachers at Northmont informed me over lunch one day that they felt that this would lead to meaningful links in the children's learning thus allowing them to transfer their dispositions from one type of activity to another.

Shrey and Shamil, two children at Northmont, served as an example of how, through guided participation, learning dispositions were given the opportunity to be enhanced. They spent a whole morning working with saws, hammers, nails, paints and glue guns to make something that they told me was from a television show that they watched at home. They were so focused on their task and stayed this way throughout, even when things went awry, such as when Shrey's piece of wood that he had patiently and laboriously sawn was the wrong size. He realized he

had to start again and did so with a brief sigh and an increased sense of determination.

Photograph 17: Shrey and Shamil involved in their constructing.

Shrey and Shamil maintained a constant dialogue about what they were doing and offered advice to each other while they made and modified their constructions. Their level of involvement and concentration might not have been so great if they had not worked together or if they had been interrupted before completion. On another occasion, I saw them apply the same sense of collaboration, purpose and perseverance when they found a ladder in the store cupboard that they thought would help them to climb a tree in the outdoor play area, which showed me how their learning dispositions were not limited to one area and were thus possibly becoming more sophisticated.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, the process of guided participation also afforded children the opportunity to develop the robustness and sophistication of their learning dispositions. One of Jane's mantras was "joined-up thinking and learning" because she wanted the children to make meaningful links between learning experiences

and thus deepen and extend their learning dispositions. Although the days at Castleton were themed to one learning area a day, the activities encompassed many different cross-curricular skills which deliberately required the children to develop learning dispositions as well as acquire subject knowledge. In particular, I saw some evidence of how the children's ability to work as part of a team and recognize the qualities needed for good team work were evident in different tasks.

On one occasion, when working on a measuring task with Anne, a group of children were initially struggling to come to a consensus of opinion, mostly due to over-excitement and talking over each other. John reminded the group about the team games they had played in PE to help them resolve their dispute. This prompted Kevin to recall how they had decided that listening was really important and that it was required for this activity. From that point, the team became much more effective, demonstrating how, on this occasion, they could use their learning dispositions in a more challenging situation. The children also showed that they could use their learning dispositions in activities that were more formal in nature, such as the previously described episode of helping each other with spelling.

4.4.3 Analysis through a personal lens

Through participation in activities in which the learning dispositions were intended to develop in terms of robustness and sophistication, some of the children's attitudes towards learning changed through a process of participatory appropriation, examples of which are described below.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, learning stories were a documentation of how learning dispositions were developing for each child. New ones were added to each child's profile when the teachers noticed something of significance for a child, in terms of a new disposition, or one being displayed more robustly or sophisticatedly. While I was visiting, I saw several learning stories unfold and then documented. One such story was of Aryan and his first attendance at Bush Kindy. Aryan had been at kindergarten for many months, but the teachers found that he did not particularly

'take an interest' or 'become involved' in activities and they were still searching for strategies to help Aryan to develop these dispositions. Aryan's father would drop him off to kindergarten and several times he sat Aryan next to me with paper and a pen for Aryan to 'write like me' (I was often to be seen with my notebook and pen close by). Aryan did not stay long at his writing once his father had left and would usually wander without apparent aim for most of the session. The breakthrough for the teachers was how Aryan changed when he first went outside to Bush Kindy. He immediately picked up a torch and proceeded to explore, excitedly calling people over when he made a 'discovery' of an interesting 'bug'.

Photograph 18: Aryan exploring with a torch at Bush Kindy.

He kept at this activity, enthralled for most of the session, only stopping to participate in a game of hide and seek with some other children, which caused him to laugh with abandonment in a way not witnessed with him at kindergarten before.

In an attempt to elicit the same involvement once back at 'normal' kindergarten, Carrie immediately recorded and printed Aryan's learning story and agreed to display photographs of Aryan's involvement at Bush Kindy to see if he could transfer his newly displayed skills. At the next session, Aryan did not display the same involvement that he had shown at Bush Kindy, but having spent some time looking and smiling wistfully at the photographs of himself on the screen, he voluntarily joined in a game with Abdullah and Akash, and remained busy and content with this activity for quite some time. That day, when Aryan's father came to collect him, he was offered Aryan's profile to take home and was told about the recent change in his demeanour. Aryan's father was pleased but not surprised and talked about how much Aryan loves climbing trees and exploring outside.

Later, I discussed with Carrie the possibility that Aryan's expectation of kindergarten had not been the reality and that could have been why it took him longer than other children to involve himself in the way that Carrie required. In an ethnographic study describing the experiences of children from under-privileged and ethnic minority backgrounds as they started school, Brooker (2002) found that for some children, particularly those in her study from Bangladeshi families, there was discord between their family 'habitus' and that of the school. This made the transition to school difficult for many due to their expectations of the learning environment differing from the actual reality. Aryan's family were new immigrants to New Zealand from Pakistan and it is entirely possible that the family expectations for Aryan attending kindergarten were of more 'formal' learning activities, hence the tendency for Aryan's father to place him by me to do some writing. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, p. 127) have described those whose familial habitus is in concord with that of the institution as like being "a fish in water", not feeling the weight of the water and taking the synergy of the world around them for granted. Conversely, Aryan must have felt like a fish out of water, confused by the dissonance of his habitus and the expectations placed upon him at kindergarten. Carrie's desire for him to be an active participant who was interested and involved in everything was incomprehensible for him. Going to Bush Kindy was a turning point for Aryan because, as his father said, exploring outside was something that Aryan loved

doing, and finally he realized what was expected of him with the help of provocation from some photographs back at 'normal' kindergarten. He was able to transfer his new skills and his attitude had changed through the process of participatory appropriation. This point illustrates that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is not deterministic, and can be influenced by experiences beyond home and family. I shall return to this point in the final chapter.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, Callum had seemingly benefited from Jane's desire for children to be confident. When discussing the differences that Jane's practice had brought about, Anne told me how Callum's mother reported that he had hated school before Jane arrived and had no confidence, but that he now *"loved* school and was *thriving"*. In the space of a week, I personally witnessed Callum's confidence in a variety of situations which suggested that this disposition had become more sophisticated. A notable example occurred during a PE lesson when the children were working in groups to make up a new team game, with an agreed and tested set of rules. Callum automatically assumed leadership of his group, explaining to the other members how they should take turns to express their ideas and listen to one another.

Once his group had initially agreed the format and rules of their game, they decided to try it out and Callum exposed flaws and misconceptions about the game that others might not have noticed. This led to discussion about how they would rectify the problems they had encountered. Through participatory appropriation, not only had Callum gained confidence that he could apply in different situations, but he could also use this disposition to influence other children's learning.

Photograph 19: Callum's team trying out their game in PE. Callum stands at the back in black shorts and red t-shirt, watching and evaluating as Annie (on the left in pink t-shirt) tries out the game.

4.5 Analysis: What role does the sociocultural environment play in the development of learning dispositions?

From a Vygotskian viewpoint, it is through the experiences of early childhood that children begin to learn how to utilize psychological tools to promote higher mental functions. Vygotsky defined higher mental functions as voluntary cognitive capacities such as memory, attention and goal-directed thought (Vygotsky, 1978), which resonate with the concept of learning dispositions. Psychological tools are semiotic constructs, the main example being speech, with additional symbolic systems that are associated with the representation of speech, such as writing, maps, number systems, and drawings. As such, psychological tools are bound and contextualized in the culture in which they are acquired. Thus, the sociocultural environment of both settings was a vital component in the learning and development of the children as they acquired the psychological tools specific to the culture of their setting.

4.5.1 Analysis through a community lens

In both settings there were key events which served as useful indicators of the sociocultural environment. As explained previously, key events can be used in the process of describing and interpreting culture:

> In every social group, there will be key or focal events which can be used to analyse a culture. They provide a lens through which it can be viewed, and in many cases a metaphor for their way of life or social values (Robson, 2002, p.488).

Relationships with parents

The relationship between parents and the setting was the first key event that was illuminating. Bronfenbrenner discussed the transition that children make between the different environments of their lives, such as home and school, and highlighted the importance of supportive links between them. Of his many hypotheses, two relate directly to the transition to a school [or could equally be kindergarten] environment:

The development potential of a setting in a mesosystem is enhanced if the person's initial transition into that setting is not made alone (Hypothesis 27, 1979, p.211).

Upon entering a new setting, the person's development is enhanced to the extent that valid information, advice and experience relevant to one setting are made available, on a continuing basis, to the other (Hypothesis 42, 1979, p.217).

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, parents were greeted warmly as they arrived each day with their children. They did not have to leave straight away and many stayed for varying amounts of time: some just for a few minutes so that their child could show them something; some stayed to chat to one of the teachers or other parents; and occasionally some would stay for most of the session and help out with things like preparing 'morning tea'. Colin's mother, with her baby daughter, often stayed for the whole morning whilst I was visiting – she told me that she liked the company. At the end of the session, parents often arrived early, many of whom also helped with 'tidy-up time', a collaborative and highly-organized effort between parents, staff and children, and observed 'mat time'. The point was that parents, and indeed the many visitors who came to kindergarten – including myself, student teachers, visiting teachers, parents who were committee members, advisory and support staff, interpreters, children's relatives from overseas – were all accepted in the same relaxed and inclusive way. There was a sense of community cohesion, despite families coming from many different ethnic backgrounds, as demonstrated by the photographs on display of fund-raising events to which children and their whole families attended. This meant that parents and children had a sense of belonging which was extended to all visitors, including me; Gabby told me that the teachers would be "devastated" if visitors were not made to feel as if they belong. This sense of belonging helped with fulfilling Bronfenbrenner's two hypotheses for supportive links between home and kindergarten. Parents of children who were new to kindergarten were always requested to stay with their child to help them to "settle". The time afforded for this to occur in Carrie's words was, "As long as it takes."

