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**Bodies in Context:
A Comparative Study of Early Childhood Education
in New Zealand and Japan**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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at Massey University, Albany,
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Abstract

Early childhood education in both New Zealand and Japan is increasingly being seen as an essential experience for children as evidenced by the growth of the early childhood sector and lively political debate. In New Zealand, the bi-cultural curriculum makes a clear commitment to supporting ethnic diversity in the classroom. While Japanese centres have been categorised as culturally homogeneous in the past, focus is now turning to accommodating children from a variety of backgrounds. In both countries less attention has been paid to the latent cultural assumptions underpinning children's, families and teachers' experiences of early childhood education.

Using Tobin et al.'s (1989, 2009) PSC3 methodology to stimulate a multi-vocal text through the use of videotape, this thesis examines how early childhood settings in New Zealand and Japan incorporate these implicit beliefs into pedagogy and practice. This study suggests that implicit cultural practices not only shape many of the interactions of the early childhood context, but also many of these practices often go unnoticed or unrecognised as culturally informed. Using visual methods to reflect on comparative material is a powerful way to reveal hidden cultural assumptions. The video-cued method works to collapse and accelerate the traditional ethnographic fieldwork process as the videos provide a focus for discussion, and help reduce the kind of ambiguity that can occur when interviewing across cultural contexts. Through the layers of dialogue stimulated by the videos, children's bodies emerged as the locus of the work. Although the body was once neglected as an object of scholarly study, it has now become a significant site for anthropological analysis. Inspired by Foucault (1995) scholars came to acknowledge that the body is not only socially and culturally produced, but historically situated within conceptions of society and nature. Using the theories of Foucault (1995), Douglas (1966, 1996) and Mauss (1973) as a framework, this study argues that the ways in which children's bodies are constructed, protected, disciplined and challenged provide a useful lens through which to examine unseen cultural practices.

As early childhood settings become more diverse, it is hoped this study will provide points for reflection and offer practical applications for teachers. With this aim in mind, the thesis incorporates film, qualitative interviews, vignettes and personal reflections to make the work accessible to a wider audience than traditional academic writing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preschools are sites where a variety of domains, interests, and social actors intersect. Preschool is where child-rearing meets education; where the world of parents and home first meets the world of teachers and school; and where the labour market's need for working women meets society's need for young children to be well cared for and prepared to be productive in the future.

(Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:2)

Beginnings and endings

In April 2005, my family returned to New Zealand after spending almost six years living in small towns in rural Hokkaido, Japan. While my husband and I had left New Zealand as newly graduated university students, we came home as parents to three young boys who had already negotiated many aspects of early childhood education in Japan. With two working parents, the boys had experienced the care of an unlicensed home-based caregiver in a mountain village; a public childcare centre and a Catholic kindergarten in a rural forestry town; and an upmarket private childcare centre in an urban environment. These varied experiences arose not only from parental employment conditions, but also through the Japanese education system which has a fixed structure. For example, children under a certain age could not attend the local childcare centre or kindergarten, and teachers like us were not permitted to teach in the centres that our children were enrolled at. In small towns there were often only one or two early childhood options available due to the closures of centres as a result of the dropping birth rate. On the other hand, Japan's low fertility rate had also created a vacuum of young children. In the last rural village we lived in, childcare and kindergarten spaces were plentiful with each centre actively campaigning to enrol children. As my children grew, the restrictive conditions pertaining to early childhood education altered and since our return to New Zealand, even more rapid changes have taken place in Japan.

For my children, a new reality was also inevitable as we arrived in bustling, urban Auckland from isolated, rural Hokkaido. While my older son, at five, had still been at kindergarten in Japan, he was quickly dispatched to school in New Zealand which was not without complications. He came home after the first day with an uneaten lunch and desperate to go the toilet. When I questioned him about school, he was very

unhappy, explaining that he had waited for the lunch greeting (*aisatsu*) to begin eating but since it never came he couldn't eat lunch. There were no inside shoes for him to wear, or toilet slippers, and besides there didn't seem to be a time when everyone went to relieve themselves anyway. He asked if New Zealand children were all poor, running around with their bare feet outside. Also, why didn't the group he approached let him play when he used the correct entry language *irete* (can I join in) which everybody knows is always followed by *ii yo* (yes, go ahead). I quickly saw my images of a smooth re-entry disappearing and realised that, although having graduated as a social anthropologist, I had neglected to discuss any of these cultural issues with my son. Despite having spent many years in Japan, I was essentially returning home, but for my children, coming to New Zealand equated to arriving in a foreign country.

My second son had also been attending an early childhood education centre in Japan and I had assumed he would be able to join our local state kindergarten at the end of the road. Upon visiting the kindergarten, however, I was surprised to be told that there was a lengthy waiting list to which I would need to add my son's name. Many of the children had been registered at birth or as toddlers and when I asked around at other kindergartens and childcare centres I encountered the same situation. Around the same time, I was offered a job in the city but trying to obtain childcare for three children at different stages (school age, preschool and a baby) proved challenging for two reasons. Firstly, it seemed impossible to find any early childhood centres with openings and secondly, the other option (hiring a full time nanny) completely negated the salary I would potentially earn. I consoled myself with the thought that conducting postgraduate study instead would enable me to spend more time with my children and still maintain an interest in the adult world.

After several months, my second son was accepted to attend the local kindergarten which he declared to be much more relaxing and free of expectation than his experiences in Japan. He had always steadfastly refused to give a morning greeting which placed him in confrontation with one of the few social acts given great importance in a Japanese early childhood setting. In New Zealand, not only were there no expectations to formally greet teachers, classmates or the principal, but the kindergarten day was dominated by free play and punctuated by snacks of fruit and milk when individual children felt like eating. The very rituals that my older son felt so lost without served to free my middle son from what he saw as tedium and repetition.

My family's return home and the realisation that childcare was essentially unavailable to us became linked to my search for a suitable research topic worthy of postgraduate study. This project has its roots in a long association with the two countries in the study, an academic quest which has paralleled my journey as a mother. The stirrings of this project began many years before I even knew I would decide to examine my topic in depth. The methods for this study were first revealed to me when I read Tobin, Wu and Davidson's (1989) book *Preschool in Three Cultures* several years earlier as part of my literature review for my Master's research. At that time, I was struck by how much of Tobin's writing resonated with my own experience of preschool Japan, and also how a seemingly simple methodology had revealed complex social and cultural patterns. Tobin's book also challenged me to think about what cultural biases I had brought to my life in Japan. How many times had I expected my children or their Japanese kindergarten teachers to conform to New Zealand ideals of appropriate behaviour or quality early childhood education?

Returning to New Zealand several years later with my husband and three young sons, I was confronted with the reality of kindergarten in my homeland that was also contrary to my expectations after having spent almost ten years overseas. Talking to the head teacher at my youngest son's kindergarten, I was surprised to learn that Tobin's video (an accompaniment to the ethnography) had been screened to New Zealand trainee teachers as part of a module on cultural awareness. Despite being over twenty years old at the time, Tobin's video appeared to be a valuable means of stimulating discussion around cultural issues before teachers graduated and were sent out to explore the implications for real in classrooms around the country. This conversation in a suburban New Zealand kindergarten prompted me to re-examine Tobin's work, even though it was dated at the time. I finally obtained the video through interloan from the one library in New Zealand with a copy, and I began to see the germination of not only an exciting doctoral study but one with possible practical implications for the early childhood sector in the countries concerned. I decided to make Tobin et al.'s work, *Preschool in Three Cultures*, the methodological foundation for this qualitative study.

My research seeks to apply Tobin's methodology to an education and care centre in suburban Rata,¹ New Zealand and a private kindergarten in rural Hokkaido, Japan. Taking the body as a locus for discussion, this thesis argues that implicit cultural

¹ Both the New Zealand and Japanese cities where fieldwork took place have been given fictitious names.

practices not only shape most of the interactions taking place in the early childhood context, many of these practices often go unnoticed or unrecognised as culturally informed. Using film as a means of reflecting on comparative material is a powerful, cost-effective tool for revealing these hidden cultural assumptions and providing stimulus for further dialogue. This approach also has practical applications for practitioners and teacher trainers.

The rationale for this study

The study of Japanese early childhood settings has been a popular topic for anthropologists in the past (Hendry 1986, Holloway 2000, Kotloff 1993, Lewis 1995, Peak 1991, Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989) but current research has tended to overlook this subject in favour of academically evolving China or Korea (Hu and Szente 2009, Kim and Lim 2007, Kwon 2003, Lau, Li and Rao 2011, Nyland, Nyland and Maharaj 2009, Park and Abelmann 2004). Furthermore, as I noted in my earlier Master's thesis (Burke 2007) most of this anthropological research has been conducted in urban Honshū leaving a gap in the literature pertaining to rural areas including Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. Similarly, ethnographic studies of New Zealand early childhood centres appear to be limited in comparison to the resources available with a foundation in education or policy studies (Bone 2007, Brennan 2006, Brennan, Everiss and Mara 2006, Mitchell et al. 2006, Notman 2011, Stephenson 1999). This study intends to go some way towards closing that gap in the literature.

It also aims to offer a view of culturally informed practice in both New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts, and as such, represents a starting point for critical self-analysis by teachers and a stimulus for dialogue between members of the early childhood education community in both countries. It is expected the proposed research will contribute to the body of work undertaken by scholars in the fields of comparative anthropology and education. This study will add to research by New Zealand scholars about Japan while providing a contemporary view of the political and social issues facing early childhood settings in a New Zealand provincial town and in a rural Japanese community. It is also hoped that the film will have a practical application within educational circles and at early childhood teacher education institutions.

As discussed earlier, the grainy videocassette produced by Tobin and his colleagues in the late 1980s is still being used as a training resource today in New Zealand and in other countries across the globe. A digital version of this video, as well

as a DVD made to accompany the new PS3C² study in 2009, is now available over the internet and will inevitably replace the original video as finances permit.³ Freudenthal (1988) also used video when conducting research on Turkish children attending kindergarten in Sweden. Like Tobin et al. (1989, 2009), Freudenthal shared his video tapes with teachers and children and recorded their reactions. About a year into his fieldwork, he was asked by the Swedish government department in charge of early childhood education to produce a film about the kindergarten. The film was shown to early childhood educators and teacher trainees to inform them about the activities of the kindergarten and to be used as a basis for further discussion (Freudenthal 1988:130). I am hopeful that the images captured in New Zealand and Japan during this project may prove to have a similar value and use in the future. As Nuttall (2003) has pointed out, early childhood teachers generally have limited opportunities to meet with other teachers and observe their practice. Teachers interviewed by Nuttall expressed a desire to engage with others in their field and to have their own practice analysed as a means of constructing their role within the sector. The same sentiment was also expressed clearly by the teachers who participated in this study.

This research has benefits for a broad range of instructors and educational institutes in New Zealand. Scholars such as Boocock (1989) and Kotloff (1993) have conducted research into how Japanese early childhood settings foster cooperative group spirit without sacrificing individuality and spontaneous self-expression. They also identify training methods for Japanese teachers as placing emphasis on observation of children's behaviour and acquisition of practical skills over abstract theories of child development and pedagogy. Such studies, which have been identified as valuable for American early childhood education, also have implications for New Zealand early childhood teachers seeking an international approach to deal with increasingly diverse classrooms. It has been argued that developing a sense of community in the classroom fosters multicultural awareness and acceptance among children (Ramsay 1982).

Across the Pacific, Japan's economic downturn and dropping birth rate has heralded a national mood of pessimism (Goodman 2000, Kingston 2004). The nation is currently undergoing a period of self-doubt following massive economic success in the 1980s. During those years anthropologists flocked to Japan to discover the 'secret' to its

² From this point on, *Preschools in Three Cultures* will be abbreviated to PS3C to make the text less cumbersome for the reader.

³ Both of these DVDs can be purchased through Joseph Tobin's webpage: <http://joetobin.net/videos.html>

children's success in exams and educational institutions were widely studied by social scientists, economists and political scientists. Post-millennium, the mood has changed. Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:152-156) have discussed the pervasive sense of pessimism that has infiltrated both wider society and the early childhood sector.

Japanese teachers are looking for new inspiration to curb the perceived tide of inadequate parenting and socially maladjusted children (Imoto 2007). In a recent study on international perspectives of play and learning in the early childhood field, researchers also point to the rising numbers of foreign nationals (including children) registered in Japan (Mori et al. 2009:117). Cross-cultural perspectives introduced through film may provide a useful lens through which early childhood teachers in Japan can reflect on their own ideology and practice.

