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**Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring student experiences  
of distance early childhood education**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Education (Early Years) at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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## **Abstract**

Distance and field-based early childhood teacher education programmes are a popular option for students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many students enrolled in these programmes are already employed as teachers in early childhood centres. For these students, the workplace represents an important learning environment. This study draws on theories of situated learning to understand students' experience of distance teacher education by exploring their learning as changes in participation in the workplaces in which they are employed. Using a sociocultural perspective and a case study methodology, interviews with four students were spaced over a trimester of study to gain individual perspectives of their changing participation. Information about students' context was gained from interviews with managers and through centre visits.

Findings from this study suggest that distance teacher education supported students understanding of their workplace and expanded the possibilities for participation that students perceived. The impact of workplace participation on students learning was revealed in a number of ways in this study. Students' interests and insights and the changes they made were aligned with the existing issues and practices in their workplace. Importantly, students' identity within their workplace played a significant role in students' perception of opportunity and motivation to change their practice. This study suggests that early childhood centres can support the learning of students through creating opportunities for them to participate in the ongoing development of their community of practice. This study also suggests that teacher education programmes can support students by exploring learning with and from others as an important goal that develops practice in an early childhood context. The relationship between teacher education and workplace learning is identified as an important focus for further research in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

Distance and field-based early childhood teacher education programmes are a popular option for students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many students enrolled in these programmes are already employed as teachers in early childhood centres. For these students, their engagement in teacher education occurs concurrently with their 'on-the-job' learning. For distance students in particular, their workplace provides an ongoing context in which they experience the daily work of an early childhood teacher and engage in dialogues with teachers, children and families that shape their understanding of teaching. The practices and relationships of the workplace provide the social context for students to observe, explore and act on insights gained through their distance teacher education programme.

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between early childhood students' engagement in a distance teacher education programme and their workplace participation. Drawing on theories of situated learning this study examines students' learning as a process of changing participation within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This study identifies connections students made between their course content and their workplace activities and how new insights motivated them to make changes in their practice. By examining actual examples of students' changing participation at work this study explores the way that students identify and negotiate changes in their practice. This study evaluates the early childhood centre as a learning environment for distance and field-based students and considers how changing student participation might impact on the activities of their workplace.

### **Rationale for the study**

The development of New Zealand distance and field-based teacher education programmes has been described as a committed response to access, diversity and quality in early childhood education rather than as an evidenced-based approach to teacher

education (Bell, 2004; Kane, 2005). While there is an emerging research base examining the nature of learning in field-based teacher education (Howie & Hagan, 2010; McConnell, 2010; Murphy & Butcher 2009; Ord, 2010) there is little available research on students' learning in distance programmes. This study seeks to contribute to the current gap in research relating to distance delivery of field-based teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Research suggests that students with continuous practice experience alongside academic study benefit from the ability to relate theoretical concepts to authentic teaching situations (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ord, 2010). However, it is also recognised that the cultures and practices of early childhood centres shape teachers' practice (Hatherly, 1997; Nuttall, 2005) and that field-based students' experience of teaching is already contextualised in practice situations and sometimes resistant to change (Bell, 2004; McConnell, 2010). Clearly, centre experiences are central to students' experience of field-based teacher education. Therefore, understanding more about their learning within centres has the potential to inform the design of distance and field-based teacher education programmes and the support centres provide to field-based students.

In early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand teachers negotiate their work in a team environment. Teachers share tasks, working in the same physical space and interacting extensively throughout the day. Nuttall's (2003) research on teachers' negotiation of the curriculum has emphasised how shared understandings within teaching teams shapes teachers' practice. This has implications for understanding the learning of field-based students. Recent studies of field-based teacher education (Howie & Hagan, 2010; McConnell, 2010) have identified a need to know more about the way students negotiate relationships as their professional knowledge develops.

My interest in undertaking this study stems from engaging with the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) during postgraduate study. The concept emphasises learning as a process of participation in shared practice where individual learning contributes to the ongoing development of the shared practice. The

sociocultural underpinnings of a community of practice align with the theoretical ideas that underpin the early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hedges, 2003). Early childhood settings have been conceptualised as communities of practice where staff, children and families develop shared understandings through participation in a shared purpose (Bary et al., 2008). As a teacher educator of a distance teacher education programme, I was interested in the implications of the concept of a community of practice for understanding the learning experiences of students already employed in early childhood centres. In particular, I was interested in how their practice might be shaped by but also contribute to the community of practice in which they are employed.

Drawing on the ideas of Wenger (1998) and other theories of situated learning (Engeström, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995), this study explores student learning as a process of participation and shared practice. Research questions guiding this study focus on the relationship between distance teacher education programmes and changing participation in the workplace, the nature of changes students make in their workplace and the impact of students' changes on the wider practices of their workplace. These questions are outlined in detail in Chapter 3. A case study methodology was used to access students' perspectives, which were analysed alongside data about their workplace context drawn from interviews with managers and from centre visits and observations. During three interviews over a seventeen week period, students discussed the relationship between their teacher education coursework and their changing participation in their workplace.

The students in this study were enrolled in a distance teacher education programme and employed in early childhood centres. Throughout this thesis, the term field-based is sometimes used generally to refer to the continuous experience of working in a centre. It should be noted that the terms 'distance' and 'field-based' also refer to particular methods of programme delivery. Information about the teacher education programme the students were enrolled in and programme terms used in this thesis are contained in Appendix A. Definitions and Course Information

## **Overview of the thesis**

Chapter Two reviews the theoretical literature of situated learning that underpins this study. The review also provides an overview of key research in areas relevant to this study, including workplace learning, learning and identity, theory and practice in teacher education and field-based teacher education.

Chapter Three outlines the sociocultural perspective used to frame the methodology, the unit of analysis and the research questions that have focused this inquiry. The interpretive case study design is outlined, followed by a description of the qualitative interview, observation methods and methods of data analysis. Considerations of ethics and validity are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents key findings arising from the analysis of data. The analysis begins with an introduction to students as participants in their workplaces. Participants' stories are analysed in relation to key themes that emerged in relation to the research questions.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of findings in the light of situated learning theories and relevant research reviewed in Chapter Two. Insights specific to field-based and distance teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand are also discussed.

Finally, Chapter Six summarises key findings relating to the research questions and the implications for initial teacher education are explored. Strengths and limitations of the project are also considered and opportunities for further research identified.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature review**

This chapter reviews research that informs an understanding of field-based students' learning in the workplace. The review begins by providing an overview of key theories of situated learning that underpin this study. Research from the fields of workplace learning and teacher education are then reviewed for two important themes of how workplaces support learning as a process of participation in social practice and how learning involves the construction of identity in particular social contexts. The final section reviews the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education and outlines recent research relating to field-based teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The literature review process began with a review of situated learning theories that shaped the initial research questions and identified concepts relevant to the research focus. Key words searched included situated learning, participation, apprenticeship, and community of practice; these were matched with workplace learning and teacher education. Field-based teacher education was an additional search topic. The scope of the search included the Massey University Library Catalogue and the journal databases Ebsco Host, A+ Education and Google Scholar. The search included the New Zealand Thesis and Australasian Digital Thesis Programme databases as well as New Zealand research publication sites Ako Aotearoa, TLRI.org. and Education Counts.

#### **What is situated learning?**

Situated learning or learning as participation in social practice encompasses a range of related theories (Edwards, 2005; Saywer & Greeno, 2009). Common to these theories is firstly the view that learning takes place within social and cultural systems of activity that give access, meaning and purpose to what is learnt, and secondly, that learning occurs through active participation in social activity and so becomes part of the ongoing

development of that activity. As Lave and Wenger (1991) state, learning is part of “generative social practice in a lived-in world” (p. 35).

Situated theories draw on sociocultural understandings of learning, which are underpinned by a constructivist epistemology. Constructivism takes the position that people learn actively, rather than passively, and that they construct their own knowledge and understandings (Crotty, 1998; Flavell, Miller & Miller, 2002). All constructivist theories include an explanation of how transformation of thinking in individuals occurs as a result of interactions with the environment and other people. The sociocultural psychology of Vygotsky has contributed to an understanding of the interrelationship between the individual mind and the social world (Edwards, 2005; Engeström, 2001; Rogoff, 1995) as his theory prioritises social interaction over individual exploration or interaction with the environment.

Vygotsky (1978) explained that higher mental functioning unique to human development involves the ability to use mediating signs and tools such as language, gestures, and mathematical formulas as a means to interpret and solve problems. Mediating signs are experienced first as interpsychological processes in social life and are then transformed as intrapsychological processes of thought. Vygotsky concluded that “all higher functions originate as actual relations between individuals” (p. 57), thus suggesting the cultural nature of human development. He also predicted the importance of access and mediation in learning, suggesting that people need the assistance of more competent others to assist them to access different environments (Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007).

The contribution of Leont’ev (1981) has also been influential to understandings of situated learning. Leont’ev developed Vygotsky’s concept of mediation providing an explanation of collective activity systems that give cultural signs and tools their meaning and purpose (Edwards, 2005; Engeström, 2001). Leont’ev argued that collective activity contains motives that shape shared practices of those involved in the activity (Edwards, 2005). An analysis of the cultural and historical development of a collective activity

system can be used to explain social actions and perspectives of individuals within the activity system (Engeström, 2001).

Edwards (2005) has traced some situated approaches to the social theory of symbolic interactionism originating in the work of Mead (1934, in Edwards, 2005). An interactionist approach argues that knowledge is “discursively constructed and drawn upon” (Edwards, 2005, p. 56) in social interactions with others. Knowledge in use in different contexts is structured by an individual’s perception of themselves in relation to situations. Interactionism is evident in the emphasis that some situated approaches place on the negotiated construction of identities (Edwards, 2005).

In situated theories, learning is viewed as a social process and is often contrasted with the individual focus of information processing views of learning (Edwards, 2005; Rogoff, 1995; Sawyer & Greeno, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Edwards (2005) makes the distinction between the two approaches stating that:

the sociocultural version of the mind is outward looking, resourceful and intent on decoding and responding to the world while the information processing model of the mind emphasises encoding, knowledge storage and recall. (p. 50)

Wenger (1998) argues that the acquisition and storage of knowledge is only a small part of knowing. Instead, he argues, knowledge is a “matter of competence” (p. 4) with respect to cultural valued activity and knowing is about “participating in social communities” (p. 10). Further, relevant information required for participation in social life cannot be codified and pre-learnt, but is embedded in situations. Social activity is a complex interrelationship of individual contributions and therefore relevant and useful knowledge is often distributed across people (Sawyer & Greeno, 2009). Situated perspectives focus on understanding the learning that occurs within everyday socially organised activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995; Sawyer & Greeno, 2009; Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger, learning is not separate from other activities but an “integral part of our everyday lives” (p. 8). It is through participation in social practice that people gain access to, make use of and contribute to useful knowledge that

achieves individual and collective goals. From a situated approach, learning is not viewed as preparation for social life, but as something that happens through participation in social life (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995).

Three theories of situated learning have been of particular relevance to this study. The approach to sociocultural analysis developed by Rogoff (1995) has helped to shape the design of this project. Two further theories have been influential in understanding workplace learning and have informed many of the studies included in this review. These theories include the concepts of cultural historical activity theory drawing on the work of Leont'ev (1981) and legitimate peripheral participation within a community of practice developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The next section will explain the importance of these three theories in more detail.

### ***Rogoff's foci of analysis***

Understanding learning as a process of transformation of participation in cultural activity has challenged researchers to capture the interrelationships between individuals, social processes and cultural contexts. Rogoff (1995) and Brennan (2006) have identified the tendency for analysis to focus on individual factors without capturing the connection to social activity. Rogoff (1995) argues that a focus on learning as an individual process of internalisation of knowledge transferred from the environment is incomplete if it does not recognise the socially mediated nature of valuable knowledge in a given context. In addition, considering only the influence of the social environment misses the creative agency of the learner and the contribution they make to social practice. Rogoff (1995) proposed a framework of analysis through which researchers can interpret sociocultural activity. She has suggested three planes or foci (Rogoff, Topping, Baker-Sennett & Lacasa, 2002) of analysis that foreground different aspects of sociocultural activity, without reducing the analysis to only one aspect. The foci include individual, interpersonal and community aspects of the activity.

The foci of analysis are defined in relation to each other, so that, while one can be foregrounded, the other two are still present but in less detail. The community or

institutional focus, through the concept of apprenticeship, highlights attention on culturally organised activity and the way that this facilitates the increasingly competent participation of individuals in activity. The interpersonal focus, through the concept of guided participation, gives attention to the processes that facilitate and guide people towards particular types of activity and the kinds of participation in which people engage. On the personal plane, the concept of participatory appropriation is used to capture how an individual's participation in cultural activity builds as an ongoing process of experience that shapes their future participation, which in turn shapes the development of the activity. Rogoff (1995) stresses that the foci of analysis are an analytical tool and are not intended to represent actual divisions in reality, but instead can be used to organise the development of questions and analysis of data with a focus on understanding sociocultural activity.

### ***Cultural historical activity theory***

Cultural historical activity theory developed directly from the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ev (Edwards, 2005; Engeström, 2001). In an activity system, particular ways of thinking and acting, and the use of mediating tools and artefacts develop around a common objective or motive. The motive channels possibilities for individual action in relation to that activity. The existence of different interpretations of the motive can cause tensions within an activity system (Engeström, 2001; Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999). Activity systems develop over time and the motives and alternative viewpoints occurring within them are understood through analysis of their historical development. Engeström (2001) has been influential in developing an application of activity theory that views contradictions within activity systems as opportunities for collaborative learning. As contradictions within the activity system are aggravated this creates possibilities for "collaborative revisioning" (p. 137) that can lead to new ways for people to work together. Where activity theory focuses analysis on learning at a systems level, the next theory reviewed, the notion of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998) places more attention on the processes of learning that occur as individuals negotiate their roles within activity systems.

### *Communities of practice*

The theory of a community of practice was built on an analysis by Lave and Wenger (1991) of ethnographic studies of traditional apprenticeships and informal learning situations. They developed an explanation of social learning as a process of individuals gaining access to a set of relationships and understandings that experienced members of a community use to organise their shared activities. They developed the term 'legitimate peripheral participation' to describe the intentional and evolving participation of newcomers within established practices of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This term was intended to capture both a newcomer's interest in the community and a community's interest in providing opportunities for newcomers to participate with increasing confidence. As newcomers move from peripheral to full participants, their practices contribute to the ongoing development of the community itself.

Wenger (1998) further developed and defined the concept of a community of practice. According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice form whenever individuals develop a shared repertoire of practices over time through their mutual engagement in a joint enterprise. Shared repertoires develop and continue to evolve through the participation of members and at the same time certain norms and expectations of members become reified into structures and processes that maintain the shared practice. For Wenger, the processes of participation and reification are dynamic and evolving. Engagement in practice drives individual and collective learning for all participants in a community of practice. He argues that:

Practice is an ongoing interactional process and the introduction of newcomers is merely a version of what practice already is. That members interact, do things together, negotiate new meanings, and learn from each other is already inherent in practice – that is how practices evolve. In other words communities of practice reproduce their membership in the same ways that they come about in the first place. (Wenger, 1998, p. 102)

Participating in practice is a holistic experience that involves not only knowledge of practice but the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. Over time, through engagement with others, individuals develop perceptions of competence,

commitment and regular ways of interacting with others in communities. Wenger explains that:

In practice we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, useable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive. (p. 153)

Learning within a community of practice then involves the construction of identities in relation to practice. Identities are not fixed but constantly negotiated. Wenger suggests that the negotiation of identities involve perceptions of past experiences and potential futures within a community which shape what people pay attention to in the present.

### ***Summary***

This section has introduced the theoretical underpinnings of situated learning as a process of participation in sociocultural activity. Three influential theories emphasise different aspects of situated learning. Rogoff (1995) draws attention to the mutually constituting processes of institutional, interpersonal and individual development that occur through participation in social practice. Activity theory (Engeström, 2001; Leont'ev, 1981) focuses analysis on the historical development of social activity to understand how it provides opportunities for particular sorts of participation. A community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) focuses on the social processes of negotiating shared practice that promote learning and involve the negotiation of identities.

### **Learning in the workplace**

Situated theories have been used to interpret workplace learning, including the work of teachers in schools and early childhood centres. This section considers how workplaces operate as learning environments. Some key features of workplaces that promote learning for novices are outlined in the first group of studies examined. A further group of studies suggests that workplace cultures can also restrict possibilities for learning. The final group of studies reviewed are selected from literature investigating features of workplaces that cultivate learning communities through participatory practices.

### *Informal learning in workplaces*

Studies of situated learning in the workplace have emphasised the way that the activities in workplaces are structured to give access to members to knowledge needed to sustain their practices (Billett, 2004; Grossman et al., 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Billett (2004) argues that engagement in workplace activities often seems informal but is actually highly structured and intentional. He draws on his own and others' research findings to argue that workplaces are structured to support goal directed activity that determine the "tasks and activities in which learners engage, what support they receive and how their efforts are appraised" (p. 134). He argues that workplaces often overlook the actual practices that employees engage in as learning opportunities.

Summarising British studies in a range of workplace environments, Eraut (2004) identified four main types of workplace activity that regularly gave rise to learning. These included: participation in group activities towards a common outcome; working closely alongside others; having opportunities to gain new perspectives through working with clients; and the opportunity to take on challenging tasks. If well supported and successful, these types of activities led to increased motivation and confidence for learners.

Research suggests that learning can be restricted if there is limited access to organisational activities. Drawing on three case studies in the steel industry in Britain, Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin (2005) compared the possibilities for learning provided by different companies when supporting apprentices for the same qualification. In one company, apprentices were given a range of different experiences and professional networking beyond the workplace, as well as courses with training providers. In another example, an apprentice learned mostly from more experienced members in one area, becoming a full participant after one year. At that point they were called upon to train more recent and sometimes older entrants to the machines in their area. Fuller et al. (2005) concluded that the latter example of learning was restrictive, with the apprentice only gaining access to knowledge for a narrow area of production. The former example was described as an expansive approach that gave entry to wider

opportunities within the profession and the apprentices were able to make broader contributions within their workplace.