Learning stories also reinforced the supportive links between home and kindergarten. One of the main reasons why several parents remained at kindergarten at the beginning of a session was related to learning stories. Either they would stay and look at their child's profile, collect the folder to take it home or return it back to kindergarten. During my visit, Akash and his family arrived at kindergarten with relatives from overseas to look at Akash's profile. These occasions would often involve parents chatting to one of the teachers about their child's latest learning story. Parents were keen to talk about similar home experiences and how much their child had enjoyed bringing the profile home; Aryan's father commented that Aryan had looked at his story about Bush Kindy so much that the rest of the family had not been given a chance to see it. Parents were encouraged to add their own learning stories to the profile to establish a two-way flow of information.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, the relationship between parents and staff was not as immediately apparent on a daily basis. This setting had a more 'school-type' environment in which staff were friendly and open with their interactions with parents but it was not a place in which they were encouraged to dwell once the school day commenced. Most mornings I witnessed a parent enter the classroom and approach Jane, Anne or Carol and they were welcomed warmly. Mostly the conversation would start with a quick message or query, for example, "Arthur's worried about his wobbly tooth!" or "Does Tina need her plimsolls tomorrow?" During my visit, the conversation also turned to a general discussion about the people in the local community and snippets of news about people and events they had in common. The vast majority of parents existed in a shared community in which the school was an integral part. Richard told me that most of the families "had known each other for years" and that those not living in Castleton came from surrounding villages (he told me that not every village had its own school anymore – a point that he regretted).

This cohesive nature of the local community would be beneficial to children in their transition from home to school. Parents of new children to Jane's class did not stay with their children until they had settled, although a teaching assistant in a different class told me that parents could stay with their children in the nursery class. However, there were so many people in the school that were already known to the children. Several of them told me about their siblings, cousins, friends and neighbours in the school, and many of the staff's children also attended the school.

There were many different ways that Jane and the rest of the staff involved the parents in school life as a means of facilitating a two-way flow of information. When she first arrived, Jane told me that she had spent time formally and informally talking to parents about the Foundation Phase and the impact on their child's experiences at school (due to the phased 'roll-out' the Foundation Phase had not been introduced to Years 1 and 2 at Castleton before Jane arrived). Richard informed me that he understood that parents were happy with the Foundation Phase. Early anxieties about perceived "lack of reading and writing" had been allayed and parents had told him how they had seen changes in their children that they found pleasing, such as confidence, articulation and motivation. Jane told me that she had made an effort to ensure that parents knew that they could talk to her informally at any time about their children as well as the school's formal systems of communicating to parents through reports and parents' meetings. In the staff room at break times, I frequently heard messages being conveyed for a teacher to telephone a parent, or teachers discussing how they were going to telephone or talk to a parent about an event or query relating to their child. All of this was done in a positive manner and Jane told me that she felt it was important to "keep in contact" with parents.

Key events

There were also events that occurred during the working day of both settings that provided an insight into their community values. Two key events at Northmont were 'morning tea' and 'mat time'. At Castleton, registration and assembly were key events in which to view the class and school culture.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

'Morning tea' at Northmont was a way for the children to have a snack and drink to last them in between breakfast and lunch (these meals were taken at home). True to the philosophy at kindergarten, Carrie did not want to interrupt the children by imposing a designated snack time. Instead, morning tea was available for most of the session so that children could choose if and when they felt like participating.

Photograph 20: Poppy, Marie and Sam making their toast for morning tea.

Their independence was demonstrated as they toasted their own bread and poured their own drinks. The children often chose to eat in groups and sat around a large table. This was a time for chat and their conversations would be about a variety of topics from what they had been doing that day to news about their home life. Humour was also apparent during these times and the children took great pleasure in amusing each other (and me – I often chose to have morning tea with them).

Morning tea was an illustration of the collective and community atmosphere at Northmont.

Photograph 21: A large group of children sharing morning tea.

A further example was 'mat time' which took place for the last quarter of an hour of every session and was the only time when everyone congregated together. Several parents would arrive for mat time to observe proceedings. Sometimes the children would sing songs, usually with vigorous actions that made them laugh and bond with their friends. Often particular children would be invited to share their work with the rest of the group. Sometimes photographs of today's or yesterday's activities would be shown to validate and provoke the children's learning dispositions. Another use of mat time was to say goodbye to children who were just turning five and would be leaving kindergarten to attend school. Families of these children were invited and they would bring a birthday cake to share with the other children. Mat time was an event in which all members of the community – parents, staff and children – could be present and was a time in which they could collectively celebrate and promote the values of their community.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, key events during the day illustrated how the children operated as a cohesive 'family' unit. The day began with registration when the children gathered together and sat on the carpeted area at the front of the classroom. Much of registration time took place in Welsh: responses to the register, collecting lunch or fruit money, requesting orders from the lunch menu and talking about the day's date and weather. At this time, and at other times during the week when I saw the children involved in Welsh activities, the children seemed proud of their Welsh heritage; it was something that they all had in common. One morning, Kevin brought an information leaflet about some of the Welsh castles that the children had been talking about. This prompted Gemma to turn to me and proudly announce that there are lots of beautiful castles in Wales. Another purpose of registration time was 'news time' in which children like Kevin could talk to the rest of the class about something happening in their home life or somewhere they had been. Whilst an individual was talking, the other children listened attentively and several asked questions. During Friday's registration, the children's task was to nominate a 'star of the week' who would be congratulated in assembly. In order to select the star of the week for their class, the children themselves made suggestions as to who had shown qualities to be admired and rewarded that week. They discussed people like Siobhan who they felt had listened well and Jess who had been perseverant. After a vote, they had eventually settled on Trevor who was chosen because he had played with Catherine when she was on her own and given up his beloved football to do so. Catherine described how they had played 'it' and he had not even moaned when it was his turn to be 'it'. This discussion made me see how this group of children had a communal spirit in which they recognized each other's needs and values.

Assembly took place every day after registration – except on Friday when it occurred in the afternoon so that announcing the stars for that week was the last event before the children went home for the weekend. Assembly was an opportunity for all classes and staff to get together and the content of assembly often promoted Welsh identity and heritage. It is an explicit aim of the Foundation

Phase to develop "children's understanding of the cultural identity unique to Wales" (Wales. Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a, p.12). This aim was achieved in a straight-forward manner at Castleton because all of the children were from Welsh families, although it is also an aim of the Foundation Phase to "enable children to become increasingly aware of, and appreciate the value of, the diversity of cultures and languages that exist in a multicultural Wales" (*ibid.*, p.15) in recognition that not all schools contain a homogenous culture like at Castleton.

On my last afternoon at Castleton, I witnessed an event that epitomized how the children operate as a family unit with empathy for each other. Carol organized an Easter egg hunt in which the children's task was to find five eggs each and all of the eggs had been hidden outside.

Photograph 22: Catherine (on the left) helping Summer to find Easter eggs.

Whilst the children collected their eggs individually, they looked out for each other and automatically helped others to ensure that everyone found five each. I saw children give one of the eggs they had found to other children, as in the case of Ian who gave Tina his fourth egg because he told me that she still only had two, and I watched how they all relinquished their playtime to ensure that everyone found

five each. This did not appear to be at anyone's explicit suggestion; it seemed to occur tacitly and spontaneously. Carys explained to me why she felt this was necessary: "Well, I feel so bad for John and Megan because they only have two and everyone else has five."

4.5.2 Analysis through an interpersonal lens

The sociocultural environment of both settings defined learning and knowledge construction as a collaborative process through interactions between individuals. In social interactions between children and their peers, and between children and adults, communication is vital. Language was considered by Vygotsky (1978) as the primary psychological tool that mediates higher mental functions as a precursor to cognitive thought. The settings were structured to facilitate the use of speech, through guided participation, as the children worked collaboratively on a variety of tasks. The use of psychological tools in both settings facilitated higher mental functions in the children and this was visible through their use of speech when working collaboratively. Frequently, children could be heard to mediate each other's learning with the use of oral language as I shall now describe.

Northmont Kindergarten, New Zealand

At Northmont, several examples of the children at play served as illustrations for speech being a mediator. At times, it encompassed a large group of children such as when an imaginative game, originally conceived by Abdullah, involved children acquiring a character with costumes, face paints or masks. They spent three successive days in the planning stages of this game, constantly talking as a whole group, and in smaller groups of twos or threes, about who would assume which role and what costumes to wear. They spent time researching characters on the internet, with the help of Gabby's laptop. Their excitement and interest for this game, expressed through language and actions, was palpable and inspired other children to join their game or devise a similar one of their own.

Photograph 23: A group of children discussing their imaginary game mediated by Gabby (in the large witch's hat on the left).

At other times, children working in pairs provided useful examples of language acting as a mediator, such as when Levi was building a tower with blocks. He was experimenting with different structures and layouts, testing the strength as he progressed, with Yasir watching him at work. I knew from discussions with Carrie that Yasir was a child who apparently did not always show as deep a level of involvement in tasks as other children. Levi persuaded Yasir to help him and Yasir willingly cooperated at first, but after a few minutes he started to lose interest. Having found a partner that made his task more manageable, Levi was not willing to let him go so soon and kept up a constant chatter to keep Yasir engaged: "What should we do next? It's your turn now. Here or here? Just five more minutes. How much higher? Come on, Yasir, let's get it finished so I can show my mum." Yasir remained involved in the activity, as a result of Levi's relentless perseverance and the fact that Levi kept talking to him; and crucially, Levi was expecting a response back. Levi had managed to mediate Yasir's learning through the psychological tool of spoken language. He was helping Yasir to self-regulate and it was possible that this deliberate act of keeping Yasir focused had the reciprocal effect of keeping Levi

himself on task longer than he might have done on his own. Lisa documented their experience as a learning story to record their collaborative project. She wrote about the learning disposition of 'being involved', which is analogous to Vygotsky's description of voluntary attention, a higher mental function, because they demonstrated that they could maintain attention for a sustained period, albeit through peer mediation. Lisa added to her account the following day because Levi and Yasir arrived and recommenced their building, this time experimenting with different sized blocks with Yasir now an equally motivated partner in the activity. Through an interpersonal lens, Yasir's learning dispositions had been mediated by Levi and through a personal lens, Yasir had potentially changed through his participation in a peer-mediated activity.