The value of a cross-cultural or comparative approach

In the past decade comparative studies have fallen out of favour in anthropological circles. Much more common is research that concentrates intensively on one community or alternatively widens its scope to include a number of field sites. However, comparative or cross-cultural studies can offer effective ways of “drawing the attention of insiders of a community to unnoticed assumptions and practices” (Rogoff 1995:144). It is clear that study of another culture invariably leads to new insights into one's own culture (Rogoff 2003). Bourdieu and Wacquant have explored the idea of reflexivity from an epistemological point of view. Rather than seeing the purpose of ethnographers as uncovering hidden truths about the culture or society of “the other”, they argue that the real value lies in how that knowledge can be reflected back to reveal implicit cultural practices normally unnoticed in the researcher's society (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Taking a cross-cultural or comparative approach can help reduce one of the problems facing anthropologists seeking clarifications of everyday practices. As Clark (1994:17) suggests, “it is the very ordinariness of the mundane that makes it difficult for people to recall all that they know about it”. In contrast, the unusual is not only given more attention, it is easier for participants to recall. One culture's quotidian life can easily come to be viewed as the exotic when seen from the perspective of another culture. This creation of the exotic is not without its drawbacks as has been analysed by scholars (Said 1978) but, at the very least, comparison can illuminate what might have previously been unseen by the members of a community or a culture.

It is worth mentioning at this point that this study draws on a number of different disciplines including social anthropology, education, early childhood studies and visual anthropology. A limitation is the heavy bias towards literature written in English. While ideally the bibliography should contain more ethnographies written in Japanese, it was difficult to locate and obtain the pertinent Japanese language texts in New Zealand. The complex nature of reading Japanese characters (*kanji*) correctly also made misinterpretation possible which further determined the selection. Despite this, where possible the translated works of Japanese ethnographers have been included. I also wish to acknowledge that while New Zealand is a bi-cultural country, my study is not based on an analysis of Māori culture and practice. While agreeing that Māori perspectives should be at the forefront of early childhood education research (Wong 2006), the New Zealand field site did not demonstrate strong Māori cultural practices and beliefs therefore they have not been included for analysis.

The field

New Zealand and Japan may at first appear to be two countries with very little in common, but they share some similarities. Both are island nations, surrounded by vast tracts of ocean which lap at a land peppered with volcanoes and hot springs. But while Japan is an ancient country rich in culture and heritage, New Zealand is a relatively young nation. However, the site of my Japanese fieldwork, the island of Hokkaido, was also colonised only fairly recently following the Meiji Restoration in 1868.⁴ It is home to the indigenous Ainu who were the island's original inhabitants (Siddle 1999a). Historically speaking, Japanese residents of the island are classified as relatively new immigrants who severed kinship ties to their original homes to establish independent family units (Ryang 2004). The island's sub-arctic climate and geographical isolation mark it as distinct from mainland Japan and it retains a utopian image in the minds of the Japanese public, especially those who reside in crowded, urban areas. In a recent survey, consumers across Japan voted Hokkaido the most attractive prefecture in the country when considering criteria such as sightseeing, residency and local products (Statistics Japan 2010a).⁵

⁴ For historical information and more detailed analyses of the impact of colonisation in Hokkaido, see Morris-Suzuki (1994) and Siddle (1995a, 1995b, 1999b).

⁵ Hendry (2009) has also discussed Hokkaido as a place for Japanese domestic tourists to explore what she terms "fantasy travel in time and space" at leisure theme parks designed to replicate far off countries or periods.

While Hokkaido is certainly beautiful, life for the prefecture's residents is becoming increasingly difficult as economic decline and depopulation take their toll. Although the current population stands at 5,507,456 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2011) many of these people reside in or near the capital city of Sapporo in the west of the island. The general Hokkaido population has decreased only 2.9% in the past five years, however many of the small towns in Eastern Hokkaido near where the fieldwork took place have experienced depopulation of around 10% over the same period. In contrast, regions often chosen to be the focus of anthropological study, such as Tokyo and Kyoto, have remained demographically stable during this time despite the challenges to Japan's economy.

My fieldwork site, the city of Yuri,⁶ is situated an hour's drive inland from the freezing Okhotsk Sea on the Eastern coast of Hokkaido. The area was at one time famed for its mint (*hakka*) exports but these days it is the commercial hub for the local agricultural industry. In 2006 several smaller towns in the surrounding area merged with the city of Yuri to form a new economic and administrative entity. As a result, the city has managed to escape many of the economic woes facing the nearby farming villages. The current population of the city is listed as 125,628 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2011), a decrease of 2.9% since the previous census taken in 2005. There are wide variations of growth and decline between different age groups, with the number of children dropping in contrast to a rising elderly cohort.⁷ With the economy of Hokkaido dependent on state-allocated funding (Japan Statistical Handbook 2006:166), it is not difficult to predict the kind of pressures local government will soon face in dealing with this "coming up-ended triangle" (Roberts 2002).

Oka⁸ is one of the largest kindergartens (*yōchien*) in the city of Yuri. It is identifiable by its bright, spacious facilities and an enormous clock which reveals dancing characters on the hour. Children arrive at the kindergarten each morning aboard a fleet of brightly painted small buses decorated with smiling animals. The one-story block of classrooms is set on expansive grounds bordered by large trees in the middle of

⁶ I have used fictitious names for the two cities where fieldwork took place in Japan and New Zealand.

⁷ For example, the number of elderly (over 65 years) has climbed from 26,715 to 29,730 (+11%) between 2002 and 2006, while the number of children aged between 0 and 4 has dropped from 4,896 to 4,554 (-7%) during the same period. These statistics were obtained in 2006 by personally visiting the Yuri town hall where detailed and specific information is held. Since that time, the absorption of surrounding villages into Yuri's administrative area has made collecting accurate micro-statistics difficult.

⁸ I have used fictitious names for the two centres where fieldwork took place in Japan and New Zealand, as well as pseudonyms for all children's and teachers' names. Participants were aware that complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed, however, due to the use of video in the project (See Appendix B).

a respectable neighbourhood. Over the past decade the kindergarten has retained its position as a popular choice for middle class parents who approve of the energetic, well-qualified teaching staff and the extensive curriculum. As a private institution, the kindergarten earns revenue by charging fees to parents although it also receives limited funding from the local city and prefecture. In contrast to many of the surrounding kindergartens and childcare centres, which have seen their rolls decrease in line with the dropping birth rate, Oka has managed to keep its roll stable by regularly introducing a number of new services to satisfy parents. These include after school care services, a mother and toddler class, holiday programmes and a comprehensive bus service used by almost all the children to travel to the kindergarten each day.

Like staff at the vast majority of Japanese kindergartens, all of the teachers at Oka are graduates of two year junior colleges and one or two have degrees from universities. Ben-Ari (2008: 249) suggests that the high numbers of qualified teachers means that the educational level of Japanese early childhood staff is amongst the best in the world. He also points out that the young age of teachers works to keep the centres economically viable as salaries are linked to years of service. At Oka, the female teachers are encouraged to leave their jobs as soon as they get married. However, this does not always mean that teachers resign their posts willingly. One staff member in particular had fought to retain her position but was being forced to accept a salary that declined each year as punishment for her stance. Like many centres across Japan, the teaching staff are all women in contrast to the small number of male employees who hold either ancillary positions (such as bus driver) or more senior posts (such as principal).

In contrast to the economic decline facing the residents of Yuri, the city of Rata, where my New Zealand field site is situated, has been experiencing a population boom. The most recent census puts the number of residents at 103,632, which represents a population increase of 14% since the previous census five years earlier in 2001. While the local economy has been challenged during the global economic crisis, it has not been enough to deter people wishing to move to the area in search of a laidback coastal lifestyle.

Kaimai Kindergarten⁹ is a community owned not-for-profit early childhood education and care centre. It is situated on a peninsula to the west of the city in a leafy

⁹ This is not the real name of the centre.

suburban area within a few minutes walk of the seashore. Many of those living in this community are in professional employment and the well-maintained houses reflect the relative wealth of the inhabitants. The centre is located on the grounds of the local primary school which is highly regarded, and which has been designated a decile 10 by the Ministry of Education.¹⁰ The physical structure of the centre consists of a one-level wooden prefabricated building which is predominantly open plan, but contains a few separate areas for the centre's kitchen, the office and the bathrooms.

The teachers are all fully qualified which is seen as a mark of both pride and quality within the centre. The fee structure for the centre is complex as payment varies according to families' eligibility for the government's "20 hours free ECE" programme. At the time of the research, 80% of the total number of children attending received this funding with just over half paying nothing, 36% paying less than \$20 per week and the remaining families (10%) paying between \$50 and \$75 per week. As the centre is prevented from charging for "20 hours" as per government policy, the economic viability of the centre has recently become more precarious. This has placed great stress on staff and families.

Like most kindergartens and early childhood centres in New Zealand, children attending Kaimai come from culturally diverse backgrounds. European children make up 68% of the roll, Māori children 12.5%, Asian children 9.7%, Pasifika 2.8% and 7% of children at the centre identify themselves as coming from other cultures outside of these groups. This diversity is a source of pride and the early childhood curriculum of New Zealand, Te Whāriki, stresses how important it is for the links between family, home and the centre to be valued and affirmed (Ministry of Education 1996:54). In contrast, figures for diversity were not available for the Japanese centre, and teachers I spoke to about this were adamant that there were no children from other cultural backgrounds attending their institution. This seems hard to believe considering that

¹⁰ In order to establish the level of funding required by state-owned schools throughout the country, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand assigns each institution a decile rating. A school's decile indicates the extent to which students come from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. As decile 10 schools are located in wealthy areas, they therefore receive little or no funding from the state. Conversely, schools with decile ratings of 1 reflect communities in need and receive maximum funding. The Ministry draws on information gleaned from the national census to calculate the decile. These factors include household income, occupation, household crowding, educational qualifications and income support (Ministry of Education 2010). This system has met with some criticism from within the education sector and in the popular press (Nicholson 2001, Richardson 2005, Staples 2009, Winton 2006).

Hokkaido is the home of the indigenous Ainu and that one of the island's most famous Ainu tourist villages is only a thirty minute drive away. There has been no move to include Ainu culture in the nationally standardised early childhood curriculum and children of this ethnicity are reported to be the victims of racism leading them to disguise their identity (Sjoberg 1993).

There are some obvious structural differences in the way the two organisations are arranged. In New Zealand, the centre caters for a smaller total number of children. This is reflected in the physical size of buildings and grounds being on a much smaller scale than that of the Japanese centre (Figure 1). As Oka Kindergarten is located in Hokkaido it is particularly fortunate to have sprawling grounds but the building, which has space for over 250 children, is not unusually large (Figure 2). Many of the kindergartens and early childhood centres I visited as part of the focus group sessions were located in urban areas, yet were similarly large structures, often two storied and capable of accommodating comparable numbers.¹¹

My Hokkaido field site was a private kindergarten located in a suburban town in the midst of a vast rural prefecture yet I did not distinguish any practices which made it more or less “Japanese” than other centres I visited in other parts of the country. Scholars such as Ben-Ari (1997:9) and Peak (2001:145) claim that there is very little difference between early childhood institutions in Japan, due to the relatively standardised curriculum, activities, ratios and staffing practices. However, remarks during several of the Japanese focus groups did lead me to believe that this kindergarten, while not unusual, was rather traditional in terms of pedagogy and practice. Viewers from several progressive centres labelled the kindergarten as somewhat old fashioned, which also linked in with notions of rural Hokkaido centres as being symbolic of a re-created, nostalgic past which will be discussed in later chapters. These ideas resonate with those expressed by Walsh (2004:98) who claimed that his research in suburban public early childhood centres reflected a more traditional side of Japanese early childhood education than that of private urban centres.

¹¹ There are also many examples of smaller institutions but in general the physical space and structures of Japanese centres are larger than their New Zealand counterparts.



Figure 1: View of the early childhood centre where New Zealand fieldwork took place



Figure 2: View of the kindergarten where Japanese fieldwork took place

As Ben-Ari (1997:26) has pointed out, the terms “typicality” and “representation” are disputed terms within the social sciences. Despite the contested nature of individual situations, recurring rhythms and patterns form the foundation of social research. Ben-Ari’s description of a daycare in Kyoto is very similar to centres detailed by Hendry (1986) and Peak (1991) and yet it differs from my field site in that his setting is clearly a childcare centre and mine is a kindergarten. However, the majority of the kindergarten’s routines were easily recognisable and familiar to Japanese viewers if somewhat traditional in terms of pedagogy and practice. In viewing the New Zealand video, New Zealand teachers found common ground in the freedom children enjoyed, the emphasis on unstructured, outdoor play and minimal routines. As Sato (2004:15) has pointed out however, although teachers may work within a shared set of ideas and practices, they are themselves individuals and their classrooms reflect both their personalities and their own diverse pedagogical approaches.