A further point made by Fuller et al. (2005) is that situated accounts of learning tend to underplay the role formal education plays in newcomers' development and that this may be seen as a gap in the propositions of Lave and Wenger (1991). In a review of studies concerning communities of practice, Amin and Roberts (2008) argue for more differentiation between communities of practice that form in different professions, suggesting that different work types have broadly different arrangements for acquiring knowledge. These authors argue that participation in professional communities, such as those within schools and centres, requires access to codified knowledge that can be individually gained through academic study as well as teaching experience. Professional competence is supported by locating newcomers with experienced members of the community; as their professional identities develop, learning can be supported through interactions with the wider professional community. The professional community plays an important role in legitimising and disseminating knowledge and sharing innovation.

In a Dutch study using a mixed methods approach of participant observation in three bakeries and interviews with 14 apprentices, Nielsen (2008) found that practical instruction gave apprentices access to "bodily know-how" (p. 247) as well as access to more responsibility. Importantly, he found time spent on explanations transformed the social position of the apprentices within the workplace. Failure in the apprenticeships occurred when apprentices were kept in marginal positions within the community of practice, and as a consequence felt devalued and restricted within the environment.

Research relating to teacher induction is useful in identifying important features of the workplace that support the learning of beginning teachers. Cameron (2007) reviewed international studies and concluded that while mentoring and assessment are important, the culture of schools into which teachers are inducted is critical. Newly qualified teachers need to feel part of a wider professional learning community that "emphasises their relationships with colleagues, with strong expectations that they will continue to

learn and grow throughout their careers” (p. 45). In a New Zealand study, Aitken (2005) considered the systems of support provided to eight newly qualified early childhood teachers in their early childhood centres. She found that issues of staff turnover and qualified teacher shortages limited the access of newly qualified teachers to the knowledge and support of experienced teachers. Some newly qualified teachers experienced multiple responsibilities and did not feel a strong sense of organised support for their role. For some teachers this led to a lack of agency and decisions to leave their centre. Two centres with more stable staff structures were found to more ably support the learning of newly qualified teachers (Aitken, 2005).

### *Cultures and routines in the workplace*

Several studies of schools and early childhood centres have identified the pervasive effects of workplace culture on practice (Hatherly, 1997; Nuttall, 2005). In a five-month case study, Nuttall (2005) interviewed and observed teachers to explore the way that the curriculum was negotiated. She found that the perpetuation of institutional norms had an important effect, because:

In order to maintain the social act of doing childcare, the teachers had adopted a rigid set of expectations about how daily life in the centre would be organised. These expectations were reified through the use of centre policies and other key documents, which also served as tools in the enculturation of new staff, thereby ensuring the smooth continuation of centre practice. (p. 19)

Nuttall (2005) identified differences and tensions in the perspectives of the teachers and argued that while “... well educated teachers are equipped with interpretive tools with which to change their practice ... they must willingly exert their personal agency in order to apply such tools” (p. 26). This finding has implications for the learning of novice teachers. In a literature review of teachers’ identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) similarly suggest that in the early years of teachers’ practice, as professional identities are forming, the influence of the surrounding context is strongly felt. Novice teachers may be more likely to adopt the practices of their centre, especially if the beliefs and intentions underpinning a programme are not discussed and negotiated

openly amongst participants. In another discussion of her doctoral research, Nuttall (2003) highlights that in Aotearoa New Zealand the constructivist nature of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) requires that teachers have frequent opportunity to make explicit the assumptions about their role.

In wider workplace contexts, routines have been considered by Eraut (2004) who suggests that routines provide both opportunities and barriers for learners. He argues that routines have the benefit of freeing up attention for other judgments in changing situations. This finding is supported by Billett (2004) who explains that through participation in daily workplace practice, individuals “reinforce and hone what is already known” (p. 314) and become more selective and strategic in what they pay attention to. Therefore, repeated activities are very educative for novices. However, Eraut (2004) also argues that routines lead to knowledge becoming “less explicit and less easily shared with others i.e. more tacit” (p. 261) and therefore the reasons for actions become less obvious. This phenomenon has the potential to restrict possibilities for individual participation and therefore what is able to be learnt through joint activity. Eraut (2004) further suggests that routines are more difficult to change for more experienced members as this can imply a “negative evaluation” (p. 261) of their previous practices. As routines are unlearned and new practices relearned, experienced practitioners can feel like novices again.

### ***Learning communities***

For Wenger (1998), workplace learning exists in the meaning-making processes of participation and reification. Participation, as previously explained, refers to the negotiated processes by which individuals collectively make sense of their activity. Reification, in contrast, refers to the processes and artefacts that form over time as people organise regular activities; the activities become entrenched in usual practice and sometimes become ideological and unquestioned. Both aspects are needed in order for people to work together towards a shared purpose and both aspects are always occurring whenever people work together. Wenger argues that organisations should attend not only to processes of acquiring knowledge of practice but also offering places where new

ways of knowing can be realised in new forms of participation. Wenger argues that learning “cannot be designed: it can only be designed for - that is facilitated or frustrated” (p. 229). Engeström (2001) similarly contributes the view that learning is often a generative problem solving process, explaining that:

In important transformations of our personal lives and organisational practices, we must learn new forms of activity which are not yet there. They are literally learned as they are being created. (p. 138)

Within educational contexts, the notion of professional learning communities is used to describe teachers working collaboratively on improving processes of learning and teaching and shows how this has the potential to build capacity for ongoing change and improvement (Hargreaves, 2003). Anning and Edwards (1999) explain that change is a complex process and needs to be managed. They summarise key elements of professional learning communities which emphasise participatory practices, including a shared sense of purpose, a collective focus on pupil learning, collaborative activity, de-privatised activity (practice made visible to each other) and reflective dialogues.

Bary et al. (2008) drew on a community of practice framework in an action research project to develop a professional learning community in the infants’ section of their childcare centre. Bary et al. defined their community of practice as a place “where participants work collaboratively contributing individual knowledge, skills, ideas and expertise” (p. 11). The centre organised professional development for all members of the teaching team to increase their understandings of a community of practice and of shared leadership. The centre fostered the emerging leadership of all members of the community. Ongoing formal and informal opportunities to engage in professional dialogue and to reflect on practice individually and as a group were created. The researchers concluded that this process strengthened collaborative relationships within the setting which led to greater participation and leadership, and “more intensive work with children” (p. 86).

While the concept of community of practice has been embraced by organisations as a framework for promoting learning through participation and sharing of knowledge, it has also been critiqued as a framework. First, examples of successful communities of practice that are presented in research are “rather stable, cohesive and even welcoming entities” (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 53). However, in modern workplaces there is much more movement of staff, including at upper levels (Fuller et al., 2005). Cox (2005) has identified other aspects of modern workplaces that reduce their ability to operate as communities of practice which support participatory processes of learning reviewed in this section. These aspects include the use of part-time staff, work reorganisation, time pressurised environments or lack of common space in which to assemble and collaborate. In a study previously cited, Aitken (2005) identified the issue of high staff turnover in early childhood centres as an impediment for the learning of newly qualified teachers.

A second criticism is that communities of practice evoke a benign and attractive ideal of participation. Wisneski and Goldstein (2004) argued that the notion of community can carry a mystique of participation that hides the power relationships. Consensus within early childhood settings about community membership can have the effect of ‘othering’ those that do not conform to these notions. They suggest that teachers hold power in this process and have the ability to divide and classify, and to coerce compliance.

### ***Summary***

The research reviewed in this section identifies how learning occurs through participation in workplace practices. Workplace research exploring the learning of novices has emphasised that broad access to workplace activities alongside more experienced workers and the support and acceptance offered by a workplace community are important. When routines and discourses within the workplace remain unquestioned, the possibilities of what can be learnt in the environment are restricted. In contrast, when participation within communities of practice is promoted, the learning of all members is supported. However, communities of practice can be difficult to sustain in modern workplaces and power relationships can impact on participatory processes.

When considering individual learning within workplace contexts, situated approaches often emphasise a close relationship between learning and the construction of identity (Billett & Somerville, 2004; Wenger, 1998). The next section examines this connection.

### **Learning and identity**

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the concept of identity is useful in understanding individual learning from a situated perspective. This concept shifts the focus away from individual learning as something disconnected from the social processes in which knowledge is actually constructed and used. Instead the concept of identity captures the lived experience of learning as that of a “person in the world, as a member of a sociocultural community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Drawing on research related to teacher education and workplace learning, connections between learning and identity are examined in this section. Identity has been a topic of interest in teacher education and the first part of this section reviews some key findings and implications of this research. Workplace research connecting negotiated identity with perceptions, motivation and agency in particular contexts is then discussed.

### ***Identity and learning to teach***

It is argued that learning to teach involves the construction of a professional identity and that a teacher’s individual identity shapes what they learn about teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In a review of research relating to the formation of teachers’ professional identity, Rodgers and Scott (2008) suggest that issues of identity in teaching have “taken centre stage, subsuming categories of belief, attitude, life history and personal narrative” (p. 732). They summarise four main conclusions that can be drawn: that identities are formed within multiple contexts and include individual responses to social, cultural, political and historical forces; that identities are formed in relationships with others; that identity is “shifting unstable and multiple” (p. 733) and finally that identity involves the construction of meaning through stories over time.

In another review of literature relating to teaching identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) conclude that identity is an organising concept that is present in the way teachers explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others and the world at large. Identity shapes teachers' decisions about where they place their effort, their commitment, and their obligations to their role.

[Identity] provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly teacher identity is not something that is fixed or imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (Sachs, 2005, in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178)

The impact of life histories and teachers' beliefs has also been recognised by other researchers (Cameron & Baker, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In a New Zealand review of research relating to learning to teach, Cameron and Baker (2004) cite an international review by Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998, in Cameron & Baker, 2004) reporting evidence that students' belief systems remain stable during teacher education programmes. In a three-year study of seventeen early childhood student teachers, Mitchell (2001, in Cameron & Baker, 2004) found that a student's experiences prior to teacher education, particularly those that occurred within families, formed stable belief systems that remained throughout the programme. Mitchell also found that students' beliefs were informed by theoretical perspectives presented in the teacher education programme, such as sociocultural and ecological theories and theories of learning through play. Her research suggests that theoretical components of a programme do contribute to teachers' beliefs about teaching.

A longitudinal study that considered the experiences of American student teachers found that the way that teachers themselves had been taught influenced their views about what sort of teacher they would like to be and how they would teach (Grossman et al., 1999). These students arrived into the programme with strong views that were formed during what Grossman et al. described as an "apprenticeship of observation" of the teacher role (p. 21). In their first year of teaching these preconceived views about the teaching role

influenced how they appropriated ideas about teaching and also influenced their teaching intentions.

### ***Identity and agency***

Wenger (1998) provides an explanation of the way in which negotiated identities within a community of practice become learning trajectories for newcomers. Wenger argues that a trajectory is not a “fixed course” (p. 154), but is a concept that connects past, present and future identity. Newcomers to a community of practice who join with the prospect of becoming full members of the community follow an “inbound trajectory” where their developing identity in the organisation is “invested in their future participation” (p. 154). A similar idea is expressed by Grossman et al. (1999), drawing on activity theory. They suggest that school cultures are infused with “ideas of personal and social futures that are promoted through ways in which cultural activity is structured” (p. 5). Wenger (1998) explains that when a community does not provide access for an individual or where an individual does not perceive their future within a community, they may follow a peripheral or outbound trajectory and therefore their goals for learning will be very different.

The interaction between negotiated identity and opportunities perceived in the workplace has been explored by Billett (2004) using the concept of affordance. The concept of affordance was developed by Eleanor Gibson (Gibson & Gibson, 1955). Gibson argued that learning cannot fundamentally change the stimuli we receive from our environment, but rather that we are able to differentiate more finely the stimuli we are receptive to. An affordance is an opportunity in the environment that is both present and perceived. Billett (2004) suggests that affordances within workplaces are linked to individual identity as this identity shapes individual perception of opportunity and agency within the workplace. Drawing from workplace examples, Eraut (2004) has modelled a similar interaction between individual and contextual factors that relate to workplace learning. He suggests that contextual factors include the allocation and structuring of work, relationships at work and the expectations of an individual’s role, performance and progress. Individual learning factors include individual perceptions of

the challenge and value of the work, feedback and support and individual confidence and commitment.

Drawing on examples from their research in workplaces of four different professions, Billett and Somerville (2004) suggest that individual processes of negotiating new identities as a result of changes in perception throughout working life are often overlooked as a driver of change within workplaces. Their research identified a strong link between developing identity and agency that has also been researched within teacher education. In an overview of literature relating to identity and teacher education, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) summarise research findings that suggest a heightened awareness of individual identity for teachers can lead to a strong sense of agency and desire to implement change in their practice. This view is supported in the literature review by Rodgers and Scott (2008), who conclude that the acknowledged relationship between teachers' learning and their developing identity carries "the implicit charge; that teachers should work towards an awareness of their identity and the contexts, relationships and emotions that shape them" (p. 733).

Taking another perspective on individual agency as a goal directed activity, Edwards (2006) suggests that a focus on supporting individual agency places "too much emphasis on individual action at the expense of responsibility to and for others" (p. 169). She presents the concept of relational agency as "a capacity to align one's thought and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems in practice and to respond to those interpretations" (p. 169). She suggests that a focus on relational agency has the potential to expand the possibilities that individuals see for themselves and others through expanding the resources available in a situation. Relational agency recognises the distributed knowledge that exists within groups and different groups of people and also links individual learning to the possibility of collective changes.

### ***Summary***

The concept of identity is complex but has been closely linked to learning in particular contexts. Identity is an important concept within teacher education. Past experiences,

existing world views and perceived futures shape what teachers take from teacher education and influence their intentions as teachers. The importance of identity is supported by wider workplace research which highlights that identities formed within workplace contexts shape the opportunities that are perceived. Importantly, teacher identity is associated with motivation and agency to make changes in practice. Edwards (2006) suggests that opportunities for change that are associated with individual agency are expanded when relational agency is considered.

### **Teacher Education – theory and practice**

Research has identified a problematic question about how effective initial teaching programmes are in relation to field-based experiences (Richardson, 1996, in Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998, in Korthagen, 2010) suggest that the impact of teacher education gets ‘washed out’ by practice experience. Grossman et al. (1999) draw attention to the fact that the ultimate goal of teacher education from a student’s perspective is to “assume the professional responsibilities of a teacher and to teach competently” (p. 24). They argue that it makes sense that students will adopt school values because, from an activity theory perspective, beginning teachers are motivated to fit in with existing structures.

A tension associated with teacher education programmes and student teacher practice experience is that teacher education programmes have an interest in educating teachers to develop new and innovative approaches to teaching. Spendlove, Howes and Wake (2010) argue that a classroom apprenticeship model of teacher education has long been viewed as problematic by teacher educators and that the one way movement from novice to expert is not desirable. They recall that Dewey argued in 1904 that reproduction of practice is not enough to enable teachers to develop reflective and enquiring approaches. Darling-Hammond (2006) describes the increasing diversity and complexity of educational contexts and the systemic difficulties in many school environments. She argues that if new teachers are to succeed in their role as teachers,

teacher educators must design programmes “that transform the kinds of settings in which novices learn to teach and later become teachers” (p. 302).

The following parts of this section review literature identifying issues arising from practice experiences in initial teacher education programmes. The review then turns to current perspectives and approaches that call for a greater alignment with teacher education and practice experience and some of the logistical concerns associated with this. The final part of this section identifies research literature relating particularly to field-based models of teacher education relevant to those common in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### ***Teaching practicum***

Research relating to practicum experiences in initial teacher education programmes has highlighted the conflicting goals and complexity of relationships in the practicum situations. From the perspective of teacher education, practicum is an opportunity for teachers to take a reflective and critical approach to their teaching practice, although research suggests that this opportunity is not always realised. A study by Haigh and Ward (2004) in New Zealand secondary schools suggested that students on practicum were neither given the opportunity nor demonstrated a desire to take risks and explore new approaches. In a recent British study, also investigating practicum experiences in secondary schools, Spendlove et al. (2010) point out that the objectives of teacher education and the school settings may be very different. They found that “teacher trainees occupy very different positions on the boundaries of the two communities of practice where they have to operate using concepts of critical and reflective pedagogy that are treated very differently in the two contexts” (p. 74). These findings are supported by research in New Zealand early childhood settings undertaken by Turnbull (2004, in Cameron & Baker, 2004). Drawing on semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries of six student teachers in one early childhood teacher education programme, and interviews with their visiting lecturers and mentor teachers, Turnbull found that alignment between the teacher education provider and the practicum settings was important for the success of students on practicum. Turnbull concluded that

students were more likely to demonstrate professional agency on practicum when there was alignment and communication between the teacher education programmes and the practicum settings.

### ***Closer relationships between theory and practice***

There have been calls for a closer relationship between the theory and practice components of teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen, 2010; Taguchi, 2008). Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that such teacher education programmes should engage more closely with schools in a “mutual transformation agenda” (p. 302) through addressing how knowledge of teaching actually shapes teaching practice. She suggests that powerful programmes of change in the United States require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire programme, examining and applying concepts and strategies they are simultaneously learning about in their courses. Darling-Hammond (2006) cites research evidence that novices who have experience in classrooms “are more prepared to make sense of the ideas that are addressed in their academic work and that student teachers see and understand both theory and practice differently” (p. 307).