Photograph 24: Levi (on the right) building a tower with Yasir.

Castleton School, Wales

At Castleton, the cooperative atmosphere of the class meant that children were accustomed to and adept at working collectively, and could communicate effectively with each other. Above all, the children showed a great sense of awareness of how they relied on each other and the importance of partnership.

John encapsulated the children's attitude to the collaborative nature of their learning during a circle time activity when the children were asked by Carol why they needed friends. John answered, "If you were training to be a knight and you had no friends you would have no one to teach you how to be a knight." This response prompted much agreement from the other children confirming how they accepted the role of their friends in the learning process.

The children also demonstrated practically how their higher mental functions were influenced through communication and collaboration. When working to solve Jane's puzzle about the shortest pathway for a knight to reach a castle, a group of children cooperated with each other and talked through their problems and possible strategies so that they eventually found a way to solve the dilemma of how to measure the distance of a 'wiggly' line. Their ability to persist in the face of difficulty was enhanced by the joint effort of trying, testing and modifying different ideas. Josh suggested "lots of smaller rulers" instead of metre rulers as a means of measuring their line. When this plan was discussed but subsequently abandoned, Kelly suggested "something elastic that will bend round corners". This idea was tried and in the process Miriam had a brainwave of using skipping ropes that would "mould around the bends", which was the method they eventually employed.

Their problem-solving abilities were mediated by a process of joint thought and action in which the children extended and modified each other's ideas. They were working at the upper limits of their zones of proximal development with shared language facilitating their thought processes. Their cognitive development was mediated through language within the process of guided participation. In addition, on the personal plane, each participant in this activity potentially changed through their experience, as practically demonstrated by Olwen who was heard later on in the week to express to Kelly, "We need to do like we did with the ropes and think about this together."

Photograph 25: A group of children mediating each other's problem solving. Lena (on the right) and Miriam (in grey coat) are holding smaller rulers, at Josh's (in red coat) suggestion.

4.5.3 Analysis through a personal lens

As well as providing opportunities for language to mediate the children's cognitive development, the sociocultural environment also appeared to help define and influence the children's identity. I refer to identity as an individual's perception of who they are, not in a way that distances themselves from others, but in a way that situates them within a sociocultural environment with shared values, assumptions and purposes. Wenger (1998, p.151) describes this situated view of identity as:

> ...a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections.

Wenger (2000) identified some crucial qualities that are prerequisites for a strong identity. The first of these is *connectedness* which involves deep connections and social relationships through shared experiences so that identity becomes "a lived

experience of belonging (or not belonging)" (*ibid.* p. 239) rather than an abstract concept. Secondly, Wenger described *effectiveness* in which an individual's engagement in a group leads to socially-recognized competencies so that identity becomes "socially empowering rather than marginalizing" (*ibid.* p. 239). The third quality that Wenger defined was *expansiveness* in which identity develops in breadth and scope through multi-membership in a variety of contexts. Through my observations at Northmont and Castleton, I discerned examples of children's identity being potentially formed and developed through their connection to their sociocultural environment and how their collective experiences were contributing to the perception of their efficacy, and a discussion of these is included below. Expansiveness, Wenger's third aspect of identity, will not be considered in relation to my observations because I only had the opportunity to observe the children in one feature of their lives, kindergarten or school. Although there is scope within a kindergarten or school environment to form connections with a range of people in a variety of contexts, the children's identity as a member of their kindergarten or school could be conceived as one community of practice, and their possible membership of others was unknown to me.

Identity - connectedness

I have already described how at each setting there were communal activities that served to bind the members of each community together at the same time as recognizing the individuals contained within. I could see how this contributed to a sense of belonging to the community, an attachment to other members of the group, and this was the teachers' desired outcome. Children in both settings demonstrated their connectedness to their peers, such as Shamil and Shrey at Northmont who noticed that a younger boy, Kallen, was apparently drifting without activity or friend and he was invited to join their game; or John at Castleton with his comment to Carol that you needed friends to help you to learn. The adults in both settings also contributed towards the children's sense of belonging. I could see that they created nurturing relationships with the children and tried to recognize their individual qualities. Families were involved in these relationships with the intent of enhancing the connectivity between home and school/kindergarten. All children at

Northmont had their own learning story profile which I could see was reification of their status as a member of the community, as catalogued by their teachers who noticed, valued and recorded their perceptions of the changes and developments in the children's identities. At Castleton, one of the ways I witnessed that the children's belonging was reified was by work being displayed on the wall as an inclusive and public recognition of achievement and contribution.

Identity – effectiveness

The sociocultural environment in both settings was contributing to children viewing themselves as capable and confident, competencies that were recognized and valued in their communities. I could see how the focus on play enabled children to be active agents in the 'here and now' of their childhood. The teachers regarded the children as co-constructors of knowledge, not solely reliant on transmission from an adult because they wanted the children to view themselves as capable and confident learners. There were several examples of children voluntarily wanting to show or tell me about their capabilities. At Northmont, many of the children were keen to share their profiles with me and they particularly enjoyed the chronology of starting with photographs of their first day and browsing through their 'journey' through kindergarten. A common conversation at these times was pointing out to me proficiencies that they did not have before. Carys reminisced over a learning story about her trying to swing on the monkey bars. She thought it was amusing that she fell off at first. When I indicated to the photograph showing her success on conquering the monkey bars she told me, "But then I got back on again and again until I could do it!" Carys was just one example of how the children at Northmont were not only aware of their capabilities but also believed that qualities like persistence were responsible for their personal progress. Children at Castleton who conversed with me had a similar view of their abilities. I have already discussed how I observed confidence in children like Tina and Callum. Children also knew about persevering in order to improve their abilities. Amanda informed me that she did not like writing because she felt that she wrote too slowly so I expressed admiration and mock surprise when I saw her voluntarily writing in the castle role play area.

Her response was that she had to practise writing otherwise she would never get any better.

Photograph 26: Amanda voluntarily practising her writing during a time of 'free choice'.

Jane promoted self and peer review of learning tasks for the very purpose of empowering the children to view themselves as capable. She used a 'three stars and a wish' system in which children were asked to identify three achievements and one target for their work, sometimes individually and often in collaboration. Through talking to the children at Castleton about their work, I found that they could articulate their strengths and were aware of what they could do to improve. Children at both settings, therefore, demonstrated to me that they knew what their capabilities were, in the 'being' sense, which is foregrounded, but they also knew what they could 'become'.

The children's developing concept of their efficacy was also apparent through examples of their independence, or their ability to be autonomous in the learning process. In completing tasks independently of adults, the children were being given the opportunity to view themselves as capable and effective members of the

community. The child-led curriculum at Northmont meant that the children had autonomy in choosing their activities, deciding their collaborative partners and the length of time spent on each task. The store areas were always open so that the children could access any resources they needed, for example Rhys replenishing the supply of wood offcuts for the glue gun area, and Colin and Jake carrying a crash mat outside so that they could leap off the climbing frame.

Photograph 27: Colin and Jake taking a crash mat outside so that they could play a game involving leaping off the climbing frame.

Marie, Gabby's daughter, encapsulated the autonomy afforded at Northmont by calling it a "can-do-kindy". She was in a position to make a comparison to a day-care centre that she attended in the afternoons while her mother remained at work. Marie told me that at day-care they always say, "Don't do that!" Without knowing the situation in her other setting, I appreciated her view on Northmont: within reason the children were allowed to do any activity of their choosing, with

the exception of not leaving the premises and not causing anyone else any harm. Even this latter exception was permitted if children were *willing* participants in a game that involved rough play.

At Castleton the children did not have the same level of autonomy in always selecting their own activities but Jane explained that they were involved in shaping the topic for each term and I observed that they had periods each day which were 'free-choice'. However, during all activities that I observed the children were independent in their approach and knew where to access resources that they might need. Andrew, when working on a drawing on the computer, collected a laminated vocabulary sheet about castles from the role play area so that he could label his drawing correctly. Jane told me that she promoted the children's independence in this way so that they did not rely on her, thus enhancing their capability and autonomy and influencing the effectiveness of their identity.

The examples provided in this chapter serve as reminders that the practitioners at Northmont and Castleton wanted the children to view themselves as capable and confident individuals who were connected to each other. I have demonstrated that in a sociocultural curriculum learning is a collaborative task and participants take responsibility not just for their own learning but also for the learning of other members of the community. The following section is concerned with being reflexive about my data collection and analysis, with consideration for how my presence might have influenced these processes.

4.6 Reflections on my experience 'in the field'

> We must consider and make explicit the benefits and disadvantages our own positions engender. (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998, p.119)

Although this quote specifically refers to the use of photography, such a reflexive stance is apt for the whole process of fieldwork. The following reflexive account is aimed at explicitly stating my position within the research and considers the advantages and disadvantages of my multiple identities.