Field site structure and daily routines

In each centre, the day was structured in ways that reflected the ideology of both the nation-state and the institution. In New Zealand, while the day technically commenced at 8.45 am, children arrived sporadically with their parents throughout the early morning. After choosing a cubby hole in which to stow their bag, the children would then wander off to join in play with friends, sit down at one of the activity tables to create with dough and paint, or maybe go and dig in the sandpit. With the exception of a break for morning tea and a ten minute “mat time” at the end, children were free to create their own play and learning opportunities. This approach is supported by the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki which views children as competent, capable learners enmeshed in community.

Most of the children would be collected by their parents at lunchtime, except for a small, daily changing group of children who tucked into sandwiches, fruit and yoghurt outside under the supervision of one teacher while the other staff retreated to the staffroom for their lunch break. The afternoon marked the commencement of a new session and the arrival of different, younger children. As in the earlier session, children were free to choose from a number of activities or objects placed on tables or set up outside, or to construct their own scenarios. The four teachers “on the floor”¹² moved

¹² This term refers to the times when teachers are assigned to be with the children: playing, supervising and scaffolding learning experiences. When not “on the floor” teachers may complete administration tasks, or attend meetings and professional development seminars.

between individuals and groups of children, assisting, chatting and interacting where required. The day finished around 3 pm with a short communal gathering before leaving, perhaps a song, or a picture book, or an acknowledgement of a particular child's contribution to the group through a kind act or word.

At the Japanese centre, the majority of the children arrived together in groups on one of the three kindergarten buses that conducted pick-up routes around the city. As each group arrived they would be met by the principal and expected to give a hearty morning greeting. The children would then go and locate their labelled cubby hole containing their inside shoes, change shoes, and proceed to their classroom to put away their bag, take off their outside uniform smock and hat, before enjoying some free play time before morning assembly. Following assembly, children would return to their classrooms for some kind of group activity which had usually been decided by the teachers before, either at the time of planning the yearly curriculum or at one of the frequent staff meetings. Sometimes the morning session would be dedicated to special or seasonal events, such as the communal birthday party, making rice cakes, planting vegetables, celebrating festivals or training for concerts or the sports day.

Lunch was a ritualised affair with children carefully laying out their lunchboxes, chopsticks and cups, then waiting for the appropriate greeting (*itadakimasu*) to commence eating as a class group. The end of the meal was similarly accompanied by ritualised greetings and songs, performed to music played on the piano by the classroom teacher. Ritualised chanting and greetings mark transition points in the Japanese kindergarten classroom and are used for beginning, finishing, eating and the arrival of visitors, among other things. The afternoon session was dedicated to free play and children would spread out throughout the classrooms, hall, staffroom and grounds tossing balls, constructing with large wooden blocks, drawing, and making swords or fairy wands. By 2 pm, the clean-up music could be heard across the kindergarten and resources would be packed away by children and staff, the farewell rituals undertaken and the buses full with their small passengers by 2.30 pm. For the children of working parents, the afternoons at kindergarten continued on with activities in the hall as part of the after school programme or on-site English lessons to attend.

As can be ascertained by these brief descriptions, the two early childhood settings vary greatly in terms of daily routines. There are also differences in terms of teacher/child ratios, fees and the hours that children attend (see Table 1). As the project progressed it became clear that these differences represented cultural expectations

relating to key issues such as definitions of appropriate play and learning, centre routines and ideas about managing conflict. These, and other issues which emerged as significant, will be explored in greater detail in the body of the thesis.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis claims that implicit cultural practices not only shape many of interactions taking place in the early childhood context, many of these practices often go unnoticed or unrecognised as culturally informed. Using video to reflect on comparative material proved to be a powerful way to expose these hidden assumptions. What this method revealed is the central role that children's bodies play in the early childhood experience. This study argues that the ways in which children's bodies are viewed, manipulated, protected, ordered and challenged provide a useful lens through which to examine unseen cultural practices.

The body has been the subject of anthropological research since the late 1970s and continues to provide a focus for robust discussion by social scientists (Fraser and Greco 2005, Mascia-Lees 2011). The "three bodies" approach suggested by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) has been especially useful for unpacking the layers of dialogue that emerged from the video sessions. The "three bodies" express three areas of discrete, yet related, analysis developed by the theorists, Mauss (1936/1973), Douglas (1970/1996) and Foucault (1975/1995). While Mauss was concerned with the experience of the individual, physical body, Douglas looked for symbolic meaning in the social body, and Foucault remained committed to unpacking the body politic.

The thesis is comprised of two main parts, each of which integrate literature, theoretical discussion, ethnographic material and, in some cases, personal anecdotes drawn from my own experiences in each context. The first part of the thesis is concerned with introducing the topic, methods and literature, commencing with this introductory chapter, followed by a discussion of the research method (Chapter Two) which has defined the parameters of the project from early in the research. Chapter Three looks at the methodological issues which had implications for this study. The theoretical underpinnings of the research are also outlined at this point. Chapter Four offers background information in order to place the New Zealand and Japanese field settings within the context of political reform, discourses and sociocultural change. It explores the cultural ideology of New Zealand and Japanese child-rearing practices, and traces the politically contested origins of the contemporary early childhood education

system in the two countries. Lastly, the chapter examines how children's transition between the home and centre is approached in culturally specific ways.

The remainder of the thesis consists of five chapters which seek to place children's bodies in context. This framework arose as a result of the video-cued multi-vocal methodology. Like that of Joseph Tobin, whose work and methods inspired this project, the aim of this study was to produce a multi-vocal text and it is throughout this section that the voices of the teachers can be heard most clearly. The issues that are presented here are those which resonated most strongly during the many hours of observations, video, discussion and analysis by all those who participated in this study.

Chapter Five discusses the discourses surrounding children's bodies in early childhood education which suggest that the body is in danger of vanishing in Western contexts yet retains a central place in Japanese settings. In New Zealand, as in other Western contexts, children's bodies have increasingly become the focus of surveillance and regulation (Foucault 1995). In contrast, Japanese children's bodies are viewed through a lens of nostalgia and innocence (Creighton 1997, Robertson 1988) despite challenges to this ideology. With reference to Douglas (1966), this chapter also considers the extent to which bodily products may be classified as polluting in each culture.

Chapter Six examines how the body both engages in and reflects the curricula of each nation through a closer view of sensory play, embodied techniques and physicality. This chapter draws on the ideas of Mauss (1973) who argues that children's play should always be seen as culturally constructed, rather than dismissed merely as "natural" acts. It is followed by Chapter Seven which asks how a global discourse of risk has influenced practice and policy in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood sector, albeit through contrasting means. Children's bodies are increasingly becoming the focus of these risk discourses, but in order to identify how different practices are labelled risky the cultural biases of each context need to be laid bare (Douglas 1992). This chapter argues that the New Zealand context is marked by health and safety discourses which seek to control and minimise bodily risk (Foucault 1995) while at the Japanese centre the management of children's bodies takes a more fatalistic approach.

Chapter Eight considers how New Zealand and Japanese early childhood teachers seek to discipline and order children's bodies through an exploration of three themes: noise, conflict, and finally, concepts of time and space. Foucault (1981, 1995) has shown how the body is rendered docile through the civilising power of modern

institutions such as the school. This chapter argues that the regulation of children's bodies, as articulated by Foucault, is a culturally mediated operation. Chapter Nine asks how intangible cultural concepts such as pollution and impurity collide with the reality of hygiene and dirt in the early childhood environment. It questions how teachers and children embody these beliefs in a practical and ritual sense. Calling on Douglas's (1966:35) definition of dirt as "a matter out of place" this chapter discusses the body as a site of pollution, polluted spaces, and rituals around food labelled in or out of place. The thesis concludes with a final chapter which revises the main argument and presents the findings of the research in a condensed format.

While the thematic chapters have been arranged so that the reader can progress through the ideas in a logical, linked manner, each chapter may also be read on its own as an introductory essay on a particular implicit cultural practice. As this is a small study, it is by no means exhaustive and cannot possibly represent the myriad of early childhood experiences throughout New Zealand and Japan. Rather, it can be seen as a first step towards a framework for more extensive research. I hope this work will provide an impetus for robust discussion about the cultural meaning behind practice, policy and pedagogy in early childhood centres, and give cause for practitioners, academics, parents and children to question the "naturalness" of their everyday interactions. It is my even greater wish that this research may someday have an applied use in the early childhood sector in one, or both, of the two countries.



Figure 3: Oka Kindergarten children

Table 1: Structure of the New Zealand and Japanese Centres

	Kaimai	Oka
Total Staff	10	14
Teachers Engaging with Children	4	8
Ratio	1:8	1:33
Total No of Children Attending	60	165
Fees	20 hours free \$3.30 per hour* \$20 donation per term per family	¥15,000 per month
Centre Hours	8.45 am – 11.45 am (Morning session) 12.45 pm – 3.15 pm+ (Afternoon session) 8.45 am – 3.15 pm (6 children per day)	9 am – 2 pm (All children) 2 pm – 5 pm (After school care available for a fee)

* On 11th Oct 2010 the fees increased from \$3.30/hour to \$4.00/hour for sessional and \$3.40 to \$4.50/hour for 7 hour full day and increased again on 1st February 2011 to \$4.50/hour sessional and \$5.00/hour full day. The first increases were introduced on 11th October to incorporate both the increase in GST and the loss of advance funding for February 2011 on 1st November. Also increased was the donation per term from \$20 to \$25 per term per family.

+ In October 2010 the length of afternoon session was increased to 3 hours (which in turn increases the full day from 6.50 hours to 7 hours) for the same reason as above.



Figure 5: Map of Japan

Source: www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/lcolor/jpcolor.htm

Chapter 2: Research Method

The local view obscures regularities, but as soon as the local moves abroad, he is forcibly struck by the standardized behaviour of foreigners. The innocent view of culture is that we don't have it at home; it is only abroad that people are culturally hide-bound. (Douglas 1992:25)

Introduction

This project was born of a long association with the two countries in the study and sparked by a reading of Tobin et al.'s (1989) book about preschools in Japan, China and the United States. While both the finished ethnography and the edited film appeared to seamlessly convey Tobin's main argument, neither made explicit the kind of detailed explanation of method that I required to consider undertaking the research in practical terms. With this in mind, I decided to try and contact Tobin via e-mail. Tobin had held several academic posts since the PS3C project but as he is a prolific writer I was able to locate current details for him.¹³ Thankfully, Tobin responded enthusiastically to my intention to apply the PS3C method to New Zealand and Japan, but more importantly, he provided answers to my queries about the finer points of his method.

At the same time, in late 2008, Tobin informed me that he had revisited the preschools featured in his landmark 1989 study. As a result of that fieldwork a new book was due to be published in mid-2009. Along with different collaborators, Yeh Hsueh and Mayumi Karasawa, Tobin had returned to the three preschools from the first book and also conducted research at three new, progressive centres in each country (China, Japan and the United States) using video cameras to capture a typical day in order to understand how two decades of globalisation and social change might have affected early childhood education. I was excited to learn that the research had continued into the present. To my mind, the fact that this research is on-going, and that participants are still interested and prepared to take part, indicates that there is a continued and real need for this kind of scholarly attention.

Tobin also alerted me to a major research project of which he is the PR Director. Entitled the *Children Crossing Borders* project, this research employs the methodology

¹³ For a full list of the academic positions Joseph Tobin has held, and for links to his articles, books and research projects, see his website <http://joetobin.net>

developed during the PS3C study as a means of uncovering staff and parents' beliefs about preschool theory and practice in five countries (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States). More specifically, the research focuses on the experiences of the children of immigrants in early childhood settings in these culturally and politically diverse nations.¹⁴

Although I had not been aware of these developments when I first considered my topic the serendipity seemed too great to ignore. My concerns about the research methods possibly being outdated were quashed in the light of Tobin's new book, especially given the large levels of international funding apportioned to the Children Crossing Borders project.¹⁵ The timing seemed perfect to apply the PS3C methodology to the New Zealand and Japanese contexts.

The aim of this study

My research seeks to apply Tobin et al.'s (1989, 2009) *Preschool in Three Cultures* (PS3C) methodology to an education and care centre in suburban Rata, New Zealand and a private kindergarten in rural Hokkaido, Japan. I currently live in Rata and my family is familiar with the centre where the fieldwork took place. The Japanese kindergarten is located in Eastern Hokkaido, an area where I previously lived for five years with my three children who attended local early childhood centres. The fieldwork consisted of one month spent observing, participating and filming children and staff in each of the centres. In New Zealand a maximum of 30 children attended the centre during each session with four teachers present. In Japan, children are separated into classes and I concentrated on the four year old class with one teacher in charge of 33 children.

In both countries, the intention was to film a 'typical' day in line with Tobin's stated aim.¹⁶ Hours of footage were edited down to a sixty minute video, which was

¹⁴ For a comprehensive explanation of the project's aims, research methods and progress, see the website www.childrencrossingborders.org which is dedicated to the study.