Korthagen (2010) argues that teacher education can benefit from drawing on community of practice frameworks to support learning. He states that “teachers’ learning should be viewed as a process of participation in social practice, especially the social practice of schools” (p. 99). This focus suggests that teachers’ learning should be viewed not so much as change in conceptual knowledge, but a change in awareness where “the relationship between the person and the phenomenon has changed” (Korthagen, 2010, p. 101). Korthagen (2010) puts forward a model of teacher education that seeks to ground a teacher’s conceptual knowledge within practical experience. He suggests structured examples of practice that create opportunities for reflection in a professional community of practice so as to co-create new meanings.

Taguchi (2008) argues for a different relationship between theory and practice in teacher education. She argues that constructivist approaches encourage a making meaning

approach to understanding practice, while a poststructuralist approach suggests that all practice is materialised meaning. She challenges whether it is “possible to know what is theory and what is practice” (p. 54). She argues for teacher education to go beyond the theory/practice binary and support student teachers’ awareness that they are already ‘doing theory’ and that this can be “unpacked, investigated and reformulated” (p. 55).

Some North American researchers have evaluated the complexity of relationships involved in creating closer partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2006) and Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (2007) identify some of the practical challenges facing teacher education programmes. In an evaluation of an innovative American teacher education programme that formed close links with schools, Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (2007) concluded that school mentors needed to engage in collaborative learning and inquiry alongside the students and that this placed an extra demand on their role. Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (2007) describe the complexity of relationships involved in supporting this sort of programme and in attending to the learning of teacher educators, visiting tutors, and mentor teachers in schools, as well as those of student teachers.

### ***Field-based models of teacher education***

The final section of this chapter reviews the development of field-based approaches in Aotearoa New Zealand as a distinctive approach to teacher education and considers these developments in light of some successful international examples that support field-based models. The Ministry of Education (2011) identified seven field-based programmes and seven distance or flexibly delivered accredited early childhood education programmes. These programmes led to a degree or diploma in early childhood teaching. The growth of field-based teacher education has been described as a committed response to access, diversity and quality in early childhood education rather than an evidenced based approach to teacher education (Bell, 2004; Kane, 2005; The Working Party, 1988). Increasing recognition of the value of quality early childhood education, and activism within the childcare sector, have supported field-based training programmes as a means to lift standards within childcare settings (Bell, 2004). Bell

(2004) speaks of field-based teacher education making a difference within early childhood settings in local areas suggesting the direct application of theory to practice provides a practical and immediate benefit.

An assumed benefit of field-based programmes for students is the ability to make authentic links between theory and practice (Bell, 2004; The Working Party, 1988). It is argued that field-based teacher education creates ongoing opportunities for students to link theoretical knowledge to real situations in their workplace, and also to bring real knowledge to their education (Bell, 2004). However, Kane (2005) observed that in the New Zealand context, the “growth of philosophies and policies has been ahead of an empirical research base” (p. 237). There has been a recent interest in developing this research base and a number of small scale evaluative studies of programmes have been conducted (Howie & Hagan, 2010; McConnell, 2010; Murphy & Butcher, 2009). Common themes arising from these studies generally support common arguments for field-based programmes. In one study, Murphy and Butcher (2009) conducted an evaluation of a field-based programme using two focus group interviews of eleven students. Benefits reported by the students in this study were real opportunities to build relationships and to make links between learning and practice in a ‘safe’ place. In another study, McConnell (2010) analysed the perspectives of students, graduate students, lecturers and associate teachers of a field-based programme. The programme was perceived to facilitate a ‘dynamic knowing’, supported by authentic relationships (McConnell, 2010). In a recent study by Brennan, Everiss and Mara (in press) that focused on the teacher education classroom environment of one field-based programme, it was found that students regularly drew on practical experience to interpret ideas within theoretical discussions.

Ord (2010) went further in her doctoral study of student teachers’ ‘preparedness’ in a field-based and a pre-service on-campus teacher education programme, suggesting that field-based students “appeared to demand the content of teacher education programmes not be severed from contexts of use” (p. 219). Ord argued that both the field-based and pre-service teachers in her study desired to interpret knowledge from teacher education

in real teaching situations. In so doing, student teachers developed a sense of understanding (as opposed to simply knowing) and constructed their teacher identities. Ord reported that the field-based students in her study tended to talk about their development of understanding and did not perceive the divide between theory and practice that was expressed by pre-service teacher participants.

Some research conducted with the primary and secondary sector points to the benefits of field-based models of teacher education and makes recommendations for the success of these programmes. A study by Duquette (1997) of a year-long field-based teacher education course for postgraduate primary and secondary student teachers found that relationships between mentors and novice teachers were important for students' ability to have opportunities to explore and implement their beliefs about teaching. Duquette also identified the importance of a strong theory component, otherwise, "graduates would be left with a sense of procedures but with little grasp of what they were attempting to accomplish or why" (p. 269).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Ussher (2010) researched the experiences of nine students in a distance primary teacher education programme with a field-based requirement of one day a week. The students in his study all had prior relationships with their 'base' schools. Ussher found that students were able to develop relationships with many members of the school community beyond their immediate mentoring teacher. Students were able to interact with others as legitimate members of the community and these relationships contributed "positively to each student's learning and effectiveness as a teacher" (p. 114).

In an Australian study, Ferfolja (2008) reviewed research evidence suggesting that in hard to staff schools teachers will only stay if they are well prepared to face the complexities of the social context and have some empathy with the community of the school. Ferfolja (2008) described initial success of the Australian Classmates programme, which aimed to establish the fitness of students within hard to staff schools through the implementation of longer practicum components and the development of

partnerships with host schools. The students in this programme reported that they were able to make dynamic connections between theory and practice, and developed their legitimacy as teachers within the context. It was also reported that the professional relationships between students and mentors moved beyond novice and expert and students felt they were able to make a valuable contribution to the relationship (Ferfolja, 2008).

A small American study by Kroeger, Pech and Cope (2009) looked at the impact that early childhood students had on their school environment during the semester-long practicum component of their teacher education programme. The researchers conducted a survey of students and mentor teachers in conjunction with five joint interviews with students and their school mentors to investigate students' contributions to the classroom environment. They found that the discussions between student teachers and mentor teachers about behaviour guidance and individual children supported a positive learning atmosphere, revitalised professional discussions, and created a more responsive environment. Collaborative problem solving was the most valuable aspect of the relationship that was found to form between students and mentor teachers.

There is also some recognition of the complexities and tensions within field-based programmes. Bell (2004) acknowledges the role of student teachers, who as employees are already part of the status quo and part of a web of relationships. She suggests that the "capacity for change has already been contextualised by the student and this may be in conflict with the objectives of the programme" (Bell, 2004, p. 14). A similar point is made by McConnell (2010), who identified perceived tensions when students were seen by teacher educators as immersed in the practices of their centres and not open to change, or when students wanted to make change in ways that were not accepted by their centres. Findings from two other small scale studies of field-based teacher education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand (Howie & Hagan, 2010; O'Connell, 2010) found that students who were volunteers rather than paid employees within early childhood centres sometimes remained in peripheral positions and this inhibited their participation and, therefore, their learning in these environments.

### *Summary*

While practice experience is considered an important component of teacher education programmes, research suggests that goals of practice within these programmes and practice settings do not always align. There are arguments that effective programmes should be designed more closely around supporting students in the process of examining and constructing understandings through practice experience. An emerging research base in Aotearoa New Zealand suggests that field-based students benefit from being a legitimate member of a professional community and are able to interpret theoretical knowledge within authentic teaching situations. However, there are also indications that opportunities to learn from field-based experience may be restricted when students do not feel included or supported in their centre or when established centre cultures inhibit their capacity to change.

### **Chapter summary**

Theories of situated learning have important implications for understanding the interaction between learners and their social context. A common conclusion of the theories reviewed in this chapter is to regard learning as participation in social practice, suggesting also that the lens for understanding learning needs to encompass sociocultural activity. This has important implications for understanding the learning of early childhood student teachers employed in centres. Students' learning may be perceived as increasingly competent participation within their centre.

Two situated theories reviewed suggest useful frameworks for analysis of learning in early childhood centres. Activity theory provides an explanation of collective activity as a system with particular motives that shape the activities favoured in the workplace setting. Activity theory also suggests that changes to the system require collaborative activity. Community of practice provides a model of novice learning that has been compelling for researchers of workplace learning. In particular, the connection made between learning and identity emphasises that learning within a community of practice involves changing forms of membership.

Research within a range of workplaces has revealed features that are more likely to give rise to learning. Opportunity to participate in a range of practices with experienced members of the community is a key feature that provides both access to knowledge of practice and support and acceptance from the community. Studies of newly qualified teachers and field-based students are consistent with these workplace studies, suggesting that legitimate participation within a community of practice is a critical success factor in students learning within a field-based approach. This study seeks to provide further insights into the social processes within centres that support or constrain students' learning. It has been identified that the early childhood environment is closely negotiated and therefore further understanding of the impact this has on novice teachers is important.

This study explores the possibility of student teachers developing identities in their workplace. Studies of identity in both workplace and teacher education have emphasised that learning occurs through interested engagement. Within teacher education, identity has been identified as an important factor in what teachers pay attention to in their teaching. Identities are negotiated in particular contexts and shape individual perceptions of the opportunities which those contexts present. Learning to teach involves the development of a professional identity and this study examines the potential of field-based distance education for supporting identity development.

Field-based teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand is an emerging area of research. Studies of field-based teacher education have generally emphasised the links between theory and practice, but many studies do not identify how this occurs or how individual perspectives and social contexts shape how these links are made. This study explores these connections through actual examples of the contribution of teacher education to students' changing workplace participation. The methodology and methods used in the present study are discussed in the next chapter, which explains how the research design was influenced by situated theories of learning.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology and methods

This chapter outlines the research design and implementation. The chapter opens with a discussion of the theoretical perspective adopted for the study. This discussion leads to an outline of the research questions that focused the inquiry. Following this, the research process is described including participant recruitment, data collection methods, ethical considerations and data analysis. As a piece of qualitative research, the implementation of this data collection plan also had a story and this too is described.

#### Theoretical perspective

A sociocultural perspective underpins this study. This theoretical perspective has shaped the research questions, the selection of methods and analysis and reporting of data. The key assumptions of a sociocultural perspective have been introduced in the literature review in the previous chapter. A research approach consistent with a sociocultural perspective carries the assumption that knowledge is meaning constructed within social life (Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). It is through participation in social life that individuals come to know and attribute meaning to the world, and social life is in itself meaning constructed through historical processes of participation. The mutually constituting processes of individual and collective activity in the construction of knowledge suggest an approach to research that seeks to understand the activities of individuals and groups within their social and cultural contexts (Rogoff, 1995).

Rogoff (1995) argues that a focus on ‘activity’ or ‘events’ as a unit of analysis in research provides the opportunity to consider the individual and sociocultural environment as connected rather than separate elements. An individual is not seen as acting alone and apart from a social context. Instead their contributions, their companions’ contributions, and the cultural activity in which they are engaged are connected and part of a whole unified sociocultural activity. Rogoff and her colleagues explain:

Employing sociocultural activity as the unit of analysis allows us to see how cognitive processes extend across individual efforts, the participation of partners, and institutions and cultural traditions. (Rogoff et al., 2002, p. 269)

Consistent with a sociocultural perspective, this study considers participation in social practice as the unit of investigation. Students' learning in their workplace is examined as increasingly competent participation in social activity (Rogoff, 1995; Wenger, 1998). Investigating changes in participation allows individual perspectives, changes in relationships, and the valued practices of the settings to be explored as part of the same sociocultural activity.

### **Research questions**

The aim of this research is to understand the impact of distance teacher education on field-based students' participation in their workplace. The research questions guiding this investigation were designed to maintain a focus on participation in social practice as the unit of analysis.

***1. How does experience within a distance teacher education programme relate to students' changing participation in their workplace?***

This question seeks to understand students' perspectives on what they found interesting and useful in their teacher education programme and how new understandings led to changes in their workplace participation.

***2. What is the nature of changes in students' participation in their workplace over a trimester of study?***

This question aims to explore the context for students' learning by examining changes in their workplace participation. Foci of interest included the individual, social and institutional factors that were present in students' transformation of participation in their workplace.

### ***3. Do shifts in activity occur in the workplace as a result of changing student participation?***

This question aims to understand how the workplace responds to students' changing participation and also to explore the extent to which students' learning made a contribution to the shared social practice of their workplace.

## **Methodology**

### ***Interpretivism***

Consistent with a sociocultural perspective, this research takes an interpretive approach. Interpretivism is an approach to social research that also seeks to understand social life as meaningful action within social contexts (Crotty, 1998). The approach is often traced to the ideas of Max Weber, who argued that it is only through understanding human behaviour that we can explain it. Weber (1949, in Crotty, 1998) argued that broad social concepts of human interaction can only be formed through the systematic investigation of the understandable actions of individuals (Crotty, 1998).

Contemporary interpretive research seeks to understand local meanings through the perspectives of participants within their social settings. In educational research, an interpretive approach has contributed to a view of teaching that sees it as a “complex intellectual endeavour that unfolds in an equally complex sociocultural context” (Borko, Whitcomb & Byrnes, 2008, p. 1025). Borko et al. (2008) suggest that the localised findings of interpretive research have been useful in improving practice, informing policy and shaping theory development in the field of education.

### ***Case study***

Case study methodology is consistent with an interpretive approach. Case studies have been described as a “study of the particular” (Stake, 2003, p. 139) and are defined more by the focus on a particular instance of a phenomenon than any particular type of research method. Yin (2003) suggests that case studies are “particularly suited to

studying phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

The domain of interest in this study is the workplace learning of field-based students enrolled in a distance teacher education programme. The unique experiences of four students from one distance teacher education programme over a trimester of study are explored within their workplace context. The trimester timeframe was chosen to be long enough for students to engage in complete courses in their teacher education programme, but short enough to notice and explore specific stories of change as they occurred. In this way, it was hoped that examples of change in participation would occur and be identified. A single trimester also provided an achievable timeframe for the researcher to complete the project.

Because each student’s experience will represent a different ‘case’ of workplace learning, a multiple case study design is followed. The same approach to data collection and analysis is followed for each case. A multiple case study approach enables comparisons to be made between cases and while the number is still small, some replication logic can be applied (Yin, 2003). While case studies do not produce data that can be generalised, there is often an intention to connect the localness of findings to broader social narratives (Dressman, 2008). In this research, findings are interpreted within theories of situated learning, and wider research into workplace learning and teacher education. The findings are intended to be exploratory in order to contribute to the emerging research base for field-based teacher education and to identify areas worthy of further investigation.

## **Participants**

To support a multiple case study design, the research plan initially included the recruitment of three early childhood student teachers. Criteria were applied to the selection of possible participants to ensure that all students were actively engaged in both their early childhood centre and their teacher education programme. To qualify for selection, students needed to be working at least 20 hours in an early childhood setting

and needed to be enrolled in their third year of the programme. Initially, participants were selected from the Canterbury region of Aotearoa New Zealand. This area was chosen because it was well outside the area of the researcher's regional responsibility in the distance teacher education programme. There was a good student base in the area, as well as an accessible base for the researcher while conducting the face-to-face aspects of the research. Permission was obtained from the teacher education institution to use student enrolment records and work addresses for the purpose of identifying potential participants that met this criteria. Experience suggested that many students enrolled in the programme were working in early childhood centres. However, the flexible nature of the programme meant that student circumstances were more diverse than expected. Invitations to participate were sent initially to eight students.

Unfortunately, the timing of the first invitations to these participants coincided with the September Canterbury earthquake. Invitations were sent later than intended out of respect to these events and only two students expressed an interest. One follow-up email was sent but it was decided not to proceed with invitations in this geographical area. A new group of students was identified in two regions that were located closer to the researcher but still outside of the researcher's regional responsibility as a lecturer. The criteria were widened to include students in their second and third year of study. Sixteen invitations were sent in January, from which two students accepted. One of these students subsequently left her workplace so no longer fitted the criteria. On gaining a new position, she re-joined the study at the beginning of the data collection phase.

During this second round of invitations, participants were contacted by phone to check whether they had received the information. Their responses provided insights into reasons why some students chose not to participate. A number of students expressed anxiety at the workload requirements of their study as they entered their third year. Other students were not comfortable with their current relationships within their workplace and did not want the workplace to know they were involved in the study. On reflection, and in discussion with supervisors, the data collection methods were revised. Instead of interviews and observations proposed in the original invitations, students

were invited to participate in an interview only option. An interview only option reduced the opportunity to gather multiple forms of data, but still provided the opportunity to compare data across multiple interviews. A further group of students was identified. Two more students agreed to participate in the interview only option and one of these students subsequently agreed to the full study. In total, four students participated in the study, three for the full study and one for the interview only option.

The following profiles provide an introduction to the four student participants. The confidentiality of participants is protected through the use of pseudonyms chosen by the researcher with approval from the participants. An outline of the courses each student was enrolled in is provided in Appendix A. Definitions and Course Information.

### ***Mia***

Mia was a woman of Pākehā and Māori descent in her forties. She was in her second year of the teacher education course and was enrolled in three courses during the trimester. Mia worked in the under-twos section of a childcare centre owned by a parent co-operative. The centre was a converted house situated in a quiet, established suburban area. The under-twos section had a separate play room and outside area but was connected to the main centre though an open doorway with a small gate. She was employed as a permanent staff member and worked four days a week. While Mia had done some relieving before, this was her first permanent job in an early childhood setting. She had worked at the centre for eighteen months.

### ***Tui***

Tui was of Pākehā and Māori descent in her thirties. She was in her second year of the teacher education course and was taking two courses during the trimester. Tui was employed as a permanent staff member in an early childhood setting and worked four days a week. Tui had recently left a permanent position in an early childhood centre and began her new job three weeks before the start of the study. Tui's new centre was privately owned and was a modern and purpose-built building with a number of separate

rooms for different age groups. Tui worked in a room with children aged from fourteen to twenty-two months.