4.6.1 My identity with the children

In both settings, I was introduced to the children as a teacher from England who had come to "see how we do things here". I made a conscious effort to be a 'practitioner' with the children as much as possible so that they could understand my identity. They were used to their own teachers fulfilling the dual role of observing and participating and I wanted them to view me in a similar way. I made an effort to learn their names quickly and interact with them personally to try to make them feel relaxed in my presence. I think that this worked for many children and there were certainly those who approached me in the way I had seen them approach their own teachers. For example, at Northmont, Yasir came to me for reassurance when he hurt his finger, and Daisy, a child who I noticed did not interact with anyone very much, brought a 'remote control' that she had made to show me. Similarly, at Castleton, Amanda was keen to show me things she had done and Summer asked for my assistance in the same way I saw her ask Jane, Anne or Carol.

Despite my attempts to interact and forge relationships with the children, I was aware that some children were more confident in my presence than others. Rhys at Northmont and Amanda at Castleton had appointed themselves as my adopted 'friend and guide' but not all children were as comfortable in my presence. Ian, a shy child at Castleton, was dumbfounded when I addressed him by name on the second morning, and looked so embarrassed in my presence that I tried to stay away from him so as not to cause him distress. Matthew and Moses, two self-

contained boys at Northmont, initiated a conversation with me for the first time on my penultimate day, having shown apparent indifference towards me before this time. I could not help but wonder how children like these might have behaved if we had had more time to build a relationship.

I queried the teachers at both settings as to whether the children were behaving 'as usual' in my presence. Jane felt that on the first day some of the children at Castleton had 'shown off' a little, as demonstrated by what she perceived as 'loud' behaviour in the castle role play area, but she expressed that apart from that, the children were pretty much the same as they usually were. At Northmont, the teachers were emphatic that the children were so used to visitors that my presence did not "faze" them. However, over lunch one day, they also reported that my interactions with the children and obvious interest in what they were doing meant that I was gaining a "real" insight into their play as opposed to some visitors who "sat back too much" meaning that the children did not open up to them. This was an obvious sign that I was influencing the way that children were going about their daily business but Lisa reassured me that she felt that this was positive and that I would thus gain more from my experience through my interactions with the children.

These comments made me more aware of my reactivity and I tried to ensure that my interactions with the children were similar to the way in which the other teachers related to them. I was aware of the fact that I wanted to enter into a relationship with the children because my data would be generated from such interactions (Lather, 1991) but I also had to ensure that I was simultaneously "stepping out of the research" (Powdermaker, 1996) in order to validate the data that emerged from my participation in the field. This was particularly the case at Northmont where I spent longer with the children than at Castleton. At Northmont, there were certain children who loved to sit with me whilst I observed and, although I had learned about the value of 'watching' or intent participation, I did not want to encourage the children to mimic my behaviour. I made sure that I moved around at these times and tried not to let children trail behind me. There were also certain children, like Kinah, who would have gladly sat on my lap for large

parts of the day. I had seen her do the same with Asha and, although I was happy that Kinah felt comfortable with me, I tried not to encourage her to sit on my lap for more than a few minutes. I also tried to ensure that I gave the same advice when children came to me with a dilemma. For example, I had often seen Travis approach Carrie when he had a social issue that he needed to resolve. "Use your words, Travis," was Carrie's response to encourage him to communicate to his friends what he was feeling. I was able to offer the same response when Travis came to me with a similar problem.

4.6.2 My identity as a photographer

One of the ways which also enabled the children to view me as a practitioner was my camera. Prior to my visits, I knew that the practitioners in both settings used cameras widely. Jane's practice of keeping her camera within arm's reach I had already seen when I visited her previous school. I had also read about Northmont's use of ICT through their Centre of Innovation Project (Ramsay, 2006) and how the practitioners took photographs and videos for learning stories. Although I was new to the children in both settings, they were accustomed to adults carrying a camera on their person and taking many photographs during the day. Pink (2007, p.48) warned about "procedural reactivity" in which having a camera can make a researcher more visible and can impinge on relationships. However, I found that my camera was an advantage in making me visible so that the children recognized my identity. I found that there were times when my camera enhanced relationships, and children in both settings asked me to take photographs of them, particularly when they felt that they had achieved something notable and worth recording. I happily obliged at these times and took this as sign of negotiated trust between us. I had not originally planned on taking posed images that Scott (1990) would term 'idealized' but these poses were not at my request and the children arranged themselves at these times to positions and with backgrounds of their choosing.

In my use of photographs, I quickly came to realize that I was not comfortable using the telephoto lens capacity of my camera. Ironically, I had bought the camera for this very function to enable me to zoom in on 'natural' events without being too

conspicuous. However, I found that this made me feel 'voyeuristic' in the covert way that these photographs were taken and it also did not enable me to read non-verbal signals from the children as to whether they were comfortable being observed and photographed. It was a practice that I abandoned so that the children were more aware of my presence when I was taking photographs. Although I had parental consent to photograph the children, it felt more consensual to avoid the use of a telephoto lens.
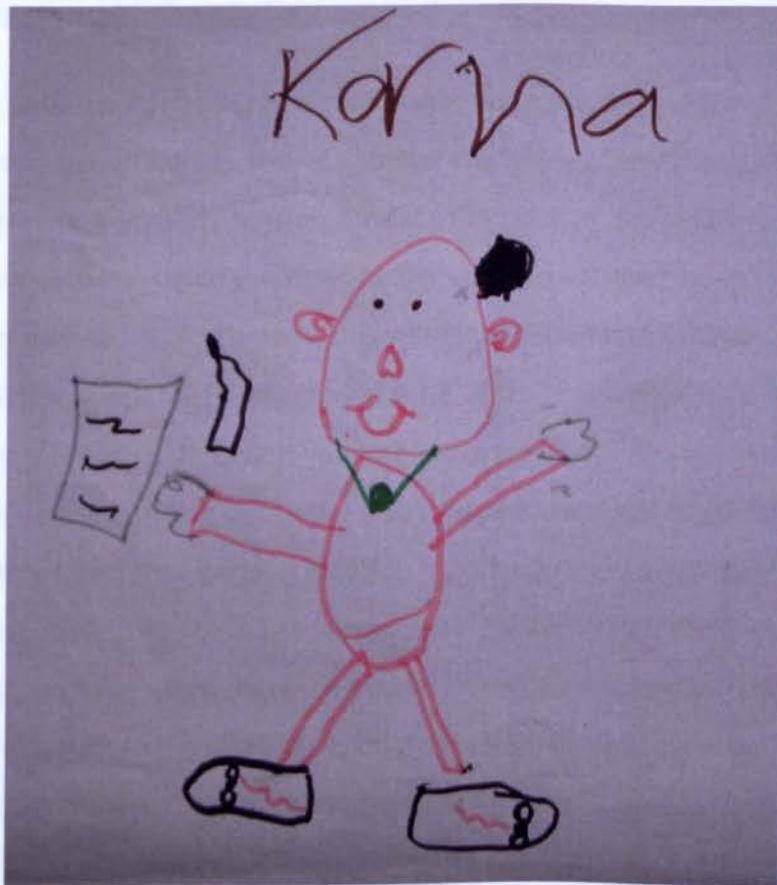

Figure 3: Poppy's drawing of me.

In my last week at Northmont, Poppy drew a picture of me as a present because she knew I would be leaving soon (see Figure 3). I was fascinated by the detail that she included in her drawing and what it said about her view of my identity: she drew me with my hair in a bun, which is my usual hair style when at work; she drew my black trainers, which I wore daily at Northmont; and she drew my greenstone necklace [greenstone is a New Zealand type of jade] which I had bought when I first arrived in New Zealand and I also wore daily at Northmont. However, I was

intrigued that she had not included my camera which was actually a permanent feature on a strap around my neck. It was interesting that Poppy picked up on small details of my attire but left out my camera, possibly because her own teachers constantly used cameras. Although Pole & Morrison (2003) advised that taking photographs can be obtrusive, Poppy's drawing, whilst representing the perception of one child, would suggest that my use of photography was not unsettling for the children and might even have enhanced my relationship with them.

4.6.3 My identity with the teachers

My identity with the adults in the research was not quite so straight forward to establish. We were all female and of a similar age but my position as a researcher from England was a possible tension. Despite reassurance that I was not there to 'judge' their practice, I could see that teachers in both settings were not always easy in my presence. At Northmont, this was exemplified when Gabby spoke sternly to some children for not listening at 'mat time' and she apologized to me after the event, saying, "I really didn't want you to have to see that." She was not referring to the children's poor listening but to the way that she reacted to their behaviour. I attempted to explain that the way in which misdemeanours were handled was of great interest to me, but she was adamant that she did not want me to hear her "cross voice" as though somehow she had let herself down. At Castleton, Jane also was keen to present to me what she thought I would want to observe. "Are you seeing what you wanted to see?" she asked me frequently despite my claim that I wanted to see what she would do in a 'normal' week and I did not want her to feel the need to do anything differently. She was not entirely convinced that her 'normal' practice was note-worthy for my research. This led me to deduce that the adults in both settings were possibly not always acting as 'normal' and were presenting their 'best behaviour' for my benefit. Wolcott (2008) discussed how this is somewhat inevitable and that it can also be useful as people on their best behaviour enact roles in what they perceive to be ideal types:

> Witnessing such behavior [sic] can be extremely valuable ... in teasing out beliefs about how people *should* act and the inevitable tension between

what people feel they *ought* to do or *ought* to say, and what they do say in fact. (p. 49, original emphasis)

In both settings, I knew that I was inevitably viewed by the teachers as a 'researcher' and that from their point of view the power balance was tipped in my favour. In order to counter this perception, I adopted two overt positions. Firstly, I emphasized my role as a practitioner so that they could try to see me as an equal. I spoke about similar experiences to theirs, empathized with their concerns, and actively encouraged their questions about my practice. In doing so, I was aiming for our dialogue to be "conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher" (Lather, 1991, p. 60-61). As argued in section 3.2.1, emotional engagement and attachment with research participants is a necessary part of gathering quality data in an intrepretivist study.