¹⁵ According to the project's website, three major organisations have provided funding for the research: Bernard van leer Foundation, Spencer Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (www.childrencrossingborders.org).

¹⁶ The word "typical" is problematic but I agree with Tobin et al. who argue that it is the most appropriate word in this case (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:8). Like Tobin et al. I do not claim that the centres or the events captured on video were representative of all early childhood settings in New Zealand and Japan. Rather, video analysis by the staff at each centre combined with comments from teachers around the country lead me to believe they were not particularly unusual or atypical. To try and deal with this semantic dilemma, early childhood researcher Daniel Walsh does not claim that his five primary research sites were *typical* but that "all sites were *identifiable* examples of Japanese early schooling" (Walsh 2002: 215).

screened to the classroom teacher and then again at a focus group meeting with other teachers of the ‘insider’ culture. The purpose of this was to confirm that the video was a good representation of the centre, and to give teachers the opportunity to analyse their own practice (the first layer of voice in Tobin’s multivocal methodology). While I found that teachers were interested in viewing their own centres, they generally didn’t feel the need to analyse their own practice in depth. Teachers in both New Zealand and Japan agreed that the video showed a typical day at each centre and that the children’s behaviour appeared “natural” with little in need of explanation. However, as scholars have pointed out, “comparative material can lead us to reinterpret behaviour as cultural that we have assumed to be natural” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1988:50).

Following language subtitling (English↔Japanese) the film was then ready for screening to teachers of the ‘outsider’ culture. This means that the New Zealand teachers do not only critically view their own kindergarten’s video but also that of the Japanese kindergarten, and vice versa. This marks a second layer of voice. Finally, the videos are shown to early childhood academics, students and staff at other centres in both countries, marking a third layer of dialogue. While one centre cannot claim to represent the diversity of a whole nation, neither can five nor fifty. The purpose of this step was to open a space for discussion around what practices and ideology make the video familiar and identifiable, or not, to their audiences.

In order to uncover this third layer of dialogue, focus group sessions were conducted in both countries. This part of the research consisted of seven focus group sessions in New Zealand (two in Christchurch, one each in Dunedin, Nelson, Wellington, Napier and New Plymouth) and nine sessions with members of the Japanese early childhood sector (a group from Hiroshima and Nara held in Christchurch, and sessions in Tokyo, Saitama, Osaka, Eniwa and three in Kutchan in Japan). The size of the focus groups varied between four (the smallest) and twenty six participants (the largest). I also conducted two individual interviews with a Bay of Plenty early childhood teacher and a former Tokyo kindergarten teacher in Rata. In total 74 participants took part in the New Zealand focus group sessions. In Japan, the number was practically the same with 75 participants involved in discussing the videos (see Table 2). All of these discussions are also filmed and these form the basis for the textual analysis.

Table 2: Breakdown of Focus Groups

	Location	Type of Centre	Participants Role	No. of Participants
New Zealand	Christchurch	Childcare centre	ECE staff	7
	Christchurch	Tertiary institution	ECE lecturers and students ¹⁷	6
	Dunedin	Tertiary institution	ECE lecturers and students	4
	Napier	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	7
	Nelson	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	13
	New Plymouth	Tertiary institution	ECE lecturers and students	26
	Rata	Childcare centre	ECE staff	1
	Wellington	Tertiary institution	ECE staff and students	10
				TOTAL 74
Japan	Eniwa (Hokkaido)	Playcentre	Playcentre teachers	4
	Kutchan (Hokkaido)	Childcare centre	ECE staff	15
	Kutchan	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	17
	Hiroshima	Tertiary institution	ECE lecturers and students	5
	Nara	Tertiary institution	ECE lecturers	3
	Osaka	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	12
	Saitama	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	8
	Tokyo	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teacher	1
	Yokohama	Kindergarten	Kindergarten teachers	10
				TOTAL 75

¹⁷ It should be noted that the ECE students that took part in these discussions were also involved in practicum at early childhood education centres and many of them had years of experience in early childhood settings.

Focus groups

Ten to twelve participants is considered the traditional size of a focus group, although for academic research purposes, five to eight is considered ideal in a Western context (Krueger and Casey 2009:67). Most of my groups fell within the range recommended by Krueger and Casey (2009), but there were some large groups, particularly in New Plymouth and Nelson in New Zealand, and in Kutchan and Osaka in Japan. However, the preference for fewer participants can be contested in the Japanese context where numbers are not as relevant as the group dynamic (Bachnik 1998). In fact, too small a group can be seen as not representative or lacking a variety of different personalities (Burke 2007).

Wellner (2003) has discussed how ethnography has influenced the turn towards focus groups conducted in natural settings with real, rather than constructed, social groups. This approach is seen as more appropriate in anthropology than the traditional method which stemmed from the fields of marketing and business. All of the focus groups were natural groups (i.e., of early childhood students and/or teachers working in either the same centre or the same region) rather than constructed groups (i.e., of people who had never met before). As the groups had not been constructed by me, I did not restrict participants according to imposed criteria. In both countries, I had been granted access to participants through personal contacts. I did not feel it would be appropriate to turn people away when they were all clearly part of the early childhood context, and each could potentially offer valuable insights. I also thought it would be rude to eliminate some participants (and on what basis?) considering they had made an effort to attend. Unlike traditional focus group sessions, I did not offer cash incentives, but relied on participants' interest in the research and the influence of my "personal guarantor". I did, however, supply refreshments which is more appropriate in academic environments (Krueger and Casey 2009:67).

Leask, Hawe and Chapman (2001) suggest that constructed groups can allow for more animated, uncensored discussion compared to natural groups where participants may censor their comments out of sensitivity to others. Despite Leask et al.'s criticism of natural groups, I believe that this approach was the most suitable for my study both in a logistical sense and in order to obtain a wide number of views. It should be noted that in several cases the teachers did not work closely together (i.e., at the same centre) but were loosely connected through an umbrella organisation (such as a Kindergarten

Association, a university, or a regional teaching group). I believe that this allowed for less inhibition when it came to presenting strong or opposing viewpoints.

The use of natural groups also follows the lead of Tobin and his colleagues who go into little detail about how focus groups were used, except to note that, for the first book, the “insider” video was shown to “approximately 300 parents, teachers, administrators, child-development specialists and students” (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:8). For the second book, the videos were shown only to “early childhood educators who are outsiders to the focal preschool but insiders to the culture” (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:17). It is notable that this time parents, students, administrators etc. were not included in the process. For logistical reasons, I followed the example of Tobin’s second book, by restricting the screenings to teachers (and initially parents although this did not eventuate as explained in Chapter Three).

To analyse the focus group data, I used a “classic analysis strategy” as described by Krueger and Casey (2009:118). In this method, themes are identified by colour coding. The authors note that “a number of variations are possible, but the core elements are basically cutting, sorting, and arranging through comparing and contrasting” (Krueger and Casey 2009:122). In order to protect the confidentiality of my focus group participants, I do not go into detail in the text about the speakers of quoted comments beyond the place name where the discussion took place. However, as with the video screenings with teachers at Kaimai and Oka Kindergartens, all of the focus groups sessions were transcribed and an audit trail logged on my records (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Grappling with terminology

Upon reading the literature, it becomes clear that ethnographies which discuss aspects of early childhood education use various terms to define institutions and settings. In the United States, the preferred umbrella term is “preschool” as seen by the works of Boocock (1989), Holloway (2000), Lewis (1995), Peak (1991), Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009), Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989), and Walsh (2002). British anthropologists such as Hendry (1986:4) make a distinction between “kindergartens” and “day nurseries” while Penn (1997) uses the term “nursery” to describe institutions in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. Israeli Ben-Ari (1997:8) pointedly identifies his field site as a “day-care center” and is quick to reproach other anthropologists for

carelessly lumping *yōchien* and *hokuien* under the umbrella term of “Japanese preschools”.

In a New Zealand context, terms such as “day-care” and “nurseries” have been out of use for many years while a growing number of New Zealand educators object to the use of the term “preschool” on the grounds that this is seen to privilege the school orientation of early childhood education.¹⁸ Similarly, the terms “classroom” and “teacher” can be problematic in the New Zealand context (Siraj-Blatchford 2004:137). This is quite different to the situation in Japan, where the “teacher” must be addressed as such (*sensei*) and children are grouped into “classes” as part of a deliberate strategy to foster cooperation and group membership. In order to overcome these context-specific semantic inconsistencies I use the term “early childhood education” to refer to the overall services available in each country. Although the preferred umbrella term in New Zealand is now early childhood care and education, there is no equivalent term in Japanese to neatly encompass both the kindergarten and childcare sector. In the case of directly referring to the work of another researcher, I have chosen to retain the terms they selected. It would seem rather bizarre to suddenly begin relabelling all of Tobin’s field sites, for example, as early childhood education and care centres instead of the preschools he considered them to be.

In its name the New Zealand centre (Kaimai Kindergarten) identifies itself as a kindergarten, and initially I used the same title when discussing the research at conferences and meetings. However, as I moved through the research process I was advised by early childhood academics that my use of this term was inappropriate. In the field of education, the term kindergarten is used to refer to centres that are funded by the state in the form of teacher’s salaries, land and buildings but that are owned and operated by community-based kindergarten associations (May 2009:226). Like state kindergartens, Kaimai Kindergarten operates on a sessional basis, but it is community owned and operated, therefore its correct title is an education and care centre. In this thesis, I have chosen to either use the generic term “centre” or the pseudonym, Kaimai Kindergarten, when referring to the New Zealand field site.

The Japanese centre can be classified as a private kindergarten (*shiritsu yōchien*) with the majority of its income generated from fees charged to parents, however, it does

¹⁸ While the term “preschool” no longer has currency in New Zealand academic debates, it is familiar to international educators and the term is frequently used when discussing early childhood education as part of cross-cultural (Corsaro and Molinari 2000) or comparative research (Alvestad and Duncan 2006).

also receive limited funding from prefectural and local authorities. Unlike the New Zealand context, the correct terminology for various early childhood options is relatively straightforward with kindergartens (*yōchien*) being administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Mombukagakushō*) and childcare centres (*hoikuen* or *hoikusho*) under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Kōseisho*). In recent years, changes have occurred with the establishment of child-accredited centres (*nintei kodomoen*) which are discussed in more detail in the chapter on the formation of early childhood education in Japan. When referring to the Japanese field site, I use the term “kindergarten” (which may be supplemented by the Japanese word “*yōchien*”) or the fictitious name, Oka Kindergarten.

Defining the method

While Tobin mentions that he and his colleagues would film a typical day, edit it and then screen it back to the teachers (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:7), this is actually an abridged description of a far more complicated set of actions, each of which involve choices with possible implications. These implications are discussed in the chapter on methodological issues. First of all, it is necessary to explain the method in more detail.

According to Tobin and Hsueh (2007:78), these are the steps carried out by the research teams when conducting fieldwork in each country: “We (1) videotape a day in a preschool; (2) edit the tape down to 20 minutes; (3) show the edited tape to the classroom teacher, and ask her to comment and offer explanations; (4) hold focus-group discussions with staff of the tape with other staff at the preschool; (5) hold focus-group discussions with staff of other preschools around the country (to address the question of typicality); and (6) hold focus-group discussions with staff of preschools in the two other countries in the study”. However, as Tobin himself acknowledges, this is a simplified explanation of a process which belies more complex issues such as ethical concerns, power relations, reflexivity, editing choices, time pressures, funding restraints and language translation.

Engaging with the field

My choice of field sites for this research was influenced by several key factors. I wanted to find two kindergartens in suburban towns of similar sizes and it was important the centres be considered as being of good quality by both the local community and education authorities. I also believed that neither of the centres had

features which marked them as unusual, and both were relatively representative of communities across New Zealand and Japan. Another important issue was the level of trust inherent in my relationship with the teachers at each centre. I did not feel it would be either possible or desirable to identify a centre with which I had no prior connections, and ask staff there to take part in a process which required their practice to be critically examined by their domestic and international peers.

The act of critiquing one's own practice has been linked to a certain level of personal threat (Dadds 1993, Stenhouse 1986, Winter 1989) which can be heightened further when that critique extends to others (Haggerty 1998). For this reason, I approached two centres whose staff I knew on a personal basis, who were comfortable with the methodology and whose early childhood settings met my other criteria for the study. I decided to concentrate on the four year old class in Japan as representing the midpoint of the kindergarten experience and replicate my observations in New Zealand with children of the same age who predominantly attended morning sessions.¹⁹

In both countries, my presence was formally acknowledged by the centre in a means appropriate to each culture. In the case of New Zealand, I was asked to give a brief explanation to the children at 'mat time' and to answer any questions they might have. In Japan, I was formally introduced by the head teacher at assembly where I gave a short speech about my project. I was also required to give a presentation at the staff meeting and the kindergarten arranged a journalist from the local newspaper to interview me about the research.