### ***Emma***

Emma was of Pākehā descent and in her twenties. She was in her third year of the teacher education course and enrolled in three papers. One paper involved a five-week practicum placement in a different early childhood centre from her workplace. Emma was employed in a community based centre situated in a multicultural, central suburb of a large city. The centre was an older, purpose-built building that had been adjusted to accommodate children under two years of age. The large main room had an area separated by a low partition for children under two. Children under two mixed with older children in other areas of the centre. Emma was employed as a permanent staff member and worked five days a week. Emma had done some prior relieving work and this was her first permanent position.

### ***Sushma***

Sushma was of Indian descent in her thirties. She was in her third year of the teacher education course and enrolled in three papers. Like Emma one of her papers included a five-week practicum placement. Sushma was employed in a centre that was one of a group of centres owned by a private company and was situated in a multicultural suburb of a large city. The centre was purpose-built with a separate infant/toddler section and pre-school section. Sushma worked in the pre-school section and relieved occasionally in the infant section. She was employed as a permanent staff member working five days a week. Sushma participated in the 'interview only' option for this study. Information about her centre was based solely on her descriptions.

### **Data collection**

The multiple case study design involved collection of different types of data, including observations and semi-structured interviews. Benzie, Mavers, Somekh & Cisneros-Cohernour (2005) suggest that using multiple data collection methods is suited to research that aims to make a holistic analysis of the shared histories, structures,

relationships, and identities within a community of practice, which enables different aspects of each case to be revealed.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews were chosen as the primary data gathering method. Three interviews were organised with the four student participants over the seventeen-week trimester. Qualitative, semi-structured interview schedules were developed. Qualitative interviews seek to understand internal experience and perceptions from the point of view of each individual participant by allowing them to explain things in their own way (Gomm, 2008). Semi-structured questions supported comparisons across cases but also gave flexibility to pursue unfolding topics and explore some ideas in more detail (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Half of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and half by a transcriber. All audio recordings were reviewed by the researcher and corrections made to transcriptions as required.

The first interview was conducted face-to-face at locations chosen by the students. These various locations were a workplace, in a student's home, in a library and in a conference room after one student had attended a face-to-face workshop in the programme. The purpose of these interviews was to establish a context for later interviews. Topics included students' current participation in their workplace and their impressions of the value of teacher education so far (refer Appendix B. Student Initial Interview).

Two subsequent interviews for each student occurred by phone. A basic structure for these interviews was followed (refer Appendix C. Student Follow up Interview Guide). Open-ended questions invited students to identify interesting aspects of their teacher education programme and describe changes in perception, intention or practice within their workplace that occurred as a result. When students described activities, I would check whether they considered the activity or interaction as 'new' and whether it would have happened if they had not been drawing on their teacher education knowledge or

experience. 'New' examples were identified as changes in participation. Changes discussed in one interview would be followed up in subsequent interviews.

Three centre managers were interviewed at the start of the study. Managers were viewed as key informants who had significant knowledge and influence in each workplace. The purpose of these interviews was to gain further insights into the culture and valued practices of each setting and also to understand managers' perspectives on having field-based students in the workplace. The practices of individual students were not discussed at these interviews (refer Appendix D. Manager Interview). One participant, Sushma, agreed to the interview only option for the study and was asked some additional questions about her centre building and environment, daily activities and valued practices.

### ***Observations***

Consistent with the focus on understanding learning as participation in social activity, observations in each context were seen as important for the embedded nature of individual and group processes to be observed together (Sawyer & Greeno, 2009). Five hours of observation were originally planned in each setting. However, participants were unable to be recruited in a single geographical area accessible to the researcher and not all participants agreed to this aspect of the study. Therefore, this aspect was reduced to a centre visit of between one and two hours for three of the four student participants. These visits were planned in conjunction with interviews with centre managers.

During these visits observations and impressions were recorded as field notes. The focus of interest included aspects such as the physical layout and artefacts in the environment such as notices, and rosters used by teachers to organise their work together. I also observed routines and interactions between staff. Due to the limited time spent on observations, the primary purpose of them was to corroborate descriptions of the centre culture and practices described in initial interviews with managers and students.

## **Data analysis**

Analysis of the data began with initial interviews with four student participants and, for three out of the four participants, interviews with managers and centre observations. I used Rogoff's (1995) foci of analysis to establish a picture of each student's sociocultural context and their current participation in it at the outset of the study.

After initial and follow up interviews, transcripts were analysed for activity themes. These themes were used to look for relationships between references to teacher education, students' personal interests and histories, and to workplace activities. I continued to organise these themes during the study with broad areas emerging such as 'play and learning' or 'cultural diversity'. After the completion of all three interviews the activity themes were used to identify connections between activities over time. These events were looked at in relation to my initial view of the sociocultural context. Changes in participation were incorporated with the initial analysis to create a story of change for each student. At the conclusion of the study these stories were shared with each student to verify my interpretation.

The stories emerged as rich and diverse examples of learning through participation in social practice. A thematic analysis was then applied across all case studies to identify important themes in relation to the research questions. The focus of these questions on participation in social practice meant that the orientation of the data collected lent itself to sociocultural explanations and key findings were mainly interpreted using theories of situated learning, although other possible explanations were also explored.

## ***Referencing system***

Each student interview was coded with their pseudonym and the interview number. The discussion within interviews was numbered according to each conversational turn. The following referencing system is used to report results: student name, interview number followed by turn number. For example (Emma2:24) would refer to Emma's second interview, statement 24. References to management interviews were also coded

according to the student followed by an M, for example (EmmaM: 32). Observations were coded as (EmmaOB).

## **Validity**

Triangulation of data was achieved in three cases by interviewing both students and managers and visiting centres to obtain information about centre contexts. In the fourth case study, the student was asked extra information about the centre, but the data could not be cross checked with the manager or via observations. Repeated student interviews enabled student perspectives and references to be compared and cross checked in all cases. These processes supported internal validity within each case study and supported recognition of contextual references within the students' interviews and emerging lines of questioning.

An important consideration of validity within this research was the use of qualitative interviewing. Gomm (2008) explains that qualitative interviews take place in a relationship and a context and this will always play a part in what is expressed. I was aware in the interviews that, while the line of questioning was different and the students were from a region other than my own, the student/lecturer relationship was still present. Students were open, but careful, with regard to negative comments about the teacher education programme or their centre's programme. I caught myself sometimes slipping into a supportive and affirming roll as a regional lecturer rather than maintaining a more objective role as an interviewer. However, over the course of three interviews, individual relationships and shared reference points developed in relation to the study, which supported open conversation and emerging lines of inquiry.

## **Ethical considerations**

In case study methodology, the researcher is a guest in a private world, enlisting participant confidence and sharing their personal views and circumstances. Stake (2003) advises that because of this, researchers must take extra care in the protection of human subjects. For this study it was important that my interest in workplace participation was

not viewed by participants as a study of workplace performance. This was achieved through maintaining clear objectives and roles throughout the research process, ensuring that the focus of the research was well explained, and that principles of consent and confidentiality were adhered to at the start and during the research process. Research information sheets were provided to students (refer Appendix G. Student Information Sheet) and to managers (refer Appendix H. Manager Information Sheet). All participants signed consent forms (refer Appendix I. Consent Form). Ongoing verbal consent from participants was maintained by restating the purpose of each new interview and being informed at the end of each interview about what I intended to do with the data. I ensured that each participant had no concerns about the process. Students reviewed initial transcripts and were given the opportunity to review further transcripts if they wished to.

Due to my role as a regional lecturer for the distance teacher education programme in which the students were enrolled, the issue of conflict of interest was carefully considered. Students were not taken from my regional cohort of students. I did not assess the academic work of student participants during the research process. The research did not disclose student identity or data to other staff or students of the institution. Furthermore, research data was not connected in any way with the students' status within the teacher education programme.

The three students who agreed to the full study gave their permission for me to approach their managers. Managers of these centres were sent an email invitation. They accepted being interviewed as part of the study and also gave permission to visit the centre.

Approval was gained from both the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (refer Appendix E. Human Ethics Application – Massey) and The Open Polytechnic Ethics Committee (refer Appendix F. Human Ethics Application – Open Polytechnic) to carry out the study.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter has introduced the research questions guiding this study. These questions have been developed using a sociocultural focus of participation in social practice as the unit of investigation. The case study methodology has been outlined. Four student participants have been introduced and the data collection process and qualitative analysis have been described. Important ethical issues arising from the case study methodology and the researcher's role as both lecturer and researcher have been carefully considered. The next chapter reports on the results emerging from the research process described here.



## CHAPTER 4

### Results

This chapter presents key themes arising from analysis of the interviews and observational data. The research questions directed attention towards understanding students' learning as a social process of increasingly competent participation in practice. These findings examine the social processes students engaged in that promoted learning rather than evaluating what they might have learnt. This focus reflects a key concern of research from a situated perspective that is identified by Grossman et al. (1999), in what circumstances do particular types of changes take place?

In each student's story, changes in their participation occurred as part of a dynamic interrelationship between their workplace cultures and activities, their engagement in teacher education, and their role and developing identity within their workplace. All of these aspects played a part in understanding the nature of students' learning during the trimester. The challenge in reporting these findings was to focus on different factors of interest present in each student's story as well as examining the interrelationships between factors.

The students are introduced as learners within their early childhood centres by drawing on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Next the contribution of teacher education to their participation in their workplace and their developing professional identities is explored. The diversity in the changes made by the students is then considered from the perspective of their workplace identity and the centre culture and negotiated activities. Finally, the contribution of the students' learning to the wider learning of their community is considered.

#### **Legitimate peripheral participation**

A key contribution of Lave and Wenger's (1991) explanations of workplace learning is the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation". The learning of novices is

supported within a community of practice through providing opportunities to participate in practice and to increasingly take on the responsibilities of full participation. Support and acceptance by the community and access to practice are important requirements for newcomers learning. The students in this study gave consistent descriptions of being legitimate participants within their centres. The following descriptions provide an outline of the formal and informal processes that supported the participation of these students in their centres.

The four students in this study were newcomers to early childhood teaching both in terms of their experience and their student status. Three students, Emma, Mia and Sushma, were employed in their first permanent position in an early childhood centre soon after they began their teacher education course. One student, Tui, had been employed as an unqualified teacher and was encouraged to enrol in teacher education by her centre manager. She had recently changed employment and so began her new role as a second year student in a recently established room for children aged 14-22 months.

The centres differed slightly in their formal recognition of the students' novice status. Both Emma and Mia were employed as teachers. Both worked in the under-two's sections of small community cooperatives, which were owned and managed by parents attending the centre. Tui, who was employed in a privately owned centre and Sushma, employed in the over-twos section of a centre that was part of a corporate chain, noted that their job titles reflected that they were student teachers. Tui felt that this was more related to pay and that her role was not distinguishable from other teachers in the centre. Sushma was aware of reduced responsibilities; she did not open or close the centre, or have the same requirements for documentation of children's learning. Sushma did note that this second point caused her to question, "Am I really good?" (Sushma2:25) but overall she did not find that these limited responsibilities inhibited her involvement in the centre day to day.

Studying towards a qualified teacher status and being an employee were both important aspects of the students' legitimate participation in their centres. From the perspective of

students and their managers, the students were first and foremost employees with roles to perform. Each student described participating in all rostered responsibilities alongside qualified staff, unqualified staff and other field-based students. The three managers that were interviewed expressed this expectation. Tui's manager explained that any students that worked in the centre in a paid or voluntary capacity were considered part of the team: "They're expected to have the same work ethic and practices as everybody here, they come to staff meetings, professional development, so there is no special treatment I suppose, for students" (TuiM:54). Emma's manager also indicated that "as part of the team they are expected to participate in the full life of the centre" (EmmaM:64). The students' rostered responsibilities varied depending on the age of the children, the centre programme and the number of staff in the centre. The following descriptions from Mia and Sushma provide an insight into a range of daily activities:

Well, because there's a lot of babies, there's a lot of bottles, nappies, sleeping, but because it's under-twos we do have older ones ... I'm the messy one, I like to have the paint and the water all outside. (Mia1:30)

I have non-contact too, yes one hour everyday to do the profile books. (Mia1:32)

I do inside jobs which are responsibilities like I do the lunches and setting up the lunches for the children and making sure they get the right lunchboxes and I take mat-times. If I'm inside teacher I get mat-time. ... when I'm outside I do the outside centre, outside jobs, looking after children and meeting the parents, talking to the parents. And when I'm rostered for nappies I'll do my nappy jobs .... and we have a floater who does the jobs like refilling the resources from the resource room. (Sushma1:36)

All the students explained that their work was carried out in collaboration with other teachers. This meant that they had access to close observation of the work of other teachers and negotiated their responsibilities on a daily basis. The following description from Tui describes the everyday negotiation that occurred in her room:

So that is always there that ... 'I'll just go out and tell such and such outside' and you know so that we all know what we are doing ... it's a really good communication because it's a small area we can open the window and say

hey ... I find that we do a lot of talking and our team leader is absolutely awesome at that. She'll go, right are you OK in here, I'll just go tell such and such and so communication's the big key for us on the day-to-day things. (Tui1:82)

Consistent with the findings of Aitken (2005), knowledge and experience within each student's centre did not exist as a hierarchy of responsibility. In every centre there was a manager or supervisor who was a fairly recent appointment and was implementing changes in the setting. Mia and Sushma indicated that this created some confusion and uncertainty in their centres during the trimester of the study. With the exception of those in Mia's centre, the staff in supervisory roles were quite recent graduates. The leader of Tui's room was still studying. Teaching teams included a mix of experienced but unqualified staff, student teachers and qualified staff. However, each student also expressed the feeling that they belonged to a core stable team where trusting relationships existed and they were able to contribute and seek support. All of the students gave similar descriptions of being in a team composed of different personalities who seemed to understand each other. Mia explained that in her room, "we all try to keep on the same page and they are very supportive in there, it's not so much out on the other side but in ... our little cluster" (Mia2:4). While some tensions inevitably existed within their teams, students generally perceived that they received emotional support and acknowledgement for their daily work. It appeared that through close daily practice shared understandings formed and students participated as legitimate members of these teams.

Being enrolled in a teaching qualification contributed to the students' legitimate participation in their centres. The managers interviewed expressed their vested interest in having additional qualified teachers in their setting. While no formal systems of support for the students' study were in place, informal systems were evident. The consistent language used by students across all centres indicated that students' experience of three-year teacher education was well understood by staff in their centre. Tui described the level of involvement in teacher education in her room:

Three of us are studying, we've got one that's on her last bit of papers ... then we've got one in year three and then I'm in year two. Then we've got a registered teacher, studying as well. (Tui2:35)

The experience of being in year one, two or three was shared with other field-based students or recent graduates within each setting. To the students, the qualified members of staff represented a future they could identify with; as Emma put it, “they’ve all done it, they’ve all been through my process to get where they are and I will be there too” (Emma1:127). Emma, Mia and Sushma had informal mentoring relationships with their supervisor or manager. All students mentioned that they sought advice about their assignments from recent graduates in their centre. Mia noted that “I can go anytime for assignments and stuff if I’m not quite sure, because sometimes it’s deciphering the questions” (Mia1:80).

### ***Summary***

The students provided similar descriptions of the collaborative and negotiated nature of their daily work which represented examples of successful situations of legitimate peripheral participation. They had access to a range of responsibilities and performed these tasks in situations of close interaction with more experienced staff. Daily practice had formed relationships that supported students in carrying out their work and in seeking advice and emotional support as they did so. The prospect of becoming qualified provided a time frame and a sense of progression towards ‘full’ membership that was recognised by both students and their centre community. The next section reports in more detail on the relationship between teacher education and the students’ increasingly competent participation in their workplace.

### **Theory and practice**

The dynamic connections field-based students make between theory and practice has been recognised in a number of studies (Bell, 2004; Howie & Hagan, 2010; McConnell, 2010). In the present study, students’ stories revealed experiences of drawing on theory to understand their work. This section reports on these experiences, exploring examples

where connections between theory and practice led to changes in their practice and the students' transformation of participation in their centre.

First the relationship between course knowledge and the students' understanding of practice is explored. This includes a focus on the experiences of second-year students Mia and Tui and how they related the content of one course to their workplace activity. Second we look further into the experience of Mia and Tui, exploring each student's unique engagement with course knowledge and their developing identity within their workplace.

### *Understanding practice*

Edwards (2005) explains a distinction between the treatment of knowledge in formal and informal learning settings. She suggests that 'knowledge about' often takes precedence in formal learning settings where information about a subject is separate from the experience of the subject. However, the learning encountered in activities of everyday life involves "trying to make sense and act appropriately within existing patterns of behaviour" (Edwards, 2005, p. 218). The experience of making sense of existing practice was expressed by all students as an important contribution of teacher education to their workplace learning. Tui described her experience as follows:

making sense of why we do things, that's been the hugest thing. Why do we have this policy, what is the point of that? Or Te Whāriki what's with that? So it makes sense. Why do we have theorists? And then when you see it in practice you go, oh! (Tui1:54)

Theories and 'the theorists' were identified as particularly valuable knowledge by all four students. As Emma explained, there are things that "you have a sense of but you don't quite understand until you really look into the theories" (Emma1:75).

In a recent doctoral study, Ord (2010) provides an in-depth exploration of the way in which field-based students in her study would 'see' theory occurring in daily activity and how new knowledge would illuminate previously unknown aspects of students' work. She uses the metaphor of 'lifting the veil' to capture the idea of revealing

something that was partially hidden. Ord's analysis is useful and very consistent with the description given by students in this study. The process of recognising knowledge in daily activity and opening new areas of interest not previously considered is explored through the experiences of Mia and Tui who related content from one of their courses during the trimester to their workplace practice. Within these examples it is possible to see how their new awareness was contextualised within their current activity. During the trimester both students completed a course that focused on mathematics, science and technology in the early childhood curriculum.