Secondly, I made it very clear that I was a 'learner' in their environment by asking questions and for clarification so that they could gain a sense of expertise in the relationship. In this respect, I emphasized the fact that although I was 'researching', my aim was to learn from them in order to improve my practice. This was also to establish a dialogic relationship, one in which the teacher-learner roles were reversed, in a way that Freire (1970) has described as "problem-posing education". I hoped that this would lead to the co-construction of knowledge through deliberate dialogue with the teachers in a way that did not emphasize dominance of power.

My identities as a practitioner and learner were truthful accounts but the key was making them visible to the staff. One of the ways I did this was to try to be useful to them as much as possible. At Northmont, my visit coincided with a period of illness for Sandra, the teaching assistant, so I quickly adopted her role each morning in setting out the equipment and undertaking responsibilities of hers that I realized were not popular with the teachers, such as washing the paint pots and brushes. One role that was found for me at Northmont, which helped to build our relationship, was as an unofficial documenter of learning stories because of my extensive notes and photographs of the children. I was often asked if I had seen a particular episode and if so what I had seen and heard; this was the case for Lisa's learning story about Levi and Yasir's tower and for Carrie's learning story about

Kiera and Georgia's face painting, and I contributed some of the background story for both of these events and photographs for the latter. I was happy to fulfil this role in a way that has been described as "commodities for exchange" (Pink, 2007, p.48). I wanted to be able to 'give something useful' in exchange for what I was gaining. Several times, the teachers at Northmont expressed how much they were going to miss having me and the "fourth pair of hands" that I offered, as well as the many conversations that we had had about teaching and learning. I took this as a sign that we had developed a reciprocal relationship in which the power balance was not tipped in my favour.

At Castleton, I also made sure that I was useful at appropriate times such as when setting up and clearing away activities. My "commodity of exchange" for Jane ended up being one of moral support rather than the practical exchange that resulted at Northmont. Jane's move to a new school had proved more difficult than she had imagined and the micro-politics in her setting meant that she was feeling isolated in her implementation of the Foundation Phase. She had not fully anticipated the reluctance of some staff to embrace the Foundation Phase and had met with resistance in the face of her innovative practice. Jane was a 'fish out of water' because of the disjuncture between her habitus and that of the other teachers in the school. We spent long periods of time talking about our shared philosophy of education and she relished hearing about my visit to New Zealand. We talked about dominant discourses and how they might be disrupted. She expressed how much it had given her "a boost" to be able to talk to someone who understood her situation and I was willing, in a genuine way, to provide a sympathetic sounding board for her thoughts and frustrations. I hoped that during my visit, and in our correspondence afterwards, that I had helped her to feel more like a 'fish *in* water' or at the very least that we were struggling out of the water in union. Reay *et al.* (2001, paragraph 1.3) have claimed that an institutional habitus is capable of change but its collective nature makes it less flexible than an individual habitus. However, the *possibility* of change is a point that Jane and I discussed in relation to both of our working practices. I expressed my gratitude for meeting

someone with similar viewpoints and frustrations as my own, and I feel that this allowed us to develop a genuine dialogic relationship.

4.6.4 Balance of different forms of data

Whilst my presence in the field was limited to three weeks in Northmont and one week in Castleton, from this immersive experience I was able to generate four distinct data sets. Firstly, my field notes, which consisted of direct observations of the actions of the children and adults at the two settings; secondly, my notes relating to conversations between myself and the adults and children at the settings; thirdly, my photographs of activities directly related to events documented in my field notes and fourthly, photos of other of activities not recorded elsewhere.

Initial analysis of the photographs, which took place according to the same analytical framework as the written data, suggested that I had (consciously or unconsciously) prioritized the activities of the children, since the role of the adults in the settings was only visible in approximately one third of the photographs. In this sense it could be argued that my own bias had led to me taking more photographs of children than adults. My reaction when I first arrived at Northmont had been confusion as to the nature of the role of adults because there were no apparent teacher-led activities. My initial view was that children played with each other whilst the adults observed this process without much interaction. However, through on-going dialogue, reflection and analysis, I came to understand that the role of the adult as seen at Northmont and Castleton was more complex than initially meets the eye. For example, direct adult interaction was seen by the practitioners as merely one method of promoting development. It was a deliberate act of the adults to withdraw their presence in order to promote peer mediation and to provide provocation within the learning environment: practices very much valued in both settings. There was, therefore, a pedagogic interpretation to be made of the adults' (apparent) absence from so many of the photographs, and cross-checking my various data sets revealed the extent to which the adults trusted the practices of peer mediation and provocation, also their conviction that these

would impact positively on the children's learning dispositions. In both settings, I talked at length with the practitioners about their views that learning dispositions were considered to be more robust and sophisticated when they were transferred from an adult mediated activity to one mediated by a peer. The photographic data had revealed that peer mediation was more prominent than teacher mediation and my field notes assisted in the interpretation as to why this was the case.

When selecting which photographs to include in the thesis it was important to present this data set as it had emerged in the field, rather than according to a false aesthetic based on notions of 'balance'. This would undermine the sense of sociocultural theory in practice that emerged in the process of conducting the research. My aim was rather to give the reader an enhanced sense of 'being there' through the realization that the settings I visited did not include many direct teacher-child interactions and that, by design, the teachers wanted peer mediation to be a prominent means of development.

Another important point in producing a reliable account of my experience in the two settings and validating my claims to knowledge was the range of representational possibilities generated by my data sets. These included my observations in the field, the teachers' thoughts and perceptions gained from conversations and informal interviews and the photographs that linked to the other two forms of data. I have already discussed the interpretivist stance of this project and accept that my account is partial and just one of many possible interpretations. What I have endeavoured to do is to consider the entire range of data and demonstrate how these shaped my thoughts and ideas prior to selecting examples that I believe best illustrate the claims that I have made.

4.6.5 Remaining 'outside' the research

In both settings, it was very easy to feel 'at home' and at times it was difficult to remember my dual role as being an 'outsider' of the research as well as being a participant. At Castleton, Jane was rapidly becoming a friend rather than an 'informant' or 'research participant'. At Northmont, my three week visit meant that

I became quite attached to the children and teachers in a way that I did not expect. There were times when I became aware of the dangers of 'going native' such as during my second week when I had visited the local primary school and returned to kindergarten to tell Carrie, Lisa and Gabby that I had seen "our Jason" at school [Jason had turned five the previous week and had just left Northmont to start school]. The teachers immediately picked up on the way in which I had adopted their way of talking and revelled in how much they had taught me. For me, it became a reminder of how I needed to strive to remember that I was seeing the world through my eyes but that I was "somewhere else" (Arendt, 2006). In each setting, I focused on a key difference that acted as a reminder of this fact. At Northmont, I fixed on the tendency of children (and their parents) to have a preference for bare feet. Some of the children would do everything without shoes and socks, including Edward, who was bare-footed when he helped Travis climb his tree. At Castleton, I was glad of the daily Welsh language activities, which served to reinforce that I was not at home. I also found it useful to keep rereading my first day's field notes from Northmont, a time at which I felt very far from home and recorded most surprise at what I had observed. This helped me to recapture the emotions of seeing and experiencing something new and assisted the interpretation of later experiences with a fresh perspective.

As well as remembering my identity outside of the research, it was also important to reflect on how much my value-laden position as a practitioner influenced the way in which I viewed and interpreted the settings that I visited. Whilst it was beneficial to remember the moment of surprise when I witnessed something that was in direct contrast to my own practice, I also needed to ensure that I considered and questioned all events, not just those which seemed to have the greatest contrast to my own practice. Northmont's lack of registration was a surprise to me, due to my own experiences of being involved in daily registration, and led me to reflect as to what this said about their system of beliefs. At the same time, registration at Castleton, whilst a familiar experience to me, needed the same level of analysis and interpretation about its significance. In this way, I hoped to prevent

my values and experiences leading to misrepresentation of the culture that I was trying to understand. In the words of Lather (1991, p.62):

> The search is for theory which grows out of context-embedded data, not in a way that automatically rejects a priori theory, but in a way that keeps preconceptions from distorting the logic of evidence.

Having been through a process of examining my position as a researcher imbricated with my data, it is hoped that my reflections will help to contextualize the analysis of what I observed and experienced at Northmont and Castleton, in a way that leads to a reliable and trustworthy interpretation for the audience. I have produced a 'thick description' of both settings by constructing an account of the unfamiliar practices.

4.7 Concluding comments for description and analysis

In this chapter, I have presented my findings, based on my time in the field, with an acknowledgement that I have provided a 'snapshot' of practice that makes my findings tentative. I have used three planes of sociocultural analysis to describe how the habitus of the settings studied and the practice of their staff has brought about *enculturation*, a term that Lubeck (1985, p.50) described as not only the means by which an individual becomes part of the group but also the means by which the values of a group are reproduced and perpetuated. In relation to the first research question, which aimed to uncover how learning dispositions were intentionally promoted, the data revealed that children in the two settings acquired contextually-defined learning dispositions through the process of enculturation, and through adult and peer mediation. The second research question aimed to examine how individual children changed through their involvement and how their learning dispositions developed in terms of robustness and sophistication. Extended learning periods, the use of provocation, and the quantity of children's interactions were identified as possible determinants in the development of learning dispositions. The third research question related to how the sociocultural environment influenced the children's learning dispositions. It was suggested that

the distinct habitus of both settings was contributing to children developing positive learner identities as connected to each other and their environment, with independence and belief in their capabilities as learners. The final section of this chapter served to provide a reflexive account of my experience in the field in order to be transparent about my multiple identities in the research process.