Figure 6: An excerpt from an article about my research published in a Hokkaido newspaper

¹⁹ At the New Zealand centre, there were a limited number of spaces (six) for children to attend for a full day. A small number of older four-year-olds featured in the study did attend for the whole day, and this attendance ranged between one and three times a week.

In both centres, I carried out the same procedure. On the first day I took along the camera but I did not switch it on, but instead had it sitting beside me on a table. Right away children came over to me to ask what I was doing at the centre, and what the camera was doing on the table. In this age of digital technology most of the children were familiar with video cameras, and had been filmed by family members or had even filmed sequences themselves. They were not so familiar with the invitingly tactile sound microphone therefore I encouraged them to touch that, to listen to their magnified voices through the headphones and to look through the camera viewfinder at their friends. In New Zealand, most of the children were satisfied with that contact and never bothered to give the camera a second glance after this initial session.

In Japan, the children continued to repeat this routine of examining the camera and listening through the headphones for several days. I found this quite surprising considering that video equipment is far more advanced and commonplace in Japan than in New Zealand. At every kindergarten event I attended parents arrived armed with expensive cameras, tripods and telephoto lenses. I then considered that maybe children were more attuned to performing for the camera at such events when both expectations and anxiety levels are higher than usual. It was at least a week before I could begin filming without children asking to look through the camera. Even then, right throughout the filming I had instances of children placing their hands over the lens or deliberately obstructing shots with their faces or bodies.²⁰ In New Zealand, there was only one child who took this approach. Interestingly her parents had not consented for her to be filmed so perhaps she had realised I was consciously avoiding her and began to seek me out in the centre.

When I looked at my Japanese video there were frequent occasions when a child had crashed into me or the camera, resulting in jumpy footage. A couple of times it was the result of a child slapping my bottom, or me getting a *kancho* (finger up the ass) which did not occur at the New Zealand centre. Walsh (2004) has described the physicality of Japanese kindergartens, and indeed his shock at being “goosed” vigorously by a group of young boys. He was equally surprised to find that the teachers, the principal and the professor who had accompanied him did not seem to notice or discipline the children for their actions. Walsh could not imagine the same scenario

²⁰ I generally didn't experience these issues with the members of the four-year-old class that was the focus of my study. While it seems that they became accustomed to the camera, the other children were still negotiating the issue of my presence in their space.



Figure 7: Japanese children are photographed by a professional photographer during the annual kindergarten sports day

occurring in an American kindergarten, and I doubt this kind of conduct would be tolerated by teachers in a New Zealand context. In Japanese early childhood settings, however, such boisterous behaviour is seen as naturally child-like and therefore rarely constrained.

This sense of freedom had interesting outcomes in terms of the filming process, however, as the Japanese scenes of naked children during water play indicate. Just as rambunctious children teasing a visiting academic would not be tolerated in a New Zealand centre neither would a researcher with a video camera in the midst of young children undressing. These scenes remain highly contentious when screened in a New Zealand context and such images would never be allowed to be captured in a New Zealand centre at the time this research was carried out. Teachers from the New Zealand field site pointed out that not only would I have been prevented by policy from filming at such a time, my cultural background as a New Zealander would have inhibited me from pointing the camera. When I asked them how they would have responded as teachers in the same situation one of them replied: “Well, you would have [stopped] because you’re part of this culture. You wouldn’t have photographed but if it had been a situation where you were still taking pictures we would have said something to you about “that’s not okay that you take pictures of those children”. Another added, “You also have to sign a form when you come in here as a stranger and taking photos of

children is not permitted anyway”. These kinds of expectations surrounding the behaviour of perceived “insider” researchers are common, allowing access at times when those deemed to be from the “outside” may have been denied (Voloder 2008).

Technical challenges

The cameras used for this project were professional quality and utilised mini DV tapes for recording the images while sound was recorded through a directional microphone. The microphone was connected to headphones so that I could hear the sound quality clearly. Before shooting any video each morning the light and sound levels needed to be checked and balanced accordingly. These levels naturally changed throughout the day, especially when you consider images in the harsh light of the midday sun compared to shots taken under the shade cover of the sandpit. Or the peacefulness of a lone child engrossed in a finger painting contrasted with a group of children squabbling over a snatched toy. In reality, I didn’t always manage to get the lighting or the sound to the quality I would have liked. This was partly due to the fact that I was relatively inexperienced with the technical side of the camera, but also because I wanted to interact with the children and the video equipment could be a barrier to that.

Like ethnographic film-makers Timothy and Patsy Asch²¹ (1995:340), I found it difficult to concentrate on simultaneously identifying interesting scenes to film, capturing good sound and interacting with the children and teachers. Unlike the Aschs who worked either in their team of two or with another anthropologist, I was working alone. I tried to carry on as normal but combining the roles of anthropologist, filmmaker and sound technician meant I was generally listening to the audio through headphones. In order to respond to what the children were saying, I had to take the headphones off every time I was engaged in conversation. Midway through filming one day I set my audio levels and left my headphones around my neck with the result that I didn’t hear a mass of crackling until the footage was digitally captured on to my editing system.

Quite often scenes that were visually or intellectually interesting were marred by less than ideal sound or picture quality. There were trade-offs to be made in the editing stage such as including a compelling conflict sequence between New Zealand boys in the sandpit despite its murky appearance to due low light levels. In other cases,

²¹ Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989:4) credit the films of Timothy and Patsy Asch, along with anthropologist Linda Connor, with inspiring the *Preschool in Three Cultures* methodology.

compromises were made between myself and participants. For example, in the New Zealand centre, three children were not given consent to take part in the project. As outlined in the information and consent form parents had signed, it was important that these children were not excluded or disadvantaged in any way during the filming. While I never filmed these children directly, occasionally one or two of them would wander into shot while I was filming another group. This was the case with a conflict and discipline scene that I particularly wanted to include in the final cut. After giving the issue some thought, I contacted the parents concerned and asked them if they would be prepared to allow the shot to be included if I could disguise (mosaic) their child's face. I offered to show them the final result, assuring them they were free to cut the scene if they were not satisfied. All of the parents agreed and the scene remains in the video.²²

Mastering the technical processes necessary to carry out this procedure was far more difficult, however, as I grappled with a newly purchased Avid Media Composer editing package. Early in the project I contacted film lecturers and media practitioners for advice on editing software that could be installed on my home computer. The responses were varied and contradictory but finally I settled on the Avid package as it was high-quality and the company gave a generous discount to students. In retrospect, this was a huge mistake as Avid may well be the choice of Hollywood studios and independent film-makers but it was far too complicated for my needs.

Being a powerful system, Avid necessitated the purchase of a new computer in order to run properly but this also meant that edited clips downloaded onto a memory stick would rarely work on other, older computers. Anytime a clip was required for a conference or classroom screening it needed to be converted into a simpler media format to be viewed.²³ It took time to realise these issues and to learn how to rectify them.

²² The sight of the "mosaic" caused some confusion when the video was shown to Japanese viewers as this method of digital editing is most often used to cover pubic hair in pornographic videos (Allison 2000). The idea of most children being allowed to participate in the video, when others were not, was also in contrast to Japanese methods of consent. As discussed in the section on ethics, consent is generally given by the group as a whole rather than by individuals.

²³ This had the potential to create ethical problems such as the time I returned to the IT support desk at a conference to find the assistants had been unable to pre-load my clips onto the computer at the venue. This was due to complications with Avid. Their suggested solution was to send the clips to You Tube and then retrieve the images back through the computer mainframe. I was horrified that they had even considered it and the idea was quickly muted.

Translating and subtitling

Conducting interviews in Japanese brought up the issue of language, comprehension and cultural nuance. Except for one group of Japanese academics who used some English during an interview conducted in New Zealand, all of the sessions with Japanese participants were conducted in their native language. Despite having lived in Japan for several years, this was not my first language and there were times when I needed clarification of complex terminology or explanations. While this is not a perfect scenario, I still believe it to be preferable to using a translator who might inadvertently fail to convey a seemingly innocuous phrase that may be of vital interest to the ethnographer.

Daniel Walsh, a colleague of Tobin's (Walsh 2003), used video during his fieldwork at Japanese preschools during the late 1990s (Walsh 2002). Walsh observed that the Japanese tendency toward humility meant it was difficult to gain positive views from teachers about their own institutions. In a similar vein, I found the Japanese teachers that I interviewed were initially reluctant to criticise the New Zealand centre until I repeatedly stressed how their honesty was essential to the success of my research.²⁴ Other ethnographers have described how this apparent politeness is a means of burying one's true opinions below layers of "wrapping" (Hendry 1989). Teachers were far more direct in their comments regarding either their own institution or, in the case of the focus group sessions, the Japanese kindergarten in the video.

Japanese have a tradition of self-reflection which is seen as an important part of socialisation (Ben-Ari 1997:79, Goodman 2000, Lebra 1983). When I was teaching in schools and kindergartens in Japan every significant event (such as the sports day or cultural festival) would be followed by a *hanseikai*²⁵ in which we would critique our own performance and that of our colleagues. At the time, this willingness to critically examine oneself appeared to me to be in contrast to Western notions that self-criticism might be akin to publically admitting one's weaknesses. Reluctance to reflect critically on one's practice was evident in some of the New Zealand focus group sessions, possibly indicating the lower priority given to developing this skill in the New Zealand education system compared to Japan.

²⁴ This issue is not limited to Japan (Bernard 2006:360). For example, Postiglione (2000:67) found that his study of minorities in China was challenged by the Chinese tendency to either supply answers that support state agendas or those they believe the researcher wishes to hear.

²⁵ This is literally a "self-reflection meeting".

While numerous online exchanges gave me the technical skills needed to create Japanese subtitles, the process of translation is not without challenge, subjectivity or issues of power (Rubel and Rosman 2003, Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002). In the case of the New Zealand video, translation of the English to Japanese was discussed with a Japanese friend to ensure nuances in the language were correct. She had the added advantage of having lived in New Zealand for several years and being the mother of children attending a New Zealand kindergarten.²⁶ As the translation progressed we found that some of the vocabulary and phrases had no suitable equivalent in Japanese. The most obvious example of this was the often uttered phrase “Use your words”. To try to literally translate this resulted in a grammatically incorrect jumble which made no sense. Finally, we settled on “Don’t hit” (*tatakanaide*) but when I discussed this issue with the New Zealand teachers they were not totally happy with the substitution. One of them explained that, “We make a point of not using negative directives in our centre so something like “don’t hit” goes completely against what we believe in. Here it’s about giving positive statements and helping children to articulate what they are feeling”.

In the Japanese video there were equally contentious words that implied contrasting cultural meanings when transferred to another language and context. As the Japanese teacher is drawing a picture to show the children how to get appropriately undressed and then prepared for water play, she makes body parts on her figure disappear and reappear to indicate the progression of the procedure. Outlining a t-shirt over a naked chest, she chirps “*Oppai ga kakureta*” before moving down to draw a pair of underpants, noting “*Chinchin ga kakureta*”. These phrases were translated as “The boobs have disappeared” and “The penis has been hidden”. The colloquial words *oppai* and *chinchin* are often used in reference to children and contain an element of cuteness about them when used in this context. New Zealand viewers, however, were confused by this kind of language in an early childhood setting, viewing it as inappropriate.²⁷

As Barbash and Taylor (1997) point out, translation must always be commenced with the knowledge that it is a fallible and culturally subjective undertaking. “Translation is an act both of interpretation and of negotiation. It invariably requires compromise. If we truly believe in the reality of cultural difference, then we have to admit that there are respects in which social meaning remain untranslatable across

²⁶ Although this friend does speak English, the discussions over translation were carried out in Japanese.

²⁷ The liberal use of these terms has also proved problematic for translators working with other media, such as Japanese *manga* and *anime*, both of which are increasing in global popularity (Lee and Shaw 2006).

cultural boundaries. Translation is an ideological and potentially reductive process that can only ever be approximate” (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 421). In the same way, selecting the scenes to be included in the final edit is equally subjective (Balikci 1988:33).

Working with film as a medium

Choosing what to capture and edit is, of course, a highly constructed exercise.²⁸ Tobin et al. (1989, 2009:12) sought not only to provide a chronological record of a day in an early childhood setting but also to engage the viewer in a narrative whilst provoking intellectual reactions. In order to achieve this aim, prior to filming Tobin et al. deliberately identified the key characters who would become the focus of each video. Although I could understand their motives, I preferred to let the characters emerge naturally and, in fact, in both New Zealand and Japan two boys clearly became apparent in these roles.