For Mia, researching information about mathematics made her more aware of children learning mathematical concepts in their everyday activity. Mia could see this "in the little things that children do all the time" (Mia 2:10). Mia reflected that this highlighted an opportunity in her current practice and as a result she was probably "putting more maths into things" (Mia2: 12). This was a matter of noticing opportunities as they occurred, as is illustrated in this example:

one of the new babies was lying right on the floor and we had one of the ... big abacus things where you push ... the beads, up the wire, and he was doing that and I thought "oh, there's a bit of maths". (Mia3:154)

Mia explained that she documented this event and highlighted the child's exploration of mathematical concepts in a narrative to share with the family. In this situation her new awareness appeared to fit easily into her everyday practices.

Tui took an interest in course information around ICT. This was an area of the curriculum that Tui had not previously thought about. She did not see opportunities to explore Information Communication Technology (ICT) promoted in the existing practices of her room and raised the issue with her team: "you know what, we just don't do it, why don't we?" (Tui2:22). Like Mia, Tui responded to her new awareness by considering new possibilities within her current practice. She described how she was sitting down with a camera and a boy came up to her: "I just said, do you want to take a photo?" (Tui2:22). She began to notice more opportunities to involve children in the use

of technology within the centre and documented examples of children using the digital camera to display and share with families. Tui put out old phones and keyboards for children to use in their play. Tui also became more aware of the way children modelled the activities of adults, explaining:

We will talk on our school phone and the kids will follow us talking on their phone. It's quite neat to me; it's quite a lot of development that you don't see. Or you don't see it unless you are looking for it. ... it's there, you just have to dig it out and encourage it. (Tui3:24)

In these examples, we see that Mia and Tui recognised knowledge from their course occurring in their daily activity and in this sense there was a 'lifting of the veil' as described by Ord (2010). As different aspects of children's learning became more visible, the students repositioned their approach to situations. New interactions with children took place, there were new conversations with staff, and a different analysis of children's learning appeared in narrative assessments. The impact of existing patterns of activity is also evident in the choices that Mia and Tui made. Digital cameras, dramatic play props, and narrative assessments were already part of their tools of daily teaching and were applied, as the situation fitted, to their new purpose.

The stories of all students in the study contained examples of teacher education course content creating a new awareness of aspects of their daily practice. In addition, making "better sense" of situations was strongly associated with descriptions of confidence. Overwhelmingly, students associated teacher education generally to greater feelings of confidence and initiative in their centre. For example, Mia explained "I feel I can understand more and feel that I can initiate things and do things, because I understand why I am doing it" (Mia1:200). Sushma felt she was able to participate in the shared understanding of other teachers, explaining "I get better ideas of what teachers are talking about and I can contribute to them" (Sushma1:48).

### *Emerging professional identity*

Each student drew quite selectively from teacher education course content during the trimester and particular interests emerged as significant to each student. Each student's

particular interests appeared in their references to teacher education, personal histories and workplace responsibilities and challenges. These references suggest a dynamic relationship between their interests and their developing professional identity. In this section we revisit the stories of Mia and Tui to explore the relationship between teacher education and their emerging professional identity. Mia's story highlights how her personal history and her developing professional identity in her centre led to particular interests and goals for her own learning. Tui's story illustrates how she drew selectively from past course content to meet the challenges she faced settling into a new centre.

During her studies Mia had taken a particular interest in understanding cultural diversity and this interest continued throughout the trimester. At each interview Mia discussed how she enjoyed learning about different families and cultures, touching on her interest in different ways. She reflected on her personal connection to the topic, explaining that there were important aspects of her own heritage that she wanted to know about. She explained that not knowing about her own cultural heritage: "makes it more important for the children we are looking after to know theirs" (Mia2:62). Mia highlighted aspects within her course material that she found interesting, commenting "there was quite a lot about thinking about different cultures" (Mia2:26) and noting "I'm quite enjoying that part" (Mia 2:44).

Within her workplace, interactions with families were a source of interest and challenge for Mia. Her workplace was run as a community cooperative that the manager described as very "family orientated" (MiaM:12) and Mia explained that "we do get to know the families quite well" (Mia1:102). Mia explained that talking to parents, especially when settling children, was an area that she felt unsure about and had sought guidance about from other staff. In other parts of our discussion Mia explained that she was becoming more confident in her interactions with parents and noted "I get more involved now, I talk to parents more" (Mia1:44). Mia's interest in becoming more competent in her interactions with families and her sense of satisfaction in doing so suggested that this was a skill that she saw as valuable and significant to her work as a teacher.

Mia discussed her interest in cultural diversity in relation to understanding the needs of different families. Mia expressed how learning about different cultural perspectives had encouraged her to reflect on her own views: “there are things that are important to them that I might not necessarily think of” (Mia2:42). Mia felt this understanding impacted on her interactions with parents, explaining that “I’ve definitely done a bit more um, listening...” (Mia2:50).

Mia’s interest in cultural diversity and her growing interest and confidence in talking to families seemed to converge and build into a consistent point of view, suggesting that this was a feature of Mia’s developing professional identity. Mia’s interest in cultural diversity motivated her to pay special attention to this topic in her course materials and heightened her awareness of her current knowledge and competence in relation to her interactions with families. A significant event during the trimester for Mia was finding an article in her course work about relationships with families and children’s sleep routines. Mia began our third interview by explaining:

I think I've been a bit more confident about talking to them about dropping off {their children} and a lot of it is from my readings {which} have been about settling and how to lead to, you know, and all that sort of stuff. So {we} had a new child come and visit it this week which was quite good and I was more confident about {it}. (Mia3:2)

Tui’s interest in her course work was very different to Mia’s. Tui revisited previous course work to meet the challenges of her new centre. Tui described how in her first weeks in her new centre, she had gone back to her human development text books to understand more about the needs of the new and younger age group she was now working with. Tui described how she approached her research with confidence:

What I found was I could actually go back to my books and go, there it is there, you know you don’t have to go ... where do I look what do I do? Cause I knew. (Tui1:54)

Revisiting knowledge from her text books that now seemed understandable and familiar supported Tui's belief in her own competence and ability to make sense of and respond to the new situations she was facing.

In her new centre Tui perceived a culture that was very different from her previous workplace. In this context she felt that being knowledgeable was important and the skills she had developed in organising information and researching new topics were useful. She described the culture of her centre as "professional but warm and supportive" (Tui1:40). Tui explained that "in the new centre your opinion is valued, or proof is valued and yeah they will listen to you" (Tui1:60). Tui enjoyed the collaborative approach to decision making she experienced. She described a situation where she collaborated with other staff to find strategies to respond to the behaviour of a child in the centre. Tui explained that when this situation occurred she reviewed her child development theories to understand what was happening and through her participation in this process was also motivated to do some independent investigation:

I was like "oh it's really valued, ... And it's made me, myself, research it a bit so I've just gone on to Child Space and ordered a book about behaviour and stuff like that and, just to look a little bit further into it yeah. (Tui2:12)

Tui added that her confidence to research further could be attributed to skills she had learnt through engaging in academic study:

I did the study, the study skills. That little extra workshop thing on the internet and what I got from that is researching and preparing and things like that. So I've found that has been quite handy in this situation. Just sort of like breaking it down and how to do things. (Tui2:12)

Tui knew where to find relevant and useful information relating to children's behaviour. The response of other staff to Tui's contribution encouraged her to look for further information on this topic. During the trimester Tui described other discussions with staff that prompted her to go back over things. She also described how she organised interesting articles that she collected into topic areas in a folder which she could draw

upon when needed. Tui's growing body of knowledge and her confidence as a learner contributed to her confidence to be involved in the life of her new centre.

### ***Summary***

For all the students, knowledge from teacher education made an important contribution to the way they understood their workplace. Examples from the stories of Tui and Mia illustrate how new knowledge created a new awareness within daily situations in their workplace and opened up new possibilities for action. All students emphasised that having knowledge was associated with feelings of confidence. What they viewed as valuable knowledge was related to each student's emerging professional identity. Like Mia and Tui, each student found areas of knowledge in their course work particularly relevant and interesting. They discussed this in relation to the interests and challenges they faced in their workplace during the trimester. Whereas teacher education contributed to the students' developing professional identity, it did not always result in changes in participation. The following section explores the actual changes that students negotiated within their workplaces.

### **Changing participation in the workplace**

This section explores more closely the changes in participation that the students made in the context of the existing relationships and practices of their centre. Broadly their changes in participation during the trimester involved seeing existing situations differently and being willing and able to negotiate changes with others. The contrasting case studies of year three students, Emma and Sushma, are drawn upon to illustrate the way in which individual identity and centre activities impacted on their changes in participation during the trimester. Sushma was aware of making many small changes in her practice during the trimester and described taking more initiative within her daily interactions with others. In contrast, Emma was aware of becoming more confident and assured in her identity as a teacher of children under the age of two, but did not describe many changes in her practice.

Eraut (2004) notes that much learning that occurs in social settings is tacit and embodied in practice experience, and therefore learners may be aware of a general development but not be conscious of specific changes occurring. This issue was apparent in some of the students' passing comments. For example, Sushma began to do parent interviews for the first time and Emma was asked to complete documentation for a centre review of meal times. Neither student recognised these as significant changes in their participation until they were highlighted by the researcher. The changes that are explored in this section are those which students connected to teacher education experiences and which were conscious activities that they were aware of and able to describe, rather than those that might have been obvious to an outside observer.

### ***Workplace trajectories***

Wenger (1998) argues that changes in participation involve new ways of belonging to a community and changes in negotiated identity. The negotiation of identity within a community of practice creates a learning trajectory for an individual within their community. Trajectories shape individuals' participation in the present. The concept of learning trajectories is used in this section as an explanation of why Sushma saw new opportunities and was motivated and aware of making changes during the trimester while Emma was more comfortable with her current practice.

Amongst the student participants in this study, Sushma appeared most aware of being a learner in her centre. She was the only unqualified teacher in her room. She had been employed in the centre after completing a practicum placement and one staff member had previously acted as a mentor teacher for her practicum placement. Sushma perceived that the qualified staff in her centre were more professional and she explained that there were some things "they know and do in a better way" (Sushma1:158). Sushma was also more aware than other students that she had reduced responsibilities. While she participated in the teaching roster, she explained that she tended not to talk to parents as much, and did not have the same responsibilities as qualified teachers for documenting children's learning.

Sushma was also aware that her beliefs about learning and teaching were changing. An important change that Sushma emphasised was the value of learning through play, as she explained:

It's so different to understand, being a parent, how play is helpful to children. So when my daughter used to go to kindergarten I never used to understand why the sandpit is important to their play. (Sushma1:54)

Sushma explained that understanding theories about play and learning had helped her to interpret the play-based programme in her centre. She explained that it helped her to understand what the teachers were trying to do, and why different resources were provided.

Sushma's participation could be defined by what Wenger (1998) terms an 'inbound' trajectory. In many ways her participation was peripheral; this was apparent in her awareness that her understanding of centre practices and her confidence in interactions with other staff were in the process of development. However, Sushma was also an interested and committed member of the centre who was becoming more aware of opportunities to participate more fully. During the trimester Sushma became more confident in her ability to promote learning through play activities and described many changes happening in her practice. In Sushma's busy centre that catered for children from two-to-five-years, organising play activities was a legitimate part of her role. As we saw in the stories of Tui and Mia, Sushma also had scope to approach situations differently within the flow of negotiation throughout the day.

Many changes that Sushma discussed were inspired by a five-week practicum placement she attended early in the trimester. The placement was in a kindergarten attended by children aged three to five. Sushma particularly described how she participated in activities and collected resources that gave her new ideas for "making learning a valued thing" (Sushma1:106). She completed her own project that focused on promoting mathematical concepts through every day activities such as cooking.

For Sushma, her practicum experience opened up new territory for thinking about interactions with children in her own centre. She began to pay more attention to talking to children about their drawings. She made changes to her documentation in order to “connect their play to meaningful learning” (Sushma2:53). Sushma also took on the task of making the weekly playdough. She had never used the centre recipe for making playdough, but felt confident to use the recipe she had successfully used with children on her practicum placement. Over the trimester this became a regular event for Sushma, as she explained:

It's my thing and the children know ... they come to help me. Now it's more teaching with the measurements ... all the age groups get involved in the measuring and teaching them mathematics and showing them how many spoons, what is half. (Sushma3:64)

These changes were all confidently negotiated within Sushma’s daily practice. Her new initiatives impacted positively on her relationships in her centre. Sushma recognised that as a result of her changes she was more “hands on” and “children are feeling more comfortable with me” (Sushma2:63). She felt that staff also noticed “they see that I am sharing the ideas, bringing new things to the centre” (Sushma2:69). Changes in participation changed Sushma’s perception of the things she is good at and the things she likes to do. Sushma also perceived that these changes were noticed by others and recognised as competence. These changes in participation can be understood as part of Sushma’s on-going construction of her identity within her centre. She explained:

so something is different because, I was usually standing behind and see what the other teachers do and support them, but now {I am} taking the responsibility to really, like, to do it. (Sushma3:34)

Relative to the other participants in this study, Emma discussed making fewer changes in her practice during the trimester. Emma also described her participation in her centre with a greater sense of confidence than the other three students. In many ways her participation reflected Wenger’s (1998) description of an identity on an ‘insider trajectory’. That is, while it was still being negotiated in practice on a daily basis, it was not infused with the recognition that there were things to be understood and challenges

to be faced in order to participate competently. In Emma's case, her insider trajectory did not mean that she necessarily had influence over others, but that she felt competent in the relationships and responsibilities of her daily work. She appeared less aware of not knowing what she didn't know than other students in this study.

Emma was the youngest student in this study and her current position was her first full-time job. Emma had joined a small and cohesive team with an influential manager. As Emma explained: "we all just work together, programme planning and profiles and everything" (Emma1:16). In the two years that Emma had worked at the centre, she had become very familiar with the centre practice. There was a lot of alignment in the stories both the manager and Emma told about centre activities in our initial interviews. Both described in similar detail the Pikler philosophy (Pikler/Lóczy Fund USA, 2010) followed in the centre and recent changes in planning approaches. In addition to her teaching role, Emma had elected to take on other responsibilities in the centre. For example, she acted as staff liaison at parent co-operative meetings and had joined a special project subcommittee. She confidently took responsibility for organising trips, putting up displays, and running a transition to school group. One area of her practice she felt defined her as a competent teacher was her understanding of respectful interactions with children. This understanding related to her strong interest in the Pikler philosophy, which she talked about a lot in the interviews.

Generally, there appeared to be an absence of tentativeness or of challenge in Emma's understanding of her daily work during the trimester. When Emma moved from an over-tvos responsibility back into an under-tvos responsibility which she had previously held, she simply noted "I had come to a position in the over-tvos where I would have needed to branch out a lot more" (Emma3:66). Emma did not explain at this point what further changes she might have explored or why she felt she was not extending herself in her practice. This was not followed up during that interview and hindsight suggests that this would have provided useful insights into Emma's contrasting experience.

During the trimester Emma tended to emphasise an alignment between her personal values, teacher education experiences and valued centre practices. Emma recognised that her interest in the Pikler approach was influenced by her work experience, but also expressed her personal affinity with it:

I find it's one of those theories that, I mean some theories are just so obvious it almost seems like ... you know ... of course you are going to be respectful to children, and the theory just brings it out a lot stronger. (Emma2:24)

During the trimester, Emma investigated her professional philosophy of teaching and looked in more depth at the Pikler approach alongside other theories. When Emma attended her five-week practicum placement during the trimester, it was significant that the first thing she chose to discuss about this experience was that her associate teacher had connected Emma's slow and respectful style of teaching, which reflected the Pikler approach, to her experience working with under-twos.

Like the other participants, Emma perceived that teacher education had helped her to understand her workplace better. She was aware that her practice had changed, explaining "there are situations I have looked at, I've reflected on even first year or before when I was relieving it's like wow, did I really do that?" (Emma1:75). However, where other students in this study indicated that their beliefs about teaching had changed as a result of teacher education and their workplace experience, for Emma it seemed that her beliefs about teaching had substantially formed during this time. It was notable that the other students made reference to having prior beliefs about teaching, particularly those in relation to being a parent. Tui noted that in "so many things I've read and learnt and discovered, I wished I'd known before I had children" (Tui1:54). Emma appeared to have more easily adopted her beliefs about teaching in relation to her experience of practice in her centre. Other students were quite aware that they were learning and still constructing their teaching identity, but Emma seemed comfortable on both these counts and during the trimester of this study was in the process of consolidating her identity as a respectful teacher with a particular interest in pedagogy for under-twos.

### *Negotiating changes in practice*

The stories of students presented so far show that changes in participation arising directly from teacher education were implemented in areas where students had some autonomy and responsibility. It is also clear how the students' interests during the trimester tended to align with valued centre practices. This alignment was present in the language used by managers and students to describe the cultural features of their setting in initial interviews and the emergence of changes in participation as a theme in each student's stories.

The students spoke with confidence about changes in practice during the trimester that reflected areas of interest and challenge within each student's legitimate roles and were aligned to valued practices within the setting. However, their learning also prompted some changes in perception that did not match current priorities and patterns of activity; in these cases the students found it more difficult to see a course of action to follow.

The confidence with which Sushma made changes in her activities and interactions with children can be contrasted with the more tentative initiative she took in another area that was not so clearly represented in the daily activities of the centre. During the trimester Sushma completed an assignment that required her to develop her personal teaching philosophy. She explained that she became more aware of how her personal and religious beliefs impacted on values she wanted to promote in her teaching practice. Sushma felt that "every child is special and unique and their contribution gives value to the centre" (Sushma2:71). She was thinking about ways to acknowledge the diversity of cultures represented in the centre.