The data collected from the settings have been represented in this chapter so that readers can have an insight into the practices of a sociocultural curriculum. What follows is an evaluation of some of the dilemmas arising from the data and critical engagement with the findings of my research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will summarize the conclusions that can be drawn from this study, which aimed to render meaning, to make familiar, the practices of the settings that I visited in New Zealand and Wales. The purpose for this chapter is to reflect critically on the data with explicit reference to my own practice. In the first section, I problematize some of the dilemmas and themes that have emerged from the research in order to provide a critical context for potential policy borrowing. The second section contains a description of how the research has influenced my practice and that of my colleagues at school. There is also an outline of additional aspects arising from the data that I would like to explore and which could be areas for further research. The third section examines how my work could have impact beyond my own school through advocacy, particularly other schools within the independent sector. The final section of this chapter summarizes what I have achieved with my study in relation to my aims.

5.1 Critical discussion of themes arising from the research

In Wales, Jane's position as a pilot teacher had afforded her the time to engage deeply with the philosophy of learning through play that is promoted in the Foundation Phase. However, not all teachers and schools in Wales were part of the pilot programme and Jane raised her concerns about the issue of teacher education in relation to the play-based learning of Foundation Phase compared to the more formal pedagogies of the previous curriculum. Jane's experience of implementing the Foundation Phase in two schools in Wales was that some teachers found it very difficult to relinquish their deeply-held views and pedagogies, and exchange them for different styles of teaching and learning. This was also apparent in my interactions with other staff at Castleton and I was aware of an undercurrent of concern about how Jane's practice might not be positive for the pupils, particularly in their transfer to the formal curriculum of Year 3. Jane explained that she had encountered many teachers' views that the Foundation Phase would hinder children's achievement later in school due to the focus on learning through play.

She felt that this view was unfounded on the basis that the Foundation Phase had not yet been fully implemented within Wales, with the exception of the pilot schools. She did not think that such judgements could be made until a larger cohort of children could be 'tracked' from the Foundation Stage and through their later school career. Jane was not alone in this experience of negative perception of the Foundation Phase and there are other settings in Wales in which the practitioners are unconvinced about its educational value (Estyn, 2011). This is an issue not just for policy makers and practitioners in Wales but also for anyone who is considering how the experience of the Foundation Phase might influence their practice. Whilst reviewing the Foundation Phase during its early stages of piloting was admirable, further evaluation would be beneficial, particularly now that the phased implementation process is complete, to explore the extent and impact of its play-based approach and how this might affect children's transition to formal learning.

Similar to Wales, it has been suggested that teachers in New Zealand have had difficulty in adapting to the different sociocultural pedagogy of Te Whāriki (Anning, 2009). Carrie informed me that some teachers who have visited Northmont as part of their professional development have been dismissive of her practice, in particular the perceived lack of 'taught' subject knowledge. It has been reported that there are no prescribed guidelines for teachers relating to subject knowledge in Te Whāriki (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Blaiklock, 2010). From my value-laden position of teaching within the clearly-defined subject domains of EYFS, there were times when it was hard to relinquish the feelings of surprise when the practitioners at Northmont apparently missed opportunities to develop children's subject knowledge, for example counting or writing names. However, as Carrie explained to me, subject knowledge is not ignored entirely in her approach but that, in her opinion, the process of responding to children's interests creates knowledge construction that is more meaningful than factual information unrelated to the task in hand. She spoke about her involvement in Colin's catapult construction as an example and how she had utilised her laptop to review different types and uses of catapult with him to enrich his knowledge base in a way that was meaningful to his current situation.

Other writers (Carr, 2001; Hedges & Cullen, 2005) have commented on the importance of *meaningful* knowledge construction within Te Whāriki in which knowledge construction is relevant to the children's current situation rather than as part of an adult's agenda. However, Alvestad, Duncan & Berge (2009) have highlighted the potential tension for teachers in responding to the children's interests rather than acting upon their own professional judgement for the skills and content knowledge that they wished children to explore and develop. I have found that this tension arises partly due to the perceived negative political views of 'child-centred' education (Alexander, Rose & Woodhead, 1992), in which the child leads the curriculum, and the neo-liberal policy agenda of a more 'rigorous' outcomes-based curriculum. The false dichotomy of the child 'discovering' knowledge alone, versus teachers transmitting knowledge didactically, implies a degree of passivity on behalf of either the teacher or learner. A sociocultural curriculum represents an alternative paradigm of knowledge construction, one in which there is reciprocal learning, with both teacher and learner as active participants in the process. As Rogoff (1994) explains, the sociocultural model of learning thus supersedes the pendulum swing from child-centred to didactic approaches. The adult can be conceived as a mediator rather than a facilitator or controller of learning. The process of mediation that could be outwardly regarded as laissez faire is actually highly strategic, with adults fully aware of their role in working dialogically with children to create knowledge in meaningful and relevant contexts.

The examples of teacher's views about a play-based curriculum in Wales and the role of subject knowledge in New Zealand serve to highlight the importance of initial teacher education and continued practice-based professional learning. These processes can widen the discourse about pedagogical approaches so that the philosophical underpinnings of the Foundation Phase and Te Whāriki can be established in practice. The teachers in both settings were aware that their practice was considered to be innovative and that this was not always received positively. It had led all concerned to have periods of unease about their 'otherness'. However, it did not prevent them from wanting to work collaboratively with other teachers to

bring about reflection and change, despite difficulties they had encountered in challenging people's beliefs and deeply-held pedagogies.

There were other dilemmas and contradictions arising from my research that relate to my professional practice. For example, the attitude towards risk in both settings was considerably more relaxed than my experience to date. At Northmont, children used 'real' saws, hammers and hot glue guns, and scaled high trees without any direct supervision. At Castleton, the children were permitted to move freely between the indoor and outdoor learning areas, and, when outside, often travelled substantial distances, their location unknown to the adults. I could not help but be surprised at the trust afforded to the children and the potential risk to their safety. The view of the adults in both settings was that risk taking is vital to the learning process and that children cannot effectively acquire and develop this skill whilst being directly supervised.

In addition to my concern about personal safety, the predominance of children playing without adult interaction seemed to contradict the sociocultural premise of teacher mediation. This led to a deep level of observation, reflection and discussion with the staff at both Castleton and Northmont to understand the nuances of teacher mediation. I came to an interpretation that teacher mediation is a more complex pedagogy than that which is obviously visible and requires skill and reflection on behalf of the practitioner. In both settings the adults believed that their role also involved intentional 'absence' in order to promote children's ability to regulate each other's and their own learning. During these times, the practitioners trusted the processes of peer mediation and provocation, both forms of guided participation (Rogoff, 2008). Whilst these processes may seem less direct that the one-to-one interaction between a child and an adult, the settings considered these intentional activities as nonetheless crucial to their role in promoting a sociocultural curriculum. They did not concur that one-to-one adult mediation with children was always more effective than peer mediation and provocation.

A further contradiction that arose from the balance of teacher presence and absence was that of entitlement. At Northmont, the children most confident in approaching adults, such as Colin with his catapult, would experience large amounts of time interacting with an adult in meaningful ways in which their learning was mediated. It appeared that some children in both settings, particularly quieter ones, did not receive the same amount of mediated attention and this raised questions for me about equality of access. For example, I have already referred to Zara and Mina whom I had privately called 'the watchers' because they often observed others rather than being directly involved. I did not completely understand why Carrie did not directly intervene with these children and I am not convinced that my actions would have been the same as hers. I knew that Carrie trusted her methods but it appeared that there was a sizeable discrepancy in different children's learning dispositions and I could not help but wonder as to the effect this might have when these children transferred to school. Carrie's view was that practitioners in schools should be cognisant of the different trajectories of children's learning dispositions and that there should be closer links between kindergartens and schools to ensure that children could continue to develop their learning dispositions beyond Te Whāriki. She was working hard to achieve this with schools and practitioners in her area.

I view these contradictions and dilemmas that have arisen from the research as an opportunity to reflect on my own values and assumptions about education and pedagogy. Although I questioned some of their practices in relation to my own, I did not see it as my place to create a dichotomy of one pedagogy being any more appropriate than another. I have raised the issues in this section in order to engage critically with the research findings and to facilitate the decision-making process about any desirable or transferable aspects of the policies that I observed. This has been my intention so that any influences on my practice are not in the style of 'cherry picking' but part of a critical study of the Foundation Phase and Te Whāriki. Phillips & Ochs (2003) propose that policy borrowing is more likely to be successful when a contextualised study of the 'lending' nation has been undertaken, and this

time-consuming activity is often neglected by politicians who are usually looking for evidence from abroad to legitimate a home-grown policy (Ochs, 2006).

Having provided critical insight into the Foundation Phase and Te Whāriki from observations at Castleton and Northmont, I have to conclude that I do not think it likely that these policies can or should be 'borrowed' in their entirety, and the cultural difference between the settings observed and my practice are significant. However, there are lessons that can be learned for my professional practice. In this respect, the metaphor of 'translation' is more apt than that of 'borrowing'. Translation implies that adopted concepts have travelled from one context to another and been adapted to the local vernacular and possibly changed somewhat from their origin form. Despite the many cultural differences, there are pedagogical concepts arising from my research that I could translate to my practice within the context of the independent education system in England.