Through my immersion in the Japanese kindergarten and my contact with the New Zealand centre prior to the project commencing, I had already identified practices that I believed would be culturally significant. Although I preferred to let the action unfold naturally, my senses were sharpened towards certain events which often did indeed turn out to be significant for teachers in both countries. At times, however, completely unexpected issues arose from seemingly innocuous interactions. This seemed to be the beauty of the method. In other cases, practices I initially believed to be of importance simply faded away. An example of this was an early interest in conflict and discipline which Tobin et al. (1989, 2009) had dealt with in some depth. With New Zealand as my first site of fieldwork, I consciously trained my camera on fights between the children and the teachers mediating the conflict. Children’s arguments tended to be long, drawn out verbal disagreements with plenty of input by the surrounding adults. In Japan, however, I found the kinds of fights that were common were of a completely different nature. Children would suddenly and violently lash out with physical blows before, just as quickly, resolving the argument with an apology or assistance from a classmate.²⁹ In general, the Japanese teacher either was not present during these conflicts or did not involve herself in them. While these alternate forms of resolution are

²⁸ It goes without saying that there is a vast literature pertaining to the theory of film, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

²⁹ In fact, the arguments were usually over so quickly that I had no chance to capture them on film, possibly leaving viewers of the two videos with the impression that New Zealand was far more conflict-ridden.

in themselves culturally revealing, looking back through the video I realise how much of my content was driven by a desire to locate conflict in the kindergarten. In reality, this was just one small aspect of children's daily lives in each centre.

Although no film-making can ever claim to be free of the bias of its creator, this method encourages participation and feedback from the teachers involved (although unfortunately the children did not get this opportunity). Teachers at each centre in New Zealand and Japan viewed the video before it was screened to the "outsider" culture or to any of the focus groups. Immediately following each viewing I asked them whether, in their opinion, either my presence or the camera had influenced the behaviour of the children or teachers. In New Zealand, teachers discussed the question among themselves:

I would say it's pretty accurate.

So you wouldn't try to calm the children?

No, I think I would do exactly the same as what I did. There was obviously one point where I looked physically at the camera, where I was really aware of you filming, but I still wouldn't have changed anything I did or said.

It was definitely a typical day.

While the Japanese teachers' discussion of their own practice went equally smoothly, the session during which the New Zealand video screened was derailed by an unexpected technical challenge: the human participant. While I had carefully set my camera to commence recording, unbeknown to me an Oka teacher had also pushed the record button just moments later in the mistaken belief that she was helping. To maintain continuity in the conversation I had been sitting with the teachers, after all, I had carefully checked all my settings beforehand. After almost an hour of discussion, the session was winding down and I was conscious of my tape running out. I excused myself and went to check the tape to find to my horror that it had only recorded two minutes of video. The teacher's action had halted the taping I had begun. All I could do to salvage the afternoon was to ask for all the teachers' notes from the screening and write up everything I remembered as soon as I got home that evening. Although at first I blamed the teacher for meddling with the camera, I realised that the fallible human was me for not checking the equipment again. I didn't make that mistake twice!

Conducting the Japan segment of fieldwork also brought me face-to-face with new technical challenges. While the Avid editing system proved itself to be troublesome

when editing the New Zealand video, I was at least able to take my time when selecting shots and attempt to alter any poor quality sound segments or images in the editing suite. As Avid requires a powerful computer in order to function it was installed on a desktop PC which, unlike a laptop, could not be transported. In Japan, due to budget constraints, I had to shoot, edit and screen the film before I left the country. Already weighed down with heavy film equipment I had decided against taking my laptop and taken the chance that I could edit the film at my friend's house. The equipment available to me was an Apple Mac loaded with Movie Maker software. While this proved to be very easy to master, there were simply not the functions available compared to Avid. I also noticed that the reproduction quality was poorer. I burned several copies before I left but when I returned to Japan almost a year later not only had my master copy been deleted off my friend's computer due to space restraints, the copies seemed to have deteriorated following multiple screenings. With no means of reproducing another copy quickly I was forced to use the imperfect copies. While some of the focus group screenings were held in kindergartens' purpose-built audio visual rooms, others were conducted on laptops above restaurants or on television sets in private lounges. For audiences, this resulted in mixed results in terms of audio and visual quality.

Conclusion

Tobin et al. (2009:6) argue that the video-cued PS3C method “collapses and accelerates” the traditional ethnographic fieldwork process in which the anthropologist observes and participates in a specific cultural context. Instead of spending the traditional year in the field, this method provides a focus for interviews and discussions with participants in the form of the videotapes. I agree that this approach not only quickly identifies major themes and issues, it helps to reduce the kind of ambiguity that can occur when interviewing across cultural contexts. For example, if early childhood teachers are asked about their views on how children learn, the question may be too large and vague to elicit a meaningful response. But by using the video as a prompt, teachers can be asked how they would act in specific situations such as when a Japanese boy refuses to draw a picture or children wander away from a baking activity at the New Zealand centre. Teachers' reactions to scenes such as these not only highlight the implicit cultural expectations underlying practice at their own centres, they reveal the way the issue is viewed in the “outsider” culture. Rather than the months spent sifting through interviews with multiple participants in traditional ethnography, these initial

themes reveal themselves relatively quickly although deeper analysis and discussion is needed to unravel them.

Another benefit of using video is the medium itself. Participants are drawn to video for its aesthetic quality and most find images more interesting than text and are therefore more willing to offer feedback on a sixty minute film than pages of text. Advances are constantly being made in digital video technology which makes purchasing equipment more affordable and easier for the novice to master. In comparison to a year in the field, it is a relatively cost-effective option in terms of both time and money.

Finally, a great strength in this method lies in its potential to be used in an applied sense. Pink (2006:19) argues that film provides anthropologists with an opportunity to promote “a public anthropology that comments on and intervenes in issues of public concern”. Throughout the fieldwork focus group participants not only expressed their desire for the films to be made publically available for teaching and training purposes, they declared that the same opportunity for reflection (on self and other) would be useful in their own centres. I believe this method could be successfully applied to other contexts such as workplaces, and used to encourage dialogue towards resolving environmental, political or racial conflict.

There are, however, limitations. Film is a subjective medium which involves issues of power and agency (Pauly 2006:121). Trying to achieve a balance is especially difficult when language translation is involved, as in the case of this study. It is essential that viewers are reminded that film is not a representation of reality, but rather the creation of the researcher.³⁰ Although digital cameras and editing packages are now relatively cheap, the equipment is also more sophisticated which can increase learning times and technical problems. The following chapter examines in greater detail these and other kinds of methodological issues I negotiated on my research journey.

³⁰ Of course, writing an ethnography based on traditional fieldwork is also an exercise in construction (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Light 2010)

Chapter 3: Methodological Issues

It is naïve and misleading to assume ethnographic data – be they film, tape-recordings or fieldnotes – are a reflection of reality, rather than the creation of a unique human being, from a particular culture, who collected the data at a specific moment in time and usually collected it to share with members of his or her own culture.

(Asch and Asch 1995:338)

Introduction

The film and ethnography, *Preschool in Three Cultures* (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989) presents comparative views of Japanese, Chinese and American preschools through the eyes of teachers empowered to speak as anthropologists. Members of each culture are (re)filmed as they critically analyse both their own country's early childhood practice and make judgements about the other two centres in the study. This method views film less as data but as a way of encouraging dialogue, which in turn illuminates culturally informed philosophies and practices of early childhood education within wider social patterns. Such an approach also removes the anthropologist from the powerful role of 'all seeing narrator' common in early ethnographic film, yet recognises the subjective nature of edited videotapes.

Two decades after the first study was conducted, Tobin and his collaborators returned to the original preschools in order to place the research in a social and historical context. An additional school was also selected for study in each country, and both the retrospective and new videos were screened to educators in Japan, China and the United States. The resulting ethnography, *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009) proved that the research methodology remains a valid means of illuminating implicit cultural practice in early childhood centres.

Bruner (1996:46) defines implicit cultural practices as "taken-for-granted practices that emerge from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach". Using Tobin's methods as a starting point I wanted to discover how early childhood settings in New Zealand and Japan incorporate these implicit cultural practices into pedagogy and practice. And what form do these processes take? Are these implicit practices recognisable to teachers at other early childhood centres in those countries?

Unpacking the method

In describing the PS3C method Tobin and Hsueh (2007:77) have written that “the videos function primarily neither as data nor as description but instead as rich nonverbal cues designed to stimulate critical reflection”. The original study was influenced by the work of filmmakers Timothy and Patsy Asch (1995) and anthropologist Linda Connor. It was also informed by Rouch’s (1975) suggestion that film be used as a tool for feedback, Clifford’s (1983) discussion of multivocal texts and Ruby’s (1982) view of ethnographic films to be seen as reflexive mirrors.

Tobin and Hsueh (2007: 78) admit that the original group did not intend to produce a video for wider consumption, but once the research was completed there was so much interest in the film the authors decided to release it to the public. In the most recent study (the sequel to PS3C) the aim was to produce an accompanying video from the start which changed the focus and pressures of the research. Tobin and his colleagues are not alone in this aim. Examples of researchers who have used videotaping as part of ethnographic observations of school or early childhood contexts include Byers and Byers (1972) and Spindler (1982) in the United States, Fujita and Sano (1998), Mori et al. (2009) and Rayna (2004) in Japan, and Haggerty (1998) and White et al. (2009) in New Zealand. Unlike Tobin and his colleagues though, for these researchers their video tapes have remained a source of ethnographic data for private analysis, and although the participants were able to view and comment on content to varying degrees I am not aware of any accompanying media material being released to the general public.

Before going on to analyse the process at work, it is useful to outline exactly what the initial parameters for filming were and how these decisions were made. Although the criteria for shooting the video were not outlined in great detail in either of his books, Tobin and his collaborator Hsueh reflected on this process in a later publication (Tobin and Hsueh 2007:79-85). The first criterion is a focus on routines found in both countries such as children arriving at the centre, lunch time and going to the toilet. Second, key issues in the centre were identified for filming. These included separation problems, fighting, misbehaviour, mixed-age play and intimacy between teachers and children. Third, provocative issues were examined. In the case of Tobin et al.’s PS3C sequel this took the form of naked children being dried off by male caregivers in a Japanese centre. Fourth, protagonists need to be strong central characters to add filmic interest. Prior to taping, Tobin and Hsueh recommend identifying four or

five children on whom to focus the camera's attention. Fifth, dramatic tension must be considered therefore it is useful to think of the film as a narrative. Sixth, it is important to keep the filming visually and auditorially appealing. Tobin and Hsueh (2007:82) argue that "an effective ethnographic video is constructed in a way that draws audience attention away from its constructedness". The last criterion refers to coherence. Tobin and Hsueh recommend that shots are ordered in the edited version as they occurred in real life.

Tobin and Hsueh (2007) acknowledge that in order to achieve these goals, and accomplish the research, there are a number of trade-offs to be made. First of all, the interests of teachers, researchers and audiences need to be negotiated. Teachers may be embarrassed by scenes that researchers see as the most interesting, likewise, a level of interest needs to be maintained to keep the audience watching. Second, it is useful to remember that audiences are made up of insiders and outsiders. Tobin and Hsueh make it clear that they wish for their books and videos to be viewed by a wide range of audiences which may affect editing decisions. Third, the authors also insist that researchers stay true to their chosen genre. In this case, PS3C is defined as "a mix of ethnography and projective tools to stimulate reflection" (Tobin and Hsueh 2007:86). Too much explanation in the form of lengthy subtitles is avoided leaving the viewers to question what they are seeing. Fourth, the search for aesthetically pleasing results needs to be evaluated against the benefit of pertinent content. Instead of hiring a professional crew, Tobin and his colleagues did their own filming in the belief that their professional experience and knowledge of the project goals was invaluable in directing the camera. Interestingly, this time around, the prosumer³¹ equipment made Japanese parents uneasy. Instead of appearing like academic researchers, Tobin's group looked like a professional television crew which initially served to alienate them from their community of observation.

Next, there are technical compromises which must be made. While adding a second camera increases your chances of obtaining good shots, it also complicates shooting and editing. Having more than one camera person can also bring unexpected issues such those which occurred when shooting video for the original PS3C study. In that case, Tobin and his colleagues discussed what to shoot and where to focus but neglected to talk about zooming in. The result was a multitude of close ups of American

³¹ The term "prosumer" is a cross between professional and consumer, and refers to cameras which have advanced features and functions.

children, shot by Joe Tobin, and many group shots by David Wu of Chinese children. They also conceded that arriving two days before the shoot proved useful in getting the children familiar with the camera, but also seemed to provoke fatigue, especially for the teachers, who were anxious to get it all over and done with.