When asked what she was planning to do with her new insight, Sushma explained she was not sure and was still thinking. Her initial ideas involved a whole centre initiative, perhaps a cultural day. She wanted to discuss this with other staff to see what they thought, and perhaps get feedback from families as well. Sushma explained that she would talk individually with staff rather than in a group situation. At the third interview, she explained that she had approached staff "just casually" and decided that

there were too many changes happening in the centre at that point and that she would wait for the right time.

While this represents a small interaction, or the initial stages of an interest that Sushma might continue to develop, it is important to consider why one idea can take hold and another does not. In contrast to the opportunities Sushma perceived to support children's play, she was having trouble seeing how insights regarding cultural diversity might lead to changes in her practice. She also did not feel she had the influence to enlist support in the centre. She was uncertain about her idea and tentative in her approach to bringing this up with other staff. The conversations she initiated did not appear to link with any current discourses or initiatives and got lost in the everyday concerns of the centre. While Sushma did not feel able to act with agency in this situation, the pathways she saw as available in her legitimate daily activities were highlighted in a further comment she made:

{it} just made me think that I could talk to children more about their ethnicity, their culture, where they come from and sharing with them ... so now I do talk to the children and share my experiences when I was a child and what I did ... what we do in India. (Sushma3:12)

Sushma was able to explore her commitment to making cultural diversity a more visible part of the centre as part of legitimate daily interactions with children, even though she did not appear confident to do this at a centre level.

While Emma's objectives appeared to align closely with those of her centre there were also indications that she had interests that she did not develop because they were not supported in her workplace. Because Emma's idea did not take hold, it represented quite a small incident within our discussions, as in Sushma's situation. Emma explained that she loved dance. On her practicum placement and a previous placement she had planned dance activities. She explained, "they said, you know, do you want to bring anything in to do and obviously I've thought, ok I'll bring in my dance stuff" (Emma2:44) and went on to say that "when you go back into a student role you kind of remember and you think about all those things you can do" (Emma2:44). She resolved that it was definitely

something she wanted to do more of when she returned to her centre because it was something she was passionate about.

On return to her own centre Emma brought back photos and offered to bring her dance activities in for the over-tuos team. She explained that they were more than happy but were quite “focus driven at the moment” (Emma3:44). As we explored this further, Emma explained that she had suggested activities and trips related to dance in the past and had “just kind of been shut down” with staff explaining that it was “not our focus at the moment” (Emma3:44).

### ***Summary***

The contrasting stories of Emma and Sushma illustrate the impact of workplace identity on the opportunities students in this study saw to make change in their workplace. It seemed that those students who were aware of making a number of changes in the practice were also on an inbound trajectory in their workplace. They were aware of developing confidence and they were renegotiating their relationships within the centre community. Students’ interests when making changes in their workplace were aligned with the values of the centre and were in areas where they had some autonomy and responsibility. This section has highlighted the students’ negotiated participation in existing centre activities. The next section considers their contribution to the on-going development of practices within their centres.

### **Making a contribution**

All students in this study demonstrated a desire to share their learning with others. This was particularly evident when learning had seemed especially significant or useful.

When Mia found an article about partnerships with families and children’s sleep routines, she brought it in to the centre for her team to read. She also shared the article with a parent who was finding the transition to childcare difficult. Mia felt that this had helped her relationship with the parent explaining, “she’d come and talk to me about it and so it’s been much better, for her and her wee girl” (Mia3:42).

Tui shared her new awareness of incorporating ICT within the programme with staff, and, like Mia, also responded to an issue within the centre by bringing in an article to share in response to problem solving discussion within her team. The team was discussing some of the challenges they were facing in supporting children's positive behaviour and whether anyone had any information that would help. Tui's article served as the focus of shared understanding in the discussion that followed, and as Tui described "it was quite neat to be able to bounce things off each other and quite funny because we were all going yeah, yeah" (Tui3:34).

An important example of Emma's changing participation occurred when she initiated a conversation with her supervisor about the theoretical approaches underpinning their programme. After Emma had developed her teaching philosophy and presented it at a course workshop, she brought it into a discussion with her supervisor. Emma and her supervisor discussed how the Pikler philosophy was reflected in their daily programme and Emma explained that:

because we were looking at it, and talking about which other theorists we bring in ... and I kind of brought out my philosophy then and said to her this is what I ... this is how I teach and we kind of saw how similar to our ... how we wanted the centre philosophy of our under-twos to be. (Emma3:12)

Emma's insight that they could not be "completely RIE-Pikler" (Emma3:26) because of other assumptions present in different aspects of their daily programme was responded to with interest by her supervisor and resulted in a further professional discussion about how their programme reflected major theories of learning and development.

### ***Learning communities***

Collaborative changes that were occurring within their early childhood centres provided the students with additional opportunities for learning. Every student's story contained examples of their support for collaborative changes already occurring in their centre. It appeared that these students' dispositions as learners meant that they were very receptive to shared initiatives, sought to make sense of them and sometimes demonstrated agency in these change processes.

Sushma was an active supporter of the mat-time approach implemented by the supervisor and was taking increasing responsibilities for running mat-times during the trimester. Tui's supervisor encouraged her to set up a fun incentive system to encourage staff to use more te reo Māori in their rooms. Both Emma and Mia had attended group professional development about the RIE/Pikler approach of teaching. The professional development had had an impact on both students' practice and both students described taking a leadership role in coordinating changes in their centres. Mia took initiative in her team and persuaded other teachers to try changes to the lunch time routines. Emma explained that her centre had wanted to change their plastic cups and plates to glass and crockery. At an earlier practicum placement, Emma had experienced meal times with glass and crockery. Emma said: "I took photos and displayed them, I showed everybody" (Emma1:113). Emma explained that it was a "gradual change that I helped initiate and now I'm redoing the self-review ... which is my first self-review which is pretty scary" (Emma1:113).

Mia described how her growing knowledge and developing confidence enabled her to speak up when tensions occurred within her centre. In the situation described, she was able to influence wider changes within the centre. During the trimester, the pressures felt by the under-two team in Mia's centre as they coped with settling small babies became a source of tension within the wider centre. Their focus on transitions for babies coming in to the centre spilled over into tensions about the transitions of older toddlers to the over-twos section. After coming under criticism at a staff meeting, Mia and her team organised to present their views on transitions at the next staff meeting. Mia felt it was a team approach, but added "I am learning" (Mia2:102), suggesting that she felt confident about her participation. Mia and her team raised their concerns about transitions at the meeting and the manager of the centre responded by spending more time in their room and seeing their current challenges first hand. During this time, Mia had raised with her manager the general lack of clarity around children's transitions and as a result the manager initiated a review of their transitions policy. Mia explained "everybody's doing it, the whole place" (Mia3:188). Mia attributed her sense of agency in responding to the tensions in her centre to her growing knowledge base and confidence within her team.

She explained “having a bit more knowledge makes you much more confident about you know, saying something” (Mia3:210).

### *Summary*

The students’ stories included examples where they shared new learning. This could be seen as their contribution to the on-going process of maintaining shared understandings within their close teaching teams. When the centres were engaged in collaborative learning, this created new opportunities for students as well. Mia’s developing confidence enabled her to play an active role in the problem solving processes occurring in her centre during the trimester.

### **Chapter summary**

In this chapter the learning of the four student participants in this study has been examined as situated within the sociocultural activity of their workplace. There was consistency in the students’ descriptions of legitimate peripheral participation. Their work in centres was organised so that they had broad access to practice and were accepted within a negotiated team environment.

Teacher education contributed to the students’ understanding of their daily work and was closely related to it. The knowledge derived from teacher education that they found useful and also the resultant changes they made in their work were influenced by the values of their workplaces and the challenges they met during the trimester. In other words, the knowledge that they perceived as important and interesting was related to what was important and interesting in their work.

Having confidence was an important outcome of teacher education for the students that went beyond the use of certain items of knowledge, to more general feelings of belonging, competence and agency. Their developing identities in relation to their community of practice was revealed as an important explanation of their motivation to make changes and the direction of their interests and energies. Students who were on inbound trajectories saw more opportunities to make changes in their practice. The

negotiated nature of their work was reflected in the fact that the changes described were in areas where they had some responsibility and were able to align with the existing culture and practices of their centre. There was evidence that not all students' ideas could be negotiated in the absence of such alignment. The students' stories illustrated examples where their changing participation occurred as part of, and made a contribution to, the on-going development of the sociocultural activity of their centre.

The findings of this study reflect many themes prevalent in studies of teacher education and workplace learning. The main significance of these findings lies in their local meaning and insights into circumstances specific to field-based and distance teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. A discussion of how these findings relate to the existing literature and the implications for distance and field-based teacher education are considered in the next chapter, along with implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The findings reported in Chapter 4 revealed, through the stories of four student participants, the diverse and situated nature of their experiences. Common aspects of their experience arising from the relationships between teacher education and workplace experience were explored. In this chapter, key themes are drawn out and analysed in further depth and their significance is considered in the light of wider research and local implications for field-based teacher education.

The discussion is structured around the three key research questions. The questions were:

- How does experience within a distance teacher education programme relate to students' changing participation in their workplace?
- What is the nature of changes in students' participation in their workplace over a trimester of study?
- Do shifts in activity occur in the workplace as a result of changing student participation?

This chapter begins with the relationship between knowledge from teacher education and the transformation of the students' participation in their workplace. The second part discusses the situated nature of the students' learning, exploring further the nature of changes that they made in their workplace participation during the trimester. The final part considers the students' participation as a process of contributing to the on-going development of practices in their centres. Implications for distance and field-based teacher education and early childhood centres are considered throughout the discussion.

## **Teacher education and workplace participation**

Studies of field-based teacher education often gain students' perspectives of practice experience as a contribution to their experience of teacher education. For example, a number of studies identify that students benefit from becoming part of the social practice of schools and early childhood settings (Ferjola, 2008; Howie & Hagan, 2010; Korthagen, 2010; O'Connell, 2010; Ussher, 2010). In a study by Ferjola (2008), students reported that extended practice experience enabled them to feel like real teachers. In this study, discussing teacher education knowledge in relation to workplace participation provided a different perspective of teacher education and practice experience. For the students in this study, who were employees in their workplace, practice was a constant daily activity and it was knowledge from teacher education that made them feel more like a teacher. Having knowledge was associated with their descriptions of increased confidence and initiative within their teaching teams. They came to understand their role as more complex and to perceive themselves as more competent.

The perspectives of the students in this study affirm the importance and effectiveness of theories of learning and teaching as a core part of a field-based early childhood teacher education programme. Theory was valued by each student in this study and made a difference to the way they perceived and approached their work. Their perspectives reflect the conclusions of Duquette (1997) that theoretical knowledge provides students with an important sense of what they were trying to accomplish and why. Access to professional knowledge through teacher education expanded possibilities for their 'on-the-job' learning by enabling them to make sense of their daily work in ways that did not emerge simply out of interactions with more experienced members of their community of practice (Fuller et al., 2005). Consistent with the findings of Mitchell (2001), it appeared that the students' beliefs and practices about teaching were increasingly informed by theoretical perspectives presented in their teacher education programme.

For the students in the present study, having knowledge strongly equated to having confidence. They discussed their growth in confidence both in general terms and in relation to particular changes during the trimester. Eraut (2004) identified that the connection between confidence and learning took on overwhelming importance in his interviews with both novices and experienced workers from a range of professions. Eraut concluded that confidence was an important outcome and condition of workplace learning. This was also evident for the students in this study. Having professional knowledge led to more confident participation that opened up new opportunities for learning. Greater participation was also accompanied by descriptions of increased confidence and commitment within their work. In descriptions given by Tui and Mia this commitment was also accompanied by an expressed desire to learn more.

Overall it can be argued that for students in this study, distance teacher education made a positive difference to their workplace participation in relation to their interest, initiative, and confidence in their daily work. The perspectives of student participants in this study have also enabled an exploration of the nature of students learning and the interrelationship of theory and practice within field-based teacher education programmes.

The findings of this study support research suggesting that student teachers who undertake teacher education course work concurrently with practice experience understand both theory and practice differently from those who engage in short blocks of practice in pre-service programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ord, 2010). Leading researchers in the area of teacher education have argued for more attention to the relationship between theory and practice components of teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen, 2010; Taguchi, 2008). Korthagen (2010) explains that teachers' learning is not about changes in conceptual knowledge, but changes in awareness in teaching situations. Findings from field-based studies have suggested changes in awareness occur when theoretical knowledge meets situations in practice in which they take on meaning (Ord, 2010; McConnell, 2010). Consistent with the descriptions provided by field-based students in studies by Ord (2010) and

McConnell (2010), students in this study expressed changes in awareness in terms of 'seeing', 'making sense' and 'understanding' aspects of their work.

With an emphasis on students' changing participation, this study revealed examples of the dynamic connections students made between theory and practice, as well as the situated nature of their learning. For Mia and Tui, completing assignments and attending a workshop about mathematics and ICT raised their awareness of curriculum content and considerations in these areas. They described acting on this awareness when a situation arose in practice. Both students also described examples where particular challenges they were facing in their workplace prompted them to take an interest in particular course content. When Mia found an article about responding to the needs of children and families with regard to infants' transition to the centre, her changes in practice took shape, not as particular strategies, but as a more attentive, confident and reassuring interest in her interactions with families. In Sushma's situation, changes in awareness came about through concrete experiences during her practicum placement. Sometimes knowledge from courses was accommodated into existing understandings and practice. This was most clearly evident in Emma's descriptions. The students' stories particularly highlighted the diverse and selective nature of their interests in teacher education course content.

This study suggests that different delivery modes of field-based teacher education have a broadly similar impact on students' experience of linking theory and practice. Howie and Hagan (2010) identified the value "of an on-going, weekly reciprocity between theory and practice" (p. 8) that occurred for students moving between centres and the field-based programme classrooms in one teacher education programme. The present study has emphasised that distance students engaging with written materials and less regular face-to-face teaching situations still experienced a similar to and fro relationship between theory and practice. This study has emphasised that the motivation to make connections between theory and practice is part of students' engaged interest and commitment to making a contribution within their workplace. These findings, along with other studies of early childhood teacher education (Howie & Hagan, 2010; Murphy

& Butcher, 2009; O'Connell, 2010) suggest that students are able to connect and engage with teacher education through different delivery methods. Furthermore, the findings support the suggestion of Kane (2005) that a comparative study of field-based delivery methods and pedagogies would be a useful addition to understanding what really makes a difference for field-based student learning.

### **The situated nature of students' learning**

Situated theorists emphasise the interrelationship between individuals and the social world (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995). Edwards (2005, p. 59) suggests that viewing learning as participation in social practice demands simultaneous examination of “(1) how learners interpret and act on their worlds and (2) the opportunities afforded to them for those interpretations and actions”. In the present study, conversations with students about change in workplace participation foregrounded the situated nature of their thought and action during the trimester. This was arguably not a result of the influence of the social environment, but more a feature of the students' participation in the social environment. Changes in their participation involved changes in their *perception* of existing activity in their centre and making changes to their *involvement* in existing activity. This section explores some key themes identified, focusing first on the students' involvement in existing activity and then on the impact of identity on students' perception and agency in their learning. However, in each discussion section the interrelationship between these aspects can also be discerned.

### ***Changes in participation***

The nature of the students' changes in participation revealed ways in which each student's activities were aligned with their centre culture and routines as well as areas where they had autonomy and were able to develop their practice. One feature apparent in the students' stories was the general alignment between their interests and the cultural features of their centre. Key themes emerged in each student's story, such as responding to family diversity, children learning through play, being respectful to children, and knowledge of children's development. The same themes appeared in students' and

managers' initial descriptions of their centre. Activity theory draws attention to the way in which "cultures are infused with notions of ideal personal and social futures that are promoted through ways in which cultural activity is structured" (Grossman et al., 1999, p. 5). The alignment between student and centre interests suggests that key motives within settings were reflected in the students' professional goals and interests during the trimester.

Engeström (2001) explains that in an activity system, the organisation of work and the use of mediating tools and artefacts channel the possibilities for individual action in relation to that activity. As the students were motivated to make changes in their practice as a result of seeing situations in a new way, they described making changes in their approach across a range of existing activities. Tui, Mia, and Sushma described how perceiving new aspects of children's learning prompted them to change not only their response to a particular situation, but also to make changes to their descriptions of learning in the narrative assessment documentation that was part of their responsibility. Particular interests during the trimester such as settling new babies, guiding behaviour and taking mat-times were challenges arising out of assumptions present in the workplace about the organisation of early childhood care and education in that context.

Nuttall (2003) has observed that in New Zealand early childhood settings, opportunities to influence understandings about the teacher's role are "constant and overt and can have an intensity that is unlikely to be experienced by classroom teachers on a regular basis" (p. 166). In the present study, students' initial descriptions of their work environments emphasised their negotiated team relationships as an important aspect of their daily work. The stories of Sushma and Emma included examples where negotiated relationships carried compromise and accommodation. Both students were aware of putting aside beliefs and interests in their teaching to fit in with the team approach. However, within their negotiated activities, students also described similar flexibility and individual responsibility for some aspects of their work, in particular, the setting up of activities for children and writing assessment documentation. Sushma, Mia and Tui were all aware of seeing opportunities and being able to implement individual changes

in their practice in these areas. Students were also able to act with individual agency in their interactions with others. Sushma discussed intentional changes in her interactions with children and Mia, her interactions with families.

The findings of this study suggest that the negotiated team environment of early childhood settings provide novice teachers with opportunities as well as limitations. When seen from the perspective of supporting learning within the workplace, working in a team created a collaborative environment that supported social inclusion and enlisted student's interest and commitment to their work (Eraut, 2004). The students had opportunity to develop confidence alongside others in a legitimately peripheral way (Lave & Wenger, 1991). All of them described an experience of standing back initially and beginning to take more initiative and responsibility over time. However, it was also significant that the opportunities they saw to make changes to their practice during the trimester were in areas where they already had agreement of their close teaching team, or had responsibility and did not need to enlist the support of others.