5.2 Impact on my practice

My experience to date of working in the independent sector is that several factors have led to an expectation to promote early formal learning. Independent schools have a long history of having to 'market' themselves competitively, with no guaranteed intake of pupils other than those it has attracted through promotional activities. One of the ways this has been achieved is in the perceived delivery of 'excellent' results, usually measured by examination success, but also through direct comparison of other measurable outcomes of education, such as early reading and writing standards. A parental demand that their children are achieving and excelling compared those in the maintained sector has also been a contributing factor, particularly in justifying school fees. Furthermore, independent schools have largely been exempt from government initiatives that would require them to change their teaching practices, which is a reason why parents expect their methods to be 'traditional', particularly in terms of literacy and numeracy.

Resisting early formal learning practices at my school has always been part of my agenda. I see my role as one that attempts to provide a balance between parental expectations of early formal learning, particularly in reading and writing, and what is in the children's best interest. For example, I have discouraged practitioners from using 'workbook' style activities with EYFS children and spent time with parents discussing the educational value of play. Another example was in persuading my head teacher and colleagues that we did not need to participate in Key Stage 1 SATS, as these tests are non-compulsory in our sector, and because I believed that they were putting undue pressure on the curriculum, with an over-emphasis on 'teaching to the test' to ensure good results.

Embarking on the Doctor of Education programme and completing my thesis has provided further opportunity to reflect on my practice with a degree of criticality in relation to my findings from Northmont and Castleton. The process of professional enquiry has enabled development of my knowledge base and brought about changes to my practice. Fully aware of some of the issues surrounding the implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales and Te Whāriki in New Zealand, there are two specific pedagogical concepts arising from my observations at Northmont and Castleton that I have translated to my practice, the first being teacher mediation.

Reflecting on the different aspects of teacher mediation has had an impact not just on my practice but has also instigated a similar level of action and reflection with my colleagues at work. Through presenting findings from my research, we have had numerous discussions about the subtleties of teacher mediation and how this differs from other forms of knowledge production. This has included an evaluation of how we mediate the children's learning, both through direct interaction but also through the deliberate provision of provocation and peer mediation. Through our collaborative discussions, my colleagues and I have redesigned the curriculum for Key Stage 1, an area of the curriculum over which I have had more control than the statutory EYFS. In writing a new curriculum, we have focused on how themes arising from my research – teacher mediation, provocation, and peer mediation –

impact on knowledge construction and our desire for both children and teachers to be active participants in this process.

Secondly, the intentional promotion of learning dispositions is an aspect of pedagogy that is translatable to my setting. Reviewing the meaning and place of teacher mediation with my colleagues has also brought about much discussion about how we intentionally promote learning dispositions and what habitus do we have, or indeed wish to have, at school? This is a collaborative activity that has been occurring in EYFS as well as Key Stage 1, and it will take time to reach a consensus as to our community habitus and the dispositions that we value. However, it is worth deliberating on this activity because my observations and discussions at Northmont and Castleton have revealed that an explicitly-defined habitus was assisting the children in their development of locally-valued learning dispositions. I have already described how Ayran, a pupil at Northmont, and Jane, the teacher at Castleton, encountered difficulty when there was dissonance between individual and collective habitus. Reay (2004, p.440) explains that this tension can result in "contradictory ways of being" and she suggests that the problem can be further compounded by gender and class. Grenfell & James (1998) add that ethnicity also increases the feeling of being a 'fish out of water'. Bourdieu's view was that habitus is transmitted in the home (Sullivan, 2002) and that early experiences carry particular weight in an individual's habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). However, this does not mean that habitus is a fixed quality but is actually responsive to experience (Reay, 2004, p. 434-435).

This implies that the experience of being at school and the collective habitus that one encounters can affect an individual's habitus. This was the case in the settings that I observed: for example, Aryan at Northmont was adapting to the sense of 'busyness' and purpose required of him; and Tina at Castleton was starting to fulfil the expectations of being more confident and active at school. I hope that similar changes might become apparent for the pupils at my setting, once we feel sufficiently confident to articulate our understanding of the explicit learning dispositions that are relevant to our local practice.

There are three further aspects of pedagogy from Northmont and Castleton that I would like to adopt in my practice, all of which would benefit from further study as a practitioner and also from the wider research community. With the 'watchers' of Northmont, Zara and Mina, in mind, the first of these is intent participation. I have spent much time reflecting on this concept and the role that this seemingly passive yet actually very active form of observation could have for the children in my setting. 'Copying' has been a practice that I have discouraged but intent participation adds a different dimension to the process of watching and imitating others. I have already explained how intent participation has received very little research attention (Rogoff *et al*. 2003) and I plan on making it the focus of small-scale research and evaluation in my own setting.

A second aspect of pedagogy for possible translation to my practice is the role of vertical teaching and learning. At Northmont and Castleton, there were a combination of 'established' (or older) and 'new' (or younger) children. The implication of vertical groupings meant that newer and younger children were always surrounded by children more established in the community habitus, which enabled apprenticeship, enculturation and peer mediation to a further extent than when every member of the group is new. Kiera at Northmont evidently benefited from her interactions with established Georgia, whilst Lena at Castleton had expertly taken younger children 'under her wing'. As a practitioner who has experienced welcoming and settling as many as thirty-six new three-year-olds into a nursery setting at the beginning of an academic year, and a slightly smaller number of four-year-olds to a reception class, I would welcome the opportunity to establish vertical groupings of children, and I have wondered about the impact of having the equivalent of Georgia or Lena in my setting at these times. I have begun to explore this idea informally through more interaction with children of different year groups at my school. Children being grouped according to the year they were born is perhaps another example of a regime of truth in which dates of birth are a means of segregating children of a similar age to receive standardized instruction in a step-by-step fashion (Rogoff, Goodman Turkanis & Bartlett, 2001). It would be advantageous to explore vertical groupings and the potential impact on children's

learning dispositions as a way to disrupt and question this regime of truth. Practitioners and researchers could ask themselves, are children separated according to age because this is in their best interests or because they are mandated to do so? Without opportunity for vertical groupings, the possibility of children learning from more-able peers is limited to those of their own academic year which is possibly not as powerful as when learning in mixed aged groups.

The third aspect that I would like to explore in my setting is the role of play in the curriculum, particularly beyond EYFS. In conceptualizing play as a collaborative and socially-mediated act as observed in the two settings, Vygotskian theory furnishes insights into the being/becoming debate. Holzman (2006, p.10) explained that the zone of proximal development can be conceived as "the ever emergent and continuously changing "distance" between being and becoming". This would mean that play is a mechanism for both 'being' in the present and for what children will 'become' in the future. As Mouritsen (2002, p.39) eloquently said about play:

> ...there is a shift from a utilitarian view of the matter ("What use is it?") to the view that play is something in its own right...It is something different from a tool of education, more than a vehicle for development. That it then [original emphasis] has many useful side-effects, for example in the form of competencies, is another matter.

The data from Northmont in New Zealand revealed how Carrie enabled time for children's play to occur without interruptions because she wanted their learning dispositions to develop and deepen. This afforded children the opportunity to 'be' a child in the present at the same time as developing the skills they would need to 'become' a pupil at school. Completely uninterrupted play is a concept that my colleagues and I have been trying to implement within EYFS at my school. Within Key Stage 1, I have been influenced by the play observed at Castleton in Wales where children up to the age of seven were learning through play for substantial periods of the day, in stark contrast to the English National Curriculum and the practice of Key Stage 1 practitioners in my school. In England, there is concern about the transition between EYFS and Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum (Tickell, 2011; Sanders *et al.*, 2005). I believe that this problem could be alleviated by extending play-based learning into Key Stage 1, as observed at Castleton, to

allow children more time to develop learning dispositions as an intentional process. This was also a recommendation of the Cambridge Review of the Primary Curriculum:

> Extending the early years phase to age six or seven would give schools up to three years to work with children to establish positive attitudes to learning and the necessary language and study skills which are crucial to raising standards in the long term. (Alexander, 2010, p.172)

Vygotsky (1978) saw play as a leading factor in the development of children in their pre-school years and this was embodied in the practices observed in both Northmont and Castleton. For Vygotsky, pre-school was more than just a chronological stage and was defined in terms of "the systematic changes that take place in the structure of a child's mental processes and in terms of its major developmental accomplishments" (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p.157). If one accepts these views, as I do, then children in England aged five who must embark on formal learning as part of the National Curriculum have a vital stage of their learning cut in half at a time when their maturing mental functions have not had a chance to develop sufficiently to enable them to be ready for the formal learning they must face. An extended period of learning through play, as seen at Castleton, could allow children to develop learning dispositions and self-regulation and for these skills to become more robust and sophisticated. This is an area that would benefit from empirical work because of the potential benefits to children's achievement at school and beyond.

5.3 Advocacy as a means of impact beyond my practice

I have described how the process of research in the two settings has already influenced my practice and those of my colleagues at work, and how there are further aspects arising from the data that I wish to explore. It is my intention that my research will also have an impact beyond my own school, particularly as other practitioners engage with my work. Underpinning my research is the concern about the damaging effect of early formal academic instruction on learning dispositions. As Carr et al. (2009, p. 220) pointed out:

>...children's learning dispositions are fragile in the onslaught of any school curriculum that is packed with compulsory tasks, tight scheduling and summative assessments – and does not recognise learning dispositions in practice or in documentation.

Katz (2011) similarly referred to the "damaged disposition hypothesis" in which children can be taught academic skills at a young age but at the expense of the disposition to use them. Rather than more compulsory testing and tight control of the curriculum, what is needed instead is a release from the "terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003) to give practitioners the space to question their beliefs and pedagogy and to enter into reflection and discussion about choices in education. Alexander (2011, p.76), having gathered teachers' views regarding a review of the primary curriculum, reported that:

>These teachers told us that what they most needed, after thirteen years of being told what to do and how to think, was a chance to work with others who wished freely and without permission to explore ways of thinking and acting which were independent of the imposed pedagogical orthodoxies.