Finally, there can be problems providing context through subtitling and narration. In the PS3C method no narration is added to the stimulus tapes, as this may privilege one act over another. The research tapes are left intentionally ambiguous, with only subtitles providing information about what is being said by the children and teachers. However, this changes in the final edited tape, which incorporates the classroom teacher's explanations into the narration. Although Tobin et al. do not discuss the power relations at play in this act, I see this as problematic as the anthropologist's narration seems to override the very voices inherent in the "poly-vocal dialogue" stated as the aim of the research. This point brings me to the beginning of my own research journey, that of obtaining ethical approval to conduct fieldwork in both New Zealand and Japan, and the starting point from which to consider how I would include the voices that I heard.

Ethical considerations

Like all researchers within universities, I was obliged to fill out a lengthy ethics application in order to gain approval from my institution to carry out my proposed study. As my project involved working with video and children under the age of seven, it was deemed to be potentially risky. Boocock and Scott (2005:47) note that it appears to be more difficult to obtain access to children in countries with higher crime rates and adult fears for children's safety (such as New Zealand) than those with low levels of social disorder (like Japan). This is supported by my personal experience with gaining consent in both countries to take photographs of children³² and throughout the filming process. For many scholars the reality of conducting research with children presents itself as both an opportunity and a dilemma (Woodhead and Faulkner 2000).

It is ironic that while on the one hand, digital culture means that images of children have flooded public arenas such as social networking websites and You Tube,

³² While living in Auckland in 2006 I was approached by the leader of a Japanese community group who asked if I would allow my family to be the subject of an article on New Zealand parenting for a popular Japanese magazine. As part of the story, the journalist and photographers accompanied me to collect my children from kindergarten where they immediately began taking photos, much to the consternation of the staff there. When it was hastily explained to them that this was not acceptable in New Zealand without prior approval, the group were genuinely baffled on two counts. Firstly, they had believed that my social connections allowed them that access and, secondly, they did not understand why taking photos of the children would be threatening or inappropriate behaviour. In contrast, in Japan I was often told that no prior notification was required to film or photograph children, and to feel free to take whatever I liked.

it has become increasingly difficult to take a photo at a school or kindergarten event (Guldberg 2009:168). Parents are also coming under scrutiny for images of their own children deemed pornographic by the authorities (Furedi 2002:74-75). It is interesting that the New Zealand participants took the consent process very seriously, yet when I told them that the Japanese did not require the same level of formality, many dismissed it as ignorance. A Kaimai Kindergarten teacher asked me, “Don’t they have any sexual abuse there yet? They might think they don’t but they’ll end up taking the same precautions in a few years. Just wait and see”.

Tobin (2007:90) argues that pleasure is the missing discourse in ethnographic videos, and that despite initial reservations about appearing on camera, teachers are more likely to agree to participate in a video based research project than a text based one. In contrast, parents are increasingly reluctant to give consent for their children’s participation in a world awash with images in public spaces such as the Internet. Furthermore, the use of video means that the identities of participants cannot be easily disguised in the manner of traditional written ethnographies which raises concern with university Ethics Committees.

In the case of my research, the New Zealand centre was enthusiastic about the idea of participating in the study, but some of the staff were a little concerned about the filming process. They had questions which were not addressed in the ethics application. What if a child was being naughty and a parent saw the film and didn’t like the way it was handled? What if one child was acting out that particular day and was viewed out of context? One staff member was nervous about her practice coming under scrutiny by her national and international peers. Other staff members were very relaxed about the process and declared that having a camera present would not be much of an intrusion as the children were already constantly being observed and photographed as part of the staff observation agenda. From these observations staff produced learning stories, photo collages for the notice board and other special features such as a recent shoe box appeal display.³³ Another teacher commented, “I think it’ll be great. I’m not worried about the filming because we have an open door policy and we’re happy to be observed at any time by parents or others”. At a later meeting with the head teacher and centre manager, the project was agreed to in principle but the two women made it clear that all the staff

³³ The annual shoe box appeal was an initiative started by a staff member who had conducted missionary work. As part of this initiative, children and their families were encouraged to fill a shoe box with a range of stationery, toiletries, clothing and toys to be sent to children in developing countries.

would have to be happy about it especially as, unlike Japan, there are no classrooms but everyone working in the same open-plan space. All of the feedback and discussion from these meetings were used to submit an ethics application that would satisfy university requirements but still reflect the desires of the centre.

In the case of Japan, the approach to ethics was handled somewhat differently despite the application being on the same form as the New Zealand part of the research. I sent out a formal letter (in Japanese) to the principal of the kindergarten that I wished to visit, explaining the project and asking if his centre would be willing to participate (Appendix C). Several weeks later a reply came stating that the kindergarten would be happy to take part, and that they would look forward to seeing me when I arrived in Japan later in the year. Unlike in the case of the New Zealand centre, I did not enclose copies of information sheets for parents and staff or consent forms for these two groups. Instead, I had written a brief description of the project's aims and objectives, including the kind of assistance I was hoping to gain from the Japanese kindergarten staff.

While this method may not be effective in a New Zealand context, it is culturally appropriate in Japan where my long-term relationship with the kindergarten was respected more than photocopied documents from a far-flung university (Cave 2007:8). A guide to conducting fieldwork in Japan explains: "In a society where the careful cultivation of interpersonal trust is given far greater weight than formal contracts and where written contracts often are viewed with distrust, there are many research situations in which American-style legalistic consent requirements would not only be culturally unfamiliar, but would call into question the researcher's cultural understanding and trustworthiness" (Bestor et al. 2003:14). This approach does not always hold sway with Ethics Committee Boards, however, and it was difficult to compile and justify two completely opposing ethical approaches on the same application form. Other researchers conducting fieldwork in Asian contexts have encountered the same challenge (Ross 2000:128).

Power and authority in the field

Paine and DeLany (2000:119) argue that ethnographic interviews are never free of issues of power and the agendas of both researcher and participant cannot be underestimated. While researchers are often hoping to make careers and produce publications from fieldwork, participants are conscious of their position in the organisation and how findings may influence their status from both an internal and

external perspective. In order to conduct research successfully in Japan, it is important to remember that a lack of binding documents does not lessen the ethical responsibility a researcher has to her community. Bestor et al. (2003:14) point out that personal introductions are a standard Japanese cultural practice which involves borrowing trust from others to gain access to new situations. While the person providing an introduction accepts a weighty role as a social guarantor, those being introduced equally enter into complex social obligations to act responsibly and in a trustworthy manner.

Personal connections in Japan can make the consent process appear less complex, but this informality can cut both ways. Both Love (2007) and lewallen³⁴ (2007) have discussed the difficulties of carrying out fieldwork in rural Japan. Simply being Japanese is also not sufficient to guarantee entry to the field as Sewaki (2004:4) has shown. Goodman (2000:154) suggests that the anthropology of Japan is notable for the number of research projects that have arisen from personal experience. He cites the ethnographies of Hendry (1986), Ben-Ari (1997) and Benjamin (1997) as occurring this way, along with McVeigh's work on junior colleges (1997) and Clark's on banks in Japan (1979). I suspect many more studies have developed the same way, despite personal circumstances not having been explicitly discussed by the authors. For my research in Japan, the years that I had spent living in rural communities in Hokkaido became the key to my fieldwork beginning, continuing and being supported in vastly different contexts throughout the country.

Even when Ethics Committees have agreed to let research proceed it seems there can still be complications as Te One (2007) discovered during her study of children's rights in New Zealand early childhood settings. Like Te One, I originally hoped to include the voices of the boys and girls from both centres in my project because as Corsaro (1997:103) notes "Children are the best sources for understanding children". However, advisors within my academic department cautioned against this idea because ethical concerns and approval processes have ironically rendered much of this research almost impossible. This approach has resulted in children's voices being clearly negated from their marginalised space in adult society. Boocock (2005:33) labels the propensity of "nonchildren" to collect and interpret data about children "the adult ideological bias". There are signs that this may be changing. New Zealand researchers have shown that while children's voices have tended to be overlooked in the past, recent theoretical

³⁴ The author chooses to write her name in lower case (lewallen 2008:537).

shifts away from a positivist approach have seen children come to be viewed as active agents (Collins 2006:165).

Te One's (2007) article continues the debate posed by a number of scholars (Corsaro 1997, Davis 1998) regarding the position and power of the researcher in a field site such as a kindergarten. What role should one take? Should a conversation with a child be interrupted if a parent speaks to the researcher? How does that affect the power dynamic within the centre? Like Haggerty (1998), Te One chose to assume an adult role if children were at risk of being hurt. Te One does not specify whether these situations were in the form of accidents or conflicts which may have required intervention. She clarifies her position by writing, "I was clearly an adult, but I was not a teacher, and I strategically chose not to wield the teacher's power to stake a claim, advocate, or influence children's choices, unless the situation was potentially harmful" (Te One 2007:22).

Haggerty's (1998:222) thesis raises a number of issues regarding "the role of person undertaking videoing, what should and should not be videoed and who should 'own' or be able to access the tapes". Like Tobin's clearly expressed aim to include "at least one fight scene in each culture" (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:7), Haggerty found herself drawn to episodes of potential or actual conflict which made some of the adults being taped uncomfortable. The question she asked was "when is it an appropriate point to intervene?" (Haggerty 1998:226). While this may seem like an obvious question, I would suggest that some researchers might decide not to intervene at all. This certainly seems to be the approach taken by Tobin et al. (1989) during their research, a decision for which they were criticised in American circles. I would argue that the point at which intervention should occur (or not) may differ according to various cultural contexts. Like Tobin and his colleagues, I chose not to arbitrate during children's conflicts in Japan in line with the teacher's response but in New Zealand it was difficult not to become embroiled in verbal disputes. Children would ask for my opinion as to who had been wrong or for assistance in restoring justice. I chose to remain purposefully vague in my answers and actions which usually resulted in children either resolving the matter amongst themselves or seeking out a teacher.

Negotiating issues of power and authority did not just occur between children and teachers. At a focus group session held at one urban Japanese kindergarten, the older, male principal insisted on holding the remote control and fast forwarding through scenes that he personally found tedious or unremarkable despite the protests of his

young, female staff. I, too, found myself unable to object to his actions considering that he had generously spent almost an hour talking to me about the philosophy of his centre.

Negotiating access to the videos

In Haggerty's (1998:227) study, the researcher was initially keen for parents to have access to her videos, but later realised it was a complex issue. Participants in some of her centres were not comfortable with sharing the video with parents due to three concerns: first, parents might over-react to conflict situations, and demand that action be taken about the perpetrator, second, privacy issues and third, scenes which may reflect negatively on the centre, staff and their practices.

I encountered the same dilemma at Kaimai Kindergarten. As part of the Ethics process, I decided in consultation with my supervisor and teachers at the field site that parents would be able to view the edited sixty minute video of the centre. My reasoning behind this was linked to a desire for a transparent research process that families could participate in and also in order to replicate the original PS3C methodology in which parents and children were invited to offer feedback. Prior to filming, staff at Kaimai Kindergarten agreed with this, considering themselves to be open with parents and unthreatened by the presence of the camera. They did, however, acknowledge the privacy issues of parents scrutinising children other than their own and watching scenes out of context.³⁵ This is an important point as video, and the feedback it receives, is always "embedded in a particular context" (Haggerty 1998:229).

After the edited video was shown to staff, they agreed that the parents of some of the children involved in the conflict scenes might feel uncomfortable. While the project's information sheet had stated that the edited film would be available if parents wished to borrow it from the office, it was tacitly assumed by staff that most parents would be too busy to get around to asking to view it. This, in fact, proved to be the case, which neatly avoided any difficult issues. At the time I was grateful that the teachers had found a way to fulfill the university's ethical requirements with a minimum of disruption to both the centre and the fieldwork. However, I have since pondered whether I should have pushed the issue (for example, by having a screening for families), or would it have just been another thing for stressed, busy parents to have to attend or consider? Later when I showed the video to focus groups of early childhood

³⁵ One of the staff commented, "It will be Murphy's Law that the video will show the one time Billy hits someone all year long!" Murphy's Law is usually expressed as "If anything can go wrong, it will".

teachers and academics across New Zealand, some were shocked that I had even taken the step of making the video available. In their minds, the film contained many scenes that, taken out of context, might be disturbing for parents.

In Japan, there were no information sheets handed out by me to either staff or parents. Following the Japanese style of top-down consent, the principal explained the project to the staff, and I was required to give a brief presentation at the staff meeting but that was the extent of fulfilling formal ethical requirements. The kindergarten also arranged for me to be interviewed for the local newspaper, and judging by the feedback I received, it seems that most of the parents had read about the research in that article. In my discussions with the Japanese teachers I explained that I intended to show the film to Kaimai Kindergarten staff and to other Japanese early childhood teachers. I also mentioned that edited sections might be shown at conferences and that there was a possibility a narrated, edited film would be produced for the public at a later date. The affirmative answers to each of these decisions were reached by the principal and staff of the kindergarten without direct consultation with parents.

Wong (2006) suggests that researchers should be able to demonstrate cultural competency during the various stages of the study. Wong defines cultural competency as having substantial knowledge of the study culture and of sociopolitical issues, plus an ability to apply the research in a culturally sensitive way. Cross-cultural research requires that researchers must constantly be willing to adjust their own cultural expectations about what constitutes ethical practice and appropriate data (Chen 2000). Several of the themes that became prominent following teacher viewing of both videos in a New Zealand context were of no concern to Japanese viewers or else left them bemused. The same scenario occurred in reverse. As Wong and Chen have suggested, ethical research does not only mean fulfilling the requirements of university boards, it requires both sensitivity to and knowledge of cultural and local factors.

Practical concerns

My Masters thesis (Burke 2006) had concentrated on the implications of Japan's falling birth rate on *shūdan seikatsu* socialisation methods in preschools, however the lengthier PhD research period allowed for the chance to replicate Tobin's PS3C study. It was also problematic as the fieldwork for Tobin's ethnography had been carried out by research teams made up of specialists in each of the three countries (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:viii) and I could not hope to match that level either in terms of funding

or academic expertise. However, slavishly adhering to costly methods is not always required to achieve worthwhile results. Galton (1999:185) argues that while large scale comparative work can be costly and time-consuming, “much useful work can be done on a comparatively small scale and at minimal cost”.³⁶ Like Galton, I believe that, although smaller in scale, a study conducted by one graduate researcher can still offer some valuable insights.

As Alexander (1999:154) points out, comparative studies across two or more countries can often take a very long time. In her case, accessing and identifying schools in two countries in her five nation study took two years.³⁷ With this in mind, I thought it best to concentrate on New Zealand and Japan, two countries that I had already lived in for extended periods of time and where I had experienced child-rearing, mothering and had encountered early childhood settings. This decision concurs with Asch and Asch’s (1995:343) argument that research filming should not commence until the ethnographer is “familiar with a community and fluent in the local language because filming has a tendency to distance the filmmaker(s) from the people being filmed”.

While ethical issues contributed greatly to the construction of my methodology, concerns of a more practical nature were equally pressing. Alexander (1999:155) notes that she consciously picked five fieldwork sites “rather than the more usual two or one because I wanted to avoid the risk of replacing one kind of dichotomizing – the English brand – by another”. This is something that Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) also mention in their choice to pick three rather than two kindergartens to research. While ideally I would have liked to have replicated Tobin et al.’s three field sites, I believe the study of two centres in two countries maximises the practical and cultural resources that I had at my disposal.³⁸

Although Alexander ultimately chose a large number of schools in which to conduct research, other ethnographic studies have concentrated on detailed analysis of just one (Paine and DeLany 2000) or two educational institutions (Fujita and Sano 1998,

³⁶ At the time of writing his essay on global classroom practice, Galton (1999) noted that he had two doctoral students, one in the United Kingdom and one in Hong Kong, who were replicating part of Tobin’s research with their own kindergarten classes.

³⁷ *Primary Education in Five Cultures*

³⁸ Early in the research I considered including Tonga following literature I had read and a three week visit there in 2007. There also seemed to be a neat symmetry about examining one Asian and one Pacific society alongside New Zealand, as both groups form major parts of the New Zealand population. However, in discussion with my supervisors, it was decided that this idea not only represented challenges in terms of adequate cultural capital, it also would require extensive extra funding and time.

Lareau 1989, Lubeck 1985) to produce the kind of thick description called for by Geertz (1973). Mori et al. (2009) taped a typical day in the lives of 0 to 3 year olds at preschools in Japan, and then played a 30 minute edited video back to parents and teachers for discussion of play and learning. They found the methodology limited as they felt that children at such a young age are easily influenced by physical, mental and weather conditions. They also noted that the presence of a researcher and the camera could be unsettling for children. In Tobin et al.'s (1989) methodology, a period of time is allowed for children and researcher to become comfortable with one another. This proved to be very necessary in my Japanese field site therefore I can understand Mori et al.'s reservations about the success of using video within tight time limits. Boocock and Scott (2005:39) recommend studying children in familiar settings such as their classrooms which have the added advantage of higher child to adult ratios so that children feel more comfortable and empowered.

Responsibility to participants

With any ethnographic project comes a sense of responsibility to one's participants, but when those participants are young and vulnerable that duty seems all the more weighty. From the start I committed to making minimal copies and accompanying each screening of the New Zealand or Japanese video. Although this sounds simple in principle, it became more challenging as I conducted focus groups in multiple regions across both countries over the course of several months. For many of the groups it was difficult to decide on a date that they could all meet due to busy work schedules. Often participants asked if I could send a copy so they could view it when they had time and then take part in a focus group discussion either in person or by electronic means. While at first this seemed quite a sensible idea, especially in terms of reducing costs, I quickly dismissed it as too risky. I was cautious of losing control of the video images and although I didn't think it likely participants would make copies or screen the video to others, it wasn't a chance I wanted to take.

In the final step of my method, focus group participants were required to view the video from their own country and comment on how it might differ from or resemble their early childhood setting. Although this was explained prior to the session, many groups were visibly disappointed that they were not going to see the video of "the other" centre. I was asked over and over to leave a copy with them, which they promised to view later and then send right back to me. In all cases, I refused to do so. However, if

time permitted I screened both videos, but I always ensured “the insider” video was viewed first. One principal in Japan was so keen to see the New Zealand video that I met her for a midnight screening at her kindergarten having run well over time with another group of childcare teachers who had stayed late to watch both the videos. In a New Zealand kindergarten, I managed to use the fast forward button to speed through the main points of the Japanese video before rushing to catch my plane. I felt guilty about having to be so firm about releasing copies, especially when interest was so high, but I felt the interests of the children were paramount and teachers in both countries were understanding of my position despite their unsatisfied curiosity for “the other”.

Although my periods of fieldwork were conducted during kindergarten sessions, in the majority of cases focus group interviews were held after the children had left for the day. McLaren (2008:10-13) has noted the difficulty of trying to conduct research with early childhood teachers who are working long hours and often on rostered shifts in noisy environments where it is challenging to find a quiet space for testing (or interviews in my case). Occasionally in New Zealand, but particularly while taping in Japan, children’s high-pitched voices sent my sound levels spiralling off the charts. Te One (2007) has noted that she had trouble transcribing children’s conversations in early childhood settings as the microphone picked up a great deal of extraneous noise which made the task extremely difficult. As I came to realise, Japanese notions of what could be accomplished during interviews beset with a barrage of interruptions (children popping in, phone calls, photocopiers churning and parcel deliveries) were quite different to perceptions in New Zealand. These issues combined with non-native language interviews made transcription of the Japanese sessions particularly challenging and time consuming.

While gaining access to my Hokkaido field site had been considerably less complicated than Rata due to minimal paperwork and my previous connections, this was not the case when it came to locating focus group participants. As discussed earlier, in a Japanese context personal contacts or being introduced by a social mediator can mean the difference between successfully undertaking research or not (Bestor et al. 2003, Peak 2001:145). When it came time to conducting my focus group sessions in Japan, I was forced to try and locate participants from communities with which I had no previous links. While an e-mail supported by my supervisor or a letter of explanation to New Zealand participants had been sufficient for them to commit to the research, in

Honshū³⁹ I was faced with numerous reasons why it wasn't possible. These included an upcoming *undōkai* (sports day), not feeling confident enough to answer the questions or impossibly busy schedules. In reality, I knew this was a reflection of my status as outsider in these areas. Eventually all of the focus group sessions were organised through the help of Japanese friends who had used their own personal connections to act as a “social guarantor” for me (Bestor et al. 2003).

Transcribing interviews took a great deal of time but this work also provided me with an opportunity to reconsider participants' comments and to begin to see patterns and themes emerging from the many layers of dialogue. One of the unexpected outcomes of this process was also the chance to reflect on my own practice as an interviewer and it was not always a pleasant experience. I realised that my early discussions with staff at both the Japanese and New Zealand field sites were ultimately the ones I was most unhappy with and yet they were among my most important sources of dialogic data.

Developing sensitivity

Research is not a static process, neither do we remain stationary as researchers therefore it is inevitable that this journey has necessitated a constant reevaluation of the ways in which I have worked (Corbin 2009). Looking back, I now feel that the early interviews were dominated by my voice because I was eager to share my thoughts and enthusiasm about the project. I cringe when I play back sections of the video where I gave lengthy explanations at the possible expense of other voices or jumped in to finish an unfinished sentence. On a positive note, however, as soon as I began transcribing those very first focus group sessions (which was generally soon after they were conducted) I could clearly see the impact of my actions on the quality of my responses. As more focus group sessions were carried out across New Zealand and Japan, I was able to hone my skills so that the discussions became more about the participants and my voice began to fade into the background yet remained perceptible enough to probe for answers to my research questions.

In the field of early childhood education, Podmore (2006:28) has discussed the issue of objectivity when observing children for research purposes. She notes that Anne Smith originally called on researchers to be “objective” which carried with it “the need

³⁹ Honshu is the largest of Japan's four main islands, located in the central part of the country between the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean.

to be conscious of self and to be critically self-aware of the meanings we bring to the process of observation” (Smith 1998:41). Smith later reconsidered her position and conceded that value-free, objective observation of human behaviour is impossible. Podmore (2006:27) continues to favour the term objective, which I find problematic, urging researchers to suspend judgement until several observation sessions have been conducted.⁴⁰ I prefer the position of Corbin and Strauss (2008) who state that objectivity is a myth, but argue that an awareness of the training, biases, knowledge and perspectives that researchers bring to the research process can actually enhance the final product. In place of objectivity, they have posited the concept of sensitivity as an aim for researchers. They suggest that sensitivity develops over time through working closely with both people and data. It is through this lens of accumulated knowledge that issues and themes from the data make themselves clear.

“Sensitivity means having insight, being tuned into, being able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data. It means being able to present the view of participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in data” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:32). Sensitivity can be enhanced by experience or familiarity with the field which reduces the time it takes to become comfortable in the setting. However, as Corbin and Strauss point out it is essential to give prominence to the participant’s experience of an event in order to construct meaning and to make connections between the researcher’s own perceptions or those of other participants. As my interviews progressed I sought to achieve better sensitivity in a number of ways. I began speaking less in the interviews to the point of allowing silences to develop which inevitably were filled by more detailed explanations by participants. I listened carefully to participants’ explanations and followed up with questions even when it appeared to them that the answer to the question was obvious, or clear to me that their analysis fitted a pattern seen elsewhere. I asked for more detailed clarification of terms I had only encountered in a different academic discipline. I also began writing my thoughts in a research journal which was separate to my field notes. Through these practical measures, I began to make sense of the data unfolding before me.

These acts also gave me an opportunity to examine my data from a reflexive stance. I began to ask where did I position myself as an anthropologist, as a woman, as a mother, as a former Japanese resident in reference to the research? As Goodman

⁴⁰ However, Podmore (2006:28) does acknowledge that it is important to incorporate “personal reflections on both the focus and process”.

(2000:151) succinctly writes: “All research reflects, at some level, the assumptions and prejudices of the researcher. The question becomes how best to conceive this truth”. Traditionally anthropologists spent lengthy periods living in their community of study but Hannerz (2007:366) has shown that the stereotypical ‘year or two in the field’ is no longer viable for today’s anthropologists. Most are trying to fit fieldwork, which is limited by funding, into teaching and/or family commitments. He suggests that multi-sited ethnography may better suit this kind of fluid scheduling than long stretches.

Amit (2000:11) agrees that core fieldwork features such as length of time and contact have radically changed in contemporary times with practical circumstances now necessarily defining the method rather than the method informing the fieldwork situation. While at first I saw my relatively short time in the field as akin to “parachute anthropology” (Pedelty 2004), I became aware that my “cultural capital” from my years living in Japan and my background as a New Zealander were valuable assets to the project (Bourdieu 1983). The more widely I read around my subject, the more I realised that very little of the recently published literature was written by anthropologists who had undertaken sustained periods in the field. Spending periods of one month in each field site combined with multiple short trips within New Zealand and Japan to conduct focus group sessions meant that I could manage the research within fairly tight time and budget constraints, as well as fulfill family responsibilities.

Positioning myself in the research

My role as a mother had brought me to this project in the very beginning and during each Japanese field trip I was accompanied by one of my three sons. Like other ethnographers before me (Flinn 1998, Gilmore 1998, Morton 1996), there were times when I questioned the sanity of that decision but in general the presence of a child from the “outsider” culture not only provided a rich source of ethnographic data (Whitehead and Price 1986:301) but a universal point