This study suggests that understanding teaching as 'participation in social practice' should be an important component in teacher education programmes with field-based students who are employed in early childhood centres. Being part of a community of practice provides students with opportunities to develop knowledge of teaching in real contexts that enable them to construct identities as legitimate members of a teaching community (Ferfolja, 2008; Ussher 2010). As emphasised by Ferfolja (2008), having a cultural alignment and empathy with a community in which teachers are going to teach is important. However, participation in social practice also involves an experience of membership that includes becoming a particular person in relation to the implicit norms and practices of the community (Wenger, 1998). Local field-based studies have recognised that the objectives for learning of field-based programmes may not necessarily be aligned with those of practice settings, and students may favour the practices of their settings (Bell, 2004; McConnell, 2010). Rather than recognising this as an impediment to students learning, teacher education programmes with field-based

students are in a position to support students' ongoing growth of awareness of the individual and contextual features that contribute to their identity as teachers.

### *Changing identity*

The relationship between identity and learning has been emphasised in literature relating to learning in work contexts (Billett & Somerville, 2004) and has been a focus of attention in teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Grossman et al., 1999; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Billett and Somerville (2004) suggest that individual identities direct intentional conscious thought; that is what people pay attention to, and also how they assess their current competence. This study emphasised that students' changes in their practice were also changes in identity. In addition, students' identity within their workplace was an important contributor to their motivation to perceive opportunities and to initiate change.

Wenger (1998) argues that the negotiation of identity within a community of practice creates a learning trajectory for an individual within their community. He explains that: "we define who we are by where we have been and where we are going" (p. 149). An individual's accumulated experiences within a community shape their perceptions of competence and understanding of current activities. Future focused aspects of a trajectory involve an emotional investment and commitment to the community. A sense of trajectory was very evident in the stories of Mia and Sushma and Tui. They described changes in practice alongside descriptions of their changes in feelings of confidence and initiative. Their stories suggested that they perceived in their workplace a mix of challenge and opportunity. Mia was seeking to engage with families in her centre in different ways, she also recognised that she was becoming more outspoken within her team. Sushma was changing the way she engaged with children by setting up new activities and engaging in new conversations with new objectives in mind. Tui was actively constructing her new teacher identity in her new centre and was becoming particularly aware of her ability to interact as an informed professional in collaboration with other staff.

Emma's identity within her centre, at least during the trimester of this study, appeared to be "reified" in a particular set of competencies, responsibilities and relationships. While she was interested and committed to her teacher education course work and she was aware of feeling more informed and confident, she did not appear to consciously make changes in practice as actively as other students. Her descriptions were consistent with an insider trajectory (Wenger, 1998).

While the students' identity within their workplace emerged as a significant factor in their sense of competence in their workplace, understanding the aspects which contributed to differences in identity became a perplexing aspect of the data analysis. Both individual and contextual factors outside the scope of the data collected may have contributed to Emma's different relationship with her centre. Considering individual factors, the development of identity is recognised as a complex process that extends beyond the negotiated relationships within the workplace (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). Identity is formed in multiple contexts and is a part of an ongoing process of interpreting lived experiences (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

While the students' personal histories were not discussed in depth, the alignment of prior beliefs with their experience of teacher education was explored as an area contributing to their identity. In a longitudinal study of beginning teachers, Grossman et al. (1999) found that when a teacher's prior beliefs, teacher education and initial practice experience appeared to align, they did not recognise so readily the impact of teacher education on their learning. This may have been the case for Emma, who described feelings of competence in relation to her workplace practice, and tended to emphasise alignment between knowledge from teacher education and her own beliefs, rather than perceiving new opportunities and challenges.

It is also possible that there might have been features of Emma's relationship with her workplace context that remained unexplored. While Emma appeared to have the same commitment to her workplace as other students in this study, she also made reference to the need to 'branch out'. Emma described a 'close knit' team, but also made a number of

references to the difficulty staff were having negotiating planning processes. The postscript to Emma's story is that when contacted at the end of the study, she had moved centres which further supported the view that she did not feel she was developing in her current role.

Overall, while the explanations of individual situations are complex, a key point that can be drawn from this comparison of students' learning trajectories is that the perception of opportunities and challenge in the workplace has a significant impact on field-based students' interest and motivation to make changes in their practice.

### **Making a contribution**

Edwards (2005) argues that many research projects investigating learning as participation in social practice tend to focus on "learning to become a member of an existing community and working within existing practices" (p. 219). Her observation can be applied to this study. While the students were actively developing an individual professional identity, descriptions of changing participation tended to emphasise their increasingly competent participation in existing practice. Rogoff (1995) argues that through individual transformation of participation, the situation is also transformed. The third research question of this study was intended to explore the possibility that students' changing participation might be seen not only in their actions but also the actions of others. Did shifts in activity occur as a result of students' changing participation? Limitations of the data gathering methods used in this study became apparent when analysis of this question was considered. The students were able to discuss their actions in detail, but they were less able to discuss how other children, staff or parents responded and how the situation had changed. Earlier discussion has outlined that students generally made incremental changes in areas where they had responsibility. The limited descriptions that students gave suggested that other staff were either already in agreement with the approach or generally supportive. This is an area which needed further exploration.

Arguably, while the data did not identify shifts in activity, the individual agency of each student emerged as a strong theme that highlighted the way in which individual contributions contribute to the ongoing development of a community of practice (Wenger 1998). A strong feature of all students' descriptions was their desire to improve their own practice for the benefit of children and families. The findings of this study support a description of students' learning as a "concerned (engaged and dilemma driven)" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33) activity that was part of "generative social practice in a lived in world" (p. 35). Billett and Somerville (2004) suggest it is often overlooked that individual contributions contribute to incremental changes in a process of remaking workplace practice. Students were involved and committed members of their workplace who were engaged in the active construction of their workplace identities and, in the process, the active contribution to workplace practice.

When involvement and commitment in practice are seen as important aspects of learning at an individual level, processes of participation take on more significance at a centre level. The experiences of students in this study are consistent with the conclusions of Cameron (2007) who identifies that professional learning communities operating in schools and early childhood centres support the ongoing learning of all teachers and are also fundamental to the learning of novice teachers. As Wenger (1998) explains that "to support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realised" (p. 215).

The experiences of students in this study support the view that participatory processes occurring in their centres supported learning (Anning & Edwards, 1999; Billett, 2004). Tui was motivated to engage in her own research in order to contribute to the collaborative processes she perceived in her centre. For both Mia and Emma, their interactions with other staff occurred in situations characterised by flat management structures and close working relationships. Emma's discussion with her supervisor occurred when she moved to the under twos section of her centre where the pair worked together in close collaboration. In Mia's room there was no supervisor and the three staff operated an informal system of distributed leadership (Ebbeck & Waniganayake,

2003). As Mia began to feel more knowledgeable and confident, she was able to enlist their support to advocate solutions for wider tensions occurring in the centre.

The findings of this study serve to further illustrate the benefits to early childhood centres of fostering collaborative learning communities (Anning & Edwards, 1999; Bary et al., 2008). For novice teachers, collaborative learning at work enlists their interested engagement in exploring and developing teaching practice. However, distance and field-based teacher education programmes have little control over the participatory processes in students' workplaces. A useful concept may be one of relational agency put forward by Edwards (2006). Relational agency brings the concept of expanding learning through working with others to an individual level. This study has highlighted that learning, when seen from the perspective of their participation in their workplace, is not an individual endeavour. It could be argued that the transformation of students' participation is supported by knowledge, experience, and also on their ability to collaborate. The concept of relational agency is useful in considering collaboration as a key ingredient for individual learning. Edwards (2006) describes relational agency as "occupying a conceptual space between a focus of learning as enhancing individual understanding and a focus on learning as systemic change and includes both" (p. 173). Edwards explains "in joint action a wider range of concepts or other resources are likely" (p. 174). Field-based programmes can support students to develop transformative approaches to teaching through developing dispositions that involve learning from and with others. These dispositions involve the ability to "seek out and use others as resources for action and equally be able to respond to the need for support from others" (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004, p. 150).

## **Summary**

The key conclusions that can be drawn from this discussion of the research findings are now summarised. Consistent with the findings of workplace learning in other contexts (Fuller et al., 2005) engaging in the structured learning of distance teacher education had the effect of expanding the possibilities that students perceived in their workplace.

Students in this study consistently described how they were able to understand their work better by drawing on knowledge that was not readily accessible in their every day interactions. For all of the students, feeling more knowledgeable gave them confidence and was accompanied by descriptions of taking initiative which led to new actions at work. These new actions often resulted in further feelings of confidence.

International and local studies have identified advantages of sustained and integrated practice experience within teacher education courses (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ord, 2010). Recent local field-based studies have emphasised the value of making reciprocal connections between theory and practice (Howie & Hagan, 2010; O'Connell, 2010). Findings from the present study suggest that students studying by distance also make these connections. The way the students described connections between theory and practice was consistent with experiences of students in other field-based studies (Ord, 2010). Students experienced a growth of awareness as theoretical knowledge was revealed within their everyday activities at work.

Importantly, this study has provided some preliminary insights into the impact of workplace participation on students learning within distance and field-based teacher education programmes. As employees and as members of a community of practice, the students' practice was interpreted, through the theoretical framework of activity theory (Engeström, 2001; Grossman et al., 1999), as an active response to the motives of their workplace. Successful participation in daily practice orientated students interests towards activities and problems that arose out of established practices and towards actions that met with general approval, acceptance and recognition. In addition, the tools of teaching that students were able to utilise in their work with others were those that were available to them in their context. The impact of workplace participation on students learning was revealed in a number of ways in this study. Firstly, the topics that the students' took a special interest in within their courses tended to align with interests and concerns they perceived in their workplace. Secondly, when they described making theoretical insights at work this led to students taking more initiative in utilising existing practices. The students described making changes in areas where they had responsibility

and were able to act with individual agency. The students were much less certain about making changes in practice when they needed to enlist the support of others to do so.

The present study has highlighted that students' developing identity within their workplace, their feelings of competence and confidence within that context (Wenger, 1998) and the possible futures they saw for themselves (Grossman et al., 1999) played a significant role in the students' perception of opportunity and their intentions and motivations to change their practice. Learning in the workplace is usefully seen as a trajectory (Wenger, 1998) that will involve not only changes in knowledge but accompanying changes in identity and relationships and this requires interested engagement and motivation in a community of practice.

Considering changes in workplace participation has revealed insights into the conditions of early childhood contexts that supported and motivated the students to develop their practice. Again these insights are well supported in wider literature related to workplace learning (Billett & Somerville, 2004; Eraut, 2004) and the learning of novice teachers (Cameron, 2007). The concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) highlights how learning is promoted through the interaction of students' active interest in contributing to the practice of the setting and the opportunities for participation provided by the centre. Early childhood settings by their very nature have the potential to provide support for student teachers. The negotiated team environment provides students with access to a wide range of teaching activities in close contact with other teachers. Over time students are able to make a more active contribution. In this study, students' motivation to develop their practice and learn more about certain topics was influenced by the collaborative learning and problem solving opportunities occurring in their centres. This finding adds further support to the view that the learning of novice teachers is not separated from the capacity of all teachers to learn together within a community of practice (Cameron, 2007).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the relationship between early childhood students' engagement in a distance teacher education programme and their workplace participation. Drawing on theories of situated learning this study has examined students' learning as a process of changing participation within a community of practice. Using a case study methodology, interviews with four students were spaced over a trimester of study to gain individual perspectives of their changing participation. Information about students' context was gained from interviews with managers and through centre visits. This was a small scale exploratory study that drew on international research relating to workplace learning and teacher education to inform local understandings of distance and field-based teacher education.

Findings from this study suggest that a distance teacher education programme supported students' transformation of participation in their workplace. The students' made reciprocal connections between their teacher education course and their workplace practice. Teacher education contributed to the students' understanding of their workplace activity and they drew selectively from course material to meet the interests and challenges they faced in their workplace. Both teacher education and the culture and activities of their workplaces contributed to the development of the students' professional identity and goals for learning.

Changes in participation required students to act with agency, negotiating new relationships within their centre. Changes in participation were incremental adjustments to existing practices and occurred in areas where students had responsibility. Changes led to enhanced feelings of competence and confidence. Students who described making changes also displayed changing identity in their workplace, and were taking more initiative in a range of areas.

This study has emphasised the place of individual agency in students' learning. A focus on students' changing participation emphasised their interested commitment in making a contribution to their early childhood centres. This study has revealed that students' interests and goals in learning are connected to their interest and contribution to the early childhood centre where they work.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of the present study**

#### ***Strengths***

The case study methodology employed in this study suited the objective of understanding distance students' learning within the sociocultural context of their workplace. Interviews foregrounded the perspectives of student participants with triangulation of data from managers and centre visits supporting the internal validity in three of the case studies (Yin, 2003). Multiple interviews with students also contributed to the opportunity for the researcher to revisit, clarify and expand upon issues over the course of three interviews and to gain further information about the centre in the fourth case study. The use of a multiple case study design provided useful opportunities to contrast and compare each student's experiences and their centre contexts.

Interview questions directed at understanding students' intentions for action and descriptions of changes to workplace practice proved to be a successful line of questioning that contextualised students' perspectives in their social context. Rich data was able to be collected and analysed in relation to the institutional and interpersonal features present, as well as the subjective experiences of each student (Benzie et al., 2005). Rogoff's (1995) foci of analysis provided an essential and robust structure for the analysis, enabling the identification and separation of different levels of activity that then exposed their interrelationships.

#### ***Limitations***

The perspectives and experiences of participants in this study cannot be seen as representative of a range of distance and field-based students or the issues they face in their workplace. It was evident during the participant recruitment process that there were

reasons why potential participants chose not to join the study which related to stress over their current workload, instability of employment or tensions within their workplace. The experiences of students in this study are best understood as successful examples of distance of teacher education. However, even with this limitation, the case studies identified features of students' learning that contributed to their success.

Investigations of situated learning are suited to ethnographic approaches, with multiple methods of data collection that include observation (Benzie et al., 2005; Sawyer & Greeno, 2009). The participants recruited for this study were more widely spread geographically than intended in the original design, as a result of the difficulties of recruiting the sample. As a result, the original observations planned for this research were reduced from five hours and an additional visit near the end of the data gathering period to an observation of one hour during a single visit. I became aware during interviews that students' descriptions of participation were limited to their perceptions, interests and recall. The greater intended use of observations originally planned in the research design may have opened up further topics of discussion and further layers of analysis.

Another limitation of the data collection was evident in the third research question. Shifts in activity within early childhood settings could only really be gained from students' descriptions of the activities of other members of the centre, and their ability to describe others' responses was limited. Due to ethical and practical considerations the perspectives of other staff in the early childhood centre in relation to changes the students were making were not sought or observed. This limited the possibilities of understanding shifts in activity but suggests a focus that might be included in a larger, more comprehensive study in this aspect of teacher education.

### **Implications for teacher education programmes and early childhood settings**

This study suggests that distance and field-based programmes can support student teachers through developing dispositions that involve learning from and with others. The

concept of relational agency (Edwards, 2006) brings the concept of expanding learning through working with others to an individual level.

This study has affirmed the importance and effectiveness of theories of learning and teaching as a core part of field-based early childhood programmes. In addition, identifying theory already present in current practice could provide further insights for students. Much of field-based students work is routine' and new insights tended to be overlaid on existing practices. In addition to investigation of the knowledge, beliefs, and values that shape their intentions in teaching, students would benefit from reflecting on the contexts in which these intentions are negotiated. The students may also benefit from tools that support an analysis of the values and practices of their workplace, as this was a significant factor shaping their interests at work and the skills that they were developing.

One important implication of this study is that early childhood settings should be encouraged to take a second look at the way that social interactions and the organisation of their work supports the learning of field-based students. Opportunities for students to engage in a wide range of teaching activities alongside other teachers are important not only for sharing knowledge, but also for students to feel their contribution is valued and to develop a commitment to their role. The experience of students in the present study supports research suggesting that the ideal learning situation in a workplace setting involves a mixture of support and challenge (Eraut, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). If the goal for students' learning is restricted to competence as an employee, then this will restrict the learning opportunities available (Fuller et al., 2005).

This study suggests that students test and share their understanding and ideas within every-day conversations with other staff. Therefore, conversations that occur every day within early childhood settings matter to field-based students and contribute to the construction of their professional identity. Recognising these conversations as learning opportunities for individual students, has the potential to create further learning opportunities for students and for other staff in the early childhood centre and is an

important implication of how students can be supported towards professional qualifications while working in the sector.

### **Implications for further research**

Viewing teacher education through the lens of students' changing participation in their workplace yields important insights into the impact of distance and field-based teacher education and the issues and interests of distance and field-based students. This piece of exploratory research reveals that there is much more that could be known about students' workplace experiences and the impact of teacher education. Some useful areas of inquiry might include:

- Additional studies set in the workplace across a diverse range of programmes, students and circumstances;
- Analysis of the impact of particular courses and experiences in field-based programmes on students' learning in their workplace;
- In depth ethnographic case studies to capture in more detail the sociocultural contexts of students' workplaces and student learning; and
- Consideration of the results when students begin to change their perspectives on centre activities.

Further questions for inquiry arising particularly from this study include:

- How do distance field-based students organise and refer to their written course materials to support their workplace learning?
- How can students be supported to deconstruct existing practice? Can this be achieved through a distance/blended delivery model?
- How can/do distance and field-based models support the disposition of learning from, and with, others in their workplace settings?

## **Concluding comments**

In many early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are students learning to become professional teachers through distance and field-based programmes. This study has highlighted that early childhood centres, by their very nature, can be effective learning environments for student teachers. Broad access to tasks and opportunities to work alongside experienced teachers are identified as important aspects of workplace learning that are present in many centres.