These teachers were giving their views about the legacy of the National Curriculum on primary school aged children but I would argue that the same freedom should be offered to those working with younger children. A break from imposed pedagogical orthodoxies would allow practitioners the opportunity to be released from technical rationalism and enable reflection and dialogue about the role of theory and research in their practice. My research would be useful in achieving this aim and provides an opportunity for enquiry to influence professional learning beyond my own practice. The experiences of Northmont and Castleton are that dialogue in theory and research is essential in promoting alternative pedagogies that differ from existing practices.

My research has been completed at a crucial time for the independent sector because an opportunity for change has emerged. The government has agreed to permit exemption of EYFS for independent schools (England. Department for Education, 2012c) that have a "track-record of quality early years provision" (England. Department for Education, 2012b, p.4) as measured by a rating of at least 'good' in their most recent inspection. It seems somewhat ironic that exemption

will be granted on a school's prior ability to implement EYFS successfully, as judged by inspection. This could be described as "conditional trust" (Avis, 2003, p.203) in which independent schools that have proved themselves in meeting the tight criteria of the reform agenda will thus be afforded freedom to direct their own practice. One can only assume that this earned freedom could be revoked at a later date if there were any questions about 'quality' of provision.

A key point is what practitioners in independent schools might do with their potential new freedom? A cursory exercise with my colleagues revealed that not all would be excited about life without EYFS and that some would be anxious about what to teach without an imposed curriculum. Furthermore, at a recent cluster meeting of about twenty other independent school practitioners in the same role as me, I was the only one who expressed an interest in abandoning EYFS. The opinion was mostly unilateral and agreed with the views of the colleagues at my school: what would they teach without EYFS? There was no overwhelming support of EYFS, just the apprehension of having to devise a suitable alternative, which implies both a significant gap in the knowledge base and the opportunity for professional development on a substantial scale.

For my thesis to have impact beyond the work that I have already instigated at my school, I would like to become an advocate within the independent school sector. Advocacy provides an opportunity for practitioners to regain their voice in policy debates in which they have previously been marginalized. Working within my sector, exemption from EYFS means that my voice as an advocate has more chance of being heard at a time when independent schools can shape their own early childhood curriculum and policy direction. The appeal of advocacy from my position as a practitioner critically engaged in professional enquiry is that policy can emerge from a local and situated level, from the 'bottom-up'. Through my cluster group of practitioners, I aim to promote discussion and awareness of alternative viewpoints relating to curriculum, the purpose of early childhood education and the different constructions of childhood. Engaging with alternative viewpoints disrupts dominant discourses and facilitates the possibility of informed choice about curriculum and

pedagogy. I want other practitioners to make decisions about exemption from EYFS from a knowledge base and a 'lexicon' of different possible perspectives (Perselli, 2012). To this effect, I have already invited colleagues from other schools to a presentation of my data and findings, and there are many who have accepted this invitation. Already, one school has requested to work collaboratively with me and my colleagues in designing an alternative curriculum to EYFS, using my research knowledge and experience. Creating such a community of practice is particularly welcome as an opportunity for my voice not only to be heard but also to influence the practice of others. I will work towards widening this community of practice to encourage collaborative practitioner research in the process of designing and implementing new curricula that can be shared with others. A caveat for me in this role is to ensure that advocacy does not become a personal crusade but that the purpose is to promote critical debate about some of the themes arising from research such as the nuances of teacher mediation, the potential impact of learning dispositions within the debate about 'school readiness', and the role of play for children within early childhood and even beyond.

5.4 Concluding comments

This research project started with several aims. The first was to provide an analytical and evidence-informed perspective on sociocultural pedagogy, as observed in New Zealand and Wales. My broad research questions aimed to establish what a sociocultural curriculum looked like in practice and the role this requires for practitioners. My observations and interpretations have described how learning is framed collectively rather than individually within a sociocultural paradigm and the essential, purposeful and active part that adults play in mediating children's learning. Through the use of three further research questions, I have described and analysed how enculturation and mediation enabled the intentional development of learning dispositions, how these dispositions were enhanced through extended learning periods, provocation and extensive communication, and in turn how the sociocultural environment influenced the children's identity of themselves as capable and confident learners.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has been a central feature of my research in underpinning the analysis of my broad and focused research questions. His work has increasing relevance and coherence with present day sociocultural thinking and practice (Damianova & Sullivan, 2011; Fleer, 2011; Veraksa & van Oers, 2011; Gredler, 2012). It has been suggested that this significance is because "Vygotsky's theory offers us answers to questions that were not asked earlier. It is only now that we have started posing questions that make Vygotsky's answers relevant" (Kozulin, 2003, p.15). I have questions that can be addressed by his work. Firstly, Vygotsky's view of the power of play in children's learning has been particularly salient. I have already argued in the second section of this chapter that his conception of play elucidates the being/becoming debate of childhood so that play is part of the natural state of childhood whilst also preparing children for the next stage of their lives. Through my data, I observed how the constant balance and harmony between play, collaboration and psychological tools were assisting with the development of self-regulation and learning dispositions.

A second question about pedagogy that is addressed by Vygotsky is the role of the adult in children's learning. Analysis of the data has revealed how adults within a sociocultural paradigm mediate children's learning, both through direct collaboration and through providing a learning environment rich in language and provocation that promote further mediation. This for me is a relevant role for adults in early childhood education, one in which they are active in children's learning but are also mindful of developing children's identities as capable, confident and autonomous learners.

This research project also aimed at examining an alternative construction of childhood and this is where Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has correspondingly been central to my work. Within a postmodernist lens, there can be no universal definition of childhood. Such ways of knowing are context-bound and perspectival. The early childhood practices of New Zealand and Wales, which are underpinned by sociocultural theory, have served to demonstrate how this view of childhood can enable children to be human beings involved in learning through play, at the same time as allowing for development in the process of becoming.

My starting position was one of an "activist educator" (MacNaughton, 2005) with the aim to speak out about my disagreements with EYFS in England. I wanted to question and disrupt some of the dominant discourses surrounding EYFS and its implementation, such as the reform agenda and its insistence on outcome rather than process, developmental psychology and its focus on the individual rather than the collective, and early formal learning and its apparent failure to prepare children to be ready for school. My intention was not to substitute one alternative 'truth' for another, but to produce an awareness of the complexity and plurality of the situation (Lather, 1991), and to offer perspective rather than truth (Ball, 1995). My purpose was also to move from this position of awareness to one of action (Ellyatt, 2011), starting with my own practice and I have described my actions in the previous sections of this chapter.

However, the influence of this research project should go beyond my professional practice and it is hoped that this thesis will provide awareness and provoke action within the wider community of practitioners, particularly in the independent sector, as they engage with my findings and reflect on the lessons learned from Northmont and Castleton. Through a process of advocacy and developing communities of practice, practitioners will engage dialogically with debates emerging from the research that resonate with and challenge their own practice as well as the ones I have raised. To date, practitioners who have reviewed my data, such as Jane at Castleton who spent much time examining and questioning me about photographs taken at Northmont, have focused on aspects of practice that are personally relevant to them. This second level of analysis and understanding by the reader is a key feature of interpretivist studies.

Regarding influence at a political level, it has been suggested that the usefulness of small-scale studies for policy making is "increasingly under the spotlight" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.116), presumably because of their rejection of totalizing, or grand narratives, and more crucially in a globalized environment, a call for context-sensitivity (Adair, 2011). Whilst interpretivist studies such as this construct a partial account of reality, one reading amongst many, the iterative link between collection and analysis of data affords the opportunity for themes to emerge that otherwise

remain hidden or assumed. I am mindful that the process of analysis taking place so early in the research is bound to influence the outcome. One critical question that begs to be asked is what themes might have appeared if I had visited Wales before New Zealand. I am also aware that there are other possible interpretations from my data. Although it represents a 'snapshot' of practice, my account has come about through a consideration of the cumulative evidence base – observations, photographs and interviews – ensuring that there has been a link between the complementary forms of data in order to validate the findings. Confessional tales such as this one can be criticized for being a "better method for learning about the fieldworker than it is for learning about the culture the fieldworker went to study" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 99). However, these issues do not make fieldwork without use, and once it has been subjected to a process of transparent reflexivity, fully acknowledging the place of the fieldworker within the research, then its usefulness can be conceived by the insights from the rich data that it produces.

Research involving analysis of practices from other countries can be vital to governments that are involved in the process of policy borrowing. In an era of globalization, an outcome of which is increased standardization and inflexibility in education (Bottery, 2006), localized studies have the crucial advantage of being able to provide situated, contextualized knowledge in a way that can add to the debate about wider educational issues. Globalization has led to educational practices and policies being 'borrowed' from one country to another but I am not suggesting that Te Whāriki or the Foundation Phase is adopted whole-sale to England without translation and consideration for local culture. Middlehurst (2001) has explained how the UK Open University system has been transported to the US but with adjustments that allow for local culture and political sensitivities. This example suggests that concepts arising from policies such as Te Whāriki or the Foundation Phase could be considered in England if they are accompanied by adaptations relating to local context and culture. In my case, pedagogical aspects of these two policies have been adopted at my school and I am in the process of reviewing their impact. This action goes beyond the simplistic policy borrowing that is practised by politicians and provides an argument for intercultural learning that

could be context-sensitive. To assist with this possibility, I have presented an insight into the sociocultural practices of the two settings that I visited to allow for reflection on our own localized and situated practices, and to provide an authentic means for practice to influence policy and research.

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