This study has argued that learning in the workplace involves the negotiation of identities. Teacher education contributes to students' feelings of competence and agency. However, agency also relates to students' interest and commitment to making a contribution to their workplace. Students seek opportunities to participate in the ongoing negotiation of centre practice. Therefore, both teacher education providers and early childhood centres support the learning of students through creating opportunities for them to participate in the ongoing development of the community of practice of their early childhood centre.

This research has contributed to a small but growing collection of national studies providing insights into distance and field-based teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the perspectives generously provided by the student participants and their centre managers, this study has provided much needed insights into workplace learning as a key contributor to distance and field-based teacher education.

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## **Appendix A. Definitions and Course Information**

### **Definitions**

There are a number of terms used in this thesis that refer to different teacher education programme delivery types. These terms are defined in this appendix. The definitions reflect those given in a 2011 publication of accredited early childhood teacher education qualifications in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2011).

**Distance teacher education** - including blended or flexible delivery. This term refers to programmes that typically include a combination of printed packages of materials and/or online learning, some face-to-face delivery in block courses and practicum placements spread throughout the programme. Distance programmes are often designed as pre-service courses, but are attractive to students already employed in early childhood settings.

**Field-based teacher education** – This term refers to teacher education programmes that include up to two days of classroom teaching and compulsory weekly requirement of up to sixteen hours experience either paid or voluntary in an early childhood setting. Students also complete block practice experience in other centres.

**Pre-service** – This term refers to face-to face teacher education programmes designed to be completed before students enter the teaching workforce. Practice experience is typically provided in blocks of practica spread throughout the course.

### **Course Information**

The student participants in this study were enrolled in a three-year Diploma of Teaching at a tertiary institution specialising in open and open and distance learning programmes. The Diploma involves a three-year full-time course of study. All courses are seventeen weeks in length and students have some flexibility in regard to the pace and order in which they proceed through the courses. All courses are delivered through written learner guides and students submit written assessments. About half of the courses have a

two-day face-to-face workshop. Students engage with lecturers and other students by phone, email and online course pages. The course includes four, five-week practicum placements in different early childhood centres. The course is designed as a pre-service programme. Students do not need to be working in an early childhood centre but many of them do.

### **Students' courses during the trimester**

The following table provides a brief summary of the courses that student participants were enrolled in during the trimester of the study.

<b>Course</b>	<b>Course description</b>	<b>Students</b>
Learning and development (year two)	To critically analyse theories of learning and development and identify factors that influence the learning and development of children. To identify implications for teaching practice.	Mia Tui
Curriculum, social and physical development (year two)	To focus on issues and considerations relating to children's physical and social development, make links to the early childhood curriculum and consider implications for practice.	Mia
Curriculum, mathematics, science and technology (year two)	To research and discuss ways that children develop mathematical understanding and logical problem solving skills. To develop students own scientific knowledge. To consider issues and opportunities for the integration of information technology within the curriculum.	Mia Tui
Professional practice (year three)	To review students own professional learning and develop and articulate their teaching philosophy. To research and develop a position on current issues facing the early childhood sector.	Sushma Emma
Five-week practicum (year three)	To undertake a practicum placement in an early childhood centre (not students' workplace). To plan learning experiences within the area of maths, science and technology. To engage in critical reflection of teaching practice under the mentorship of an experienced teacher.	Sushma Emma
Assessment and planning (year three)	To critically examine different planning approaches and consider strategies to develop holistic and inclusive programmes. To explore issues of transition between early childhood settings and school.	Sushma Emma

## Appendix B. Student Initial Interview

### Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education

Research project 2011

#### Interview questions for students

*The first questions are intended to establish basic information about your position to serve as background to the rest of our discussion.*

How long have you been working at your centre?

How did you get the position you have now?

What is your current position title and who do you report to?

What was your early childhood experience before this position?

Can you describe your main activities in a typical day at work?

*It is suggested by socio-cultural theorists that members of a community of practice, such as teachers in an early childhood centre, negotiate ways of working together and create established practices and relationships. 'Newcomers' into the community of practice are often on the periphery of activities and over time they become more central to maintaining established practices and also contribute to the ongoing development of that community. The next questions invite you to reflect on your changing participation at work.*

Have you noticed that your participation has changed over time?

Are you taking more initiative or responsibility?

Have you gained more confidence in your work with children and families?

*The following questions invite you to reflect on the connections you are making between your experiences in the Diploma of Teaching and your everyday work as a teacher.*

Do you think teacher education has helped you to be a better teacher?

What particular aspects of the Diploma programme have you found valuable?

Do you think teacher education has changed the way you think about;

1. Your role as a teacher?
2. Your centre?
3. Your ability to contribute as a member of staff?

Do you have an example of where you were motivated by a Diploma experience to make a change in your practice at work?

How did others respond to the change you made?

*These last questions invite you to reflect on the opportunities you see in your work environment.*

In what ways do staff participate in day to day decision making at your centre?

Do you often discuss beliefs and ideas about teaching or learning with other staff?

Do you perceive differences between teachers in training and qualified teachers at your centre?

Do you have a view of yourself as a more experienced teacher? What are some things you would like to achieve?

# Appendix C. Student Follow up Interview Guide

## Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education

Research project 2011

Question guide for ongoing interviews.

*These questions are intended as a guide for the type of topics the discussion will cover but the actual questions or order of questions may vary depending on the emergent nature of the discussion*

1. What have you found interesting in your study recently?
2. Have you seen new possibilities for :
  - Your own practice?
  - Your centre's activities?
3. What have you done or what do you plan to do with these ideas?
  - What effect do you think this knowledge has had on your relationships with others in the centre.
  - How do you think these changes have impacted on centres structures or activities? i.e. layout, routines or practices, communication systems, shared understandings.
4. Is there anything else you been thinking about at work recently? Not necessarily something related to your recent study.

Follow up themes: Examples from Tui's follow up interview one

- What are your impressions of how your team is forming?
- Are you all getting on the same wave-length? How is this happening? What have been some topics?
- What role do you play? What responsibilities or commitments are you taking on? What ways are you finding to contribute?
- What effect do you think this knowledge has had on your relationships with others in the centre.
- How do you think these changes have impacted on centres structures or activities? i.e. layout, routines or practices, communication systems, shared understandings.

# Appendix D. Manager Interview

## Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education

Research project 2011

### Interview questions for Supervisors

*The first questions ask basic information about your position to serve as a background to our discussion.*

How long have you been working at this centre? How long in your current role?

What are your main responsibilities?

*It is suggested by socio-cultural theorists that members of a community of practice, such as teachers in an early childhood centre, negotiate ways of working together and create established practices and relationships. 'Newcomers' into the community of practice are often on the periphery of activities and over time they become more central to maintaining established practices and also contribute to the ongoing development of that community.*

*These questions are designed to help you explain this early childhood settings community of practice.*

How do you usually describe this early childhood centre?

What are important things that contribute to the culture of this centre?

What is an average length that current teachers been working at this centre? How often would you employ new teachers?

What individual or group processes are there for professional development?

How do programme or curriculum decisions get made? (This might be in formal or informal ways).

*These questions relate to your perspectives of distance and field-based teacher education.*

What is your experience of having distance or field-based students in your workplace?

How can the development of distance or field-based students be supported and accommodated in a centre environment?

## Appendix E. Human Ethics Application – Massey



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

16 August 2010

Alice Tate  
15 Kereru Drive  
RD4  
PALMERSTON NORTH

Dear Alice

**Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 10/37**  
**Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education**

Thank you for your letter dated 10 August 2010.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl Pajo'.

Dr Karl Pajo, Chair  
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B

cc A/Prof Claire McLachlan School of Arts, Development and Health Education PN900	Dr Alison Sewell School of Educational Studies PN900
Dr Kama Weir, HoS School of Arts, Development and Health Education PN900	Prof Howard Lee, HoS School of Educational Studies PN900
Mrs Roseanne MacGillivray Graduate School of Education PN900	

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Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Research Ethics Office, Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand  
T +64 6 350 5573 +64 6 350 5575 F +64 6 350 5622  
E [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz) [animalethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:animalethics@massey.ac.nz) [gtc@massey.ac.nz](mailto:gtc@massey.ac.nz)  
[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

Te Kūnenga  
ki Pūrehuroa

## Appendix F. Human Ethics Application – Open Polytechnic



23 July 2010

Alice Tate  
Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

Dear Alice

I am contacting you on behalf of the Ethics Committee.

This is to inform you that the Ethics Committee has approved your application for the "*Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education*" which was submitted to the Ethics Committee for consideration at their meeting of 01 July 2010.

The Committee wishes you well with your Research project.

Regards

Sonya Jackson  
Executive Secretary for Ethics Committee

# Appendix G. Student Information Sheet



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
TE KUPENGA O TE MATAURANGA

## Research project

### Developing identities in the workplace: Experiences of distance early childhood teacher education

#### Information sheet for students

Kia ora,

My name is Alice Tate. I am a Master's student at Massey University and you may also know me as a Regional Lecturer for the Open Polytechnic early childhood programme. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting. This information sheet explains the aims and requirements of the project to help you make an informed decision about whether you wish to be involved.

#### Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to understand how distance early childhood students are learning in their workplace. I am interested in how student teachers identify new opportunities and negotiate changes in their participation at work as they develop their professional knowledge. This is a small scale exploratory case study designed to identify themes and areas of interest for further research. It is hoped that this study will support participants to reflect on their changing identity as teachers within their centre community.

#### The Participants

Three third year students studying with The Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching (ECE) will be the key participants of this study. Invitations have been sent to a small group of students in your region who are likely to be enrolled in second or third year full time study and employed at least 20 hours per week in an early childhood setting. The study will include observations in each early childhood setting, therefore if you express an interest, I will need to make contact with the supervisor of your setting and gain their support for the study.

#### The Procedures

The study will involve two visits to your early childhood setting, one before the start of Trimester One 2011 and one approximately six months later. During these visits I would like to observe the activities of your centre in order to understand the context of your work. Observation times will be negotiated with you and your centre and will include around five hours of observations in total for each period. Observation data will be recorded as field notes.

At the start of the study, I would also like to interview you. During this interview, I'd like to learn about your perspectives on working and being a distance student. This 60 – 90 minute interview will take place at a location convenient to you, and will be recorded and transcribed. Over the course of the study, I will keep in contact with you (via email and phone, at times suitable for you) to discuss changes you might be thinking about or implementing in your practice. I anticipate this will happen about four times. Finally, I will

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ki Pārehuroa

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arrange a time to discuss my initial findings so that you can contribute to my analysis of them.

#### **Reporting the data**

Pseudonyms will be used for you and your early childhood setting and identifying features will not be included in the final report. Other staff within your early childhood setting will have some knowledge of your involvement in the study. Care will be taken in the final report to ensure that nothing is included that harms your relationship with your work colleagues. You will have the opportunity to review and discuss the data that is collected about you and withdraw anything you would not wish to have reported.

The student/lecturer relationship you and I have within the Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching ECE is acknowledged. Steps will be taken to ensure that participation in this study does not compromise your position as a student in the Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme or any other Open Polytechnic programme you may undertake in future. Information you and I share about your work and study will not be shared with other lecturers at the Open Polytechnic and I will not assess your work during this study.

Data about the study will be stored securely. Only my research supervisors and I will have access to it. When the study is completed, findings will be submitted as a Master's thesis to Massey University and a summary may also be presented at conferences or in education journals.

#### **Your rights**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate if you do not wish to. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the data collection period. You also have the right to:

- decline to answer any question during interview or observation times;
- review and comment on data about you that forms part of the study and withdraw any information up until the end of the data collection period;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a summary of the research findings in written form. Face-to-face feedback will also be arranged.

**To express an initial interest in this study please phone or email me using the contact information below. A consent form is attached to this information sheet. Returning the signed consent form will confirm your agreement to be a participant in this study.**

#### **Project Contacts**

For further questions about this project now or at any time, please contact me at:

Phone: (06) 353 0464

Email: [alice.tate@openpolytechnic.ac.nz](mailto:alice.tate@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

You may also contact my research supervisors:

Associate Professor Claire McLachlan and Dr Alison Sewell

Massey University College of Education

Private Bag 11 222

Palmerston North

Phone (06) 356 9099, Ext 8957 or Ext 8853

Email: [c.j.mclachlan@massey.ac.nz](mailto:c.j.mclachlan@massey.ac.nz) or [a.m.sewell@massey.ac.nz](mailto:a.m.sewell@massey.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 10/37. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929  
Email: [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz).

This project has also been reviewed and approved by The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand Research Ethics Committee and concerns about this research may also be directed to Dr. Raymond Young, Dean of School of Information Sciences, Open Polytechnic, Private Bag 31914, Lower Hutt, telephone 0508 650200 ext:5765  
Email: [Raymond.young@openpolytechnic.ac.nz](mailto:Raymond.young@openpolytechnic.ac.nz).

Thank you for considering your involvement in this study.

Kind regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alice Tate', written in a cursive style.

Alice Tate

## **Appendix H. Manager Information Sheet**

### **Developing identities in the workplace: Exploring experiences of distance early childhood teacher education**

#### **Information sheet for Supervisors**

Kia ora,

My name is Alice Tate. I am a Masters student at Massey University and a Regional Lecturer for the Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme. A student teacher at your centre has expressed an interest in a research project I am conducting and I would like to invite you and your early childhood setting to support this project. This information sheet explains the aims and requirements of the project so that you can make an informed decision about whether you wish to participate.

#### **Aim of the study**

Studying for a professional qualification while working within an early childhood setting is a popular teacher education option available to students in Aotearoa/New Zealand. There is a growing interest in developing a research base around the particular impact of our unique distance and centre-based approaches to teacher education.

The aim of this study is to gain insights into the experience of distance early childhood students within their workplace. I am interested in how student teachers identify new opportunities and negotiate changes in their participation at work as they develop their identity as teachers. I am also interested in how these changes might impact on wider workplace activities.

This is a small scale exploratory case study designed to identify themes and areas of interest for further research. It is hoped that this study will also provide personal insights for participants.

Guiding questions for the study include:

- What is the nature of changes in student's participation in their workplace over a trimester of study?
- How does experience within a distance teacher education programme relate to students changing participation in their workplace?
- Do shifts in activity occur in the workplace as a result of changing student participation?

#### **The Participants**

Expressions of interest have been received from three third year students studying with The Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching (ECE) to be the key participants of

this study. Part of the study will take place in each students centre and as the supervisor of one of these centres you are invited to participate in the study. Teaching staff, children and families could be present during observations but are not participants in the study. These groups will not be specifically observed or individually described within observations. I will provide an information sheet informing these groups of my purpose within the centre.

#### **The Research Procedures.**

The study would involve two visits to your early childhood setting: One near the start of trimester two 2010 and one approximately six months later. During these visits I would like to observe the activities of your centre to understand the context of the student teachers work. A key interest would be how the student teacher participates in different activities and how her participation might be changing over time. Information from these observations will be recorded as field notes. Observation times would be negotiated with you and the student teacher but I would hope to conduct around five hours of observations at each period. Some time during the first observation period I would like to interview you to understand more about the philosophy and practices of your centre. This interview would take around 30-60 minutes and would be recorded and transcribed. The interview can take place at your workplace at a time suitable to you.

A key aspect of the study will be a series of interviews with the student teacher. Over the course of the six month study I will arrange to keep in contact (via email and phone). We will discuss new ideas that students are developing about their participation at work, what changes they are hoping to make in their practice and what happens when they do. The interviews will be at a time convenient to the student teacher.

#### **Ethics**

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and early childhood settings. Confidentiality from all participants during the research process will be important. Care will be taken that identifying features are not included in the final report and that nothing is reported that might be harmful to relationships within the centre. Participants will have the opportunity to review, and withdraw any data collected about them that forms part of the study and contribute to an initial analysis of this data

Steps will be taken to ensure that participation in this study will not compromise the position of student participants in the Open Polytechnic Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme in any way. Student identity and specific information about their work and study will not be shared with other lecturers at the Open Polytechnic and I will not assess their work during this study or in the future.

Data about the study will be stored securely and only I will have access to it. My research supervisors may be provided access to the data during supervision meetings if the need arises. When the study is completed, findings will be submitted as a Masters thesis to Massey University and a summary may also be presented at conferences or in education journals

### **Your rights**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate if you do not wish to. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the data collection period, that is, 28 February 2011. You also have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question during interview or observation times
- Review and comment on any data about you that forms part of the study and withdraw any information up until the end of the data collection period.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time
- Receive a summary of the research findings in written form. Face-to-face feedback will also be arranged on request.

### **Project Contacts**

If you have any further questions about this project now or at any time, please contact me at:

Phone: (06) 353 0464

Email: [alice.tate@openpolytechnic.ac.nz](mailto:alice.tate@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

If you have any concerns about this project, you may also contact my research supervisor:

Associate Professor Claire McLachlan  
Massey University College of Education  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
Phone (06) 356 9099, Ext 8957 or Ext 8853  
Email: [c.j.mclachlan@massey.ac.nz](mailto:c.j.mclachlan@massey.ac.nz) or [a.m.sewell@massey.ac.nz](mailto:a.m.sewell@massey.ac.nz)

Or

Dr. Raymond Young  
Dean of School of Information & Social Sciences  
Open Polytechnic  
Private Bag 31914  
Lower Hutt 5040  
Phone 0508 650200 ext:5765  
Email: [Raymond.young@openpolytechnic.ac.nz](mailto:Raymond.young@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern Application and Open Polytechnic of New Zealand Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact:  
Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee Southern,  
Phone (06) 350 5799 x 8771  
Email : [humanethicsouth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouth@massey.ac.nz).

# Appendix I. Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
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## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### Developing identities in the workplace: Experiences of distance early childhood teacher education

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

- I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I also understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time up until the end of the data collection period.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name - printed \_\_\_\_\_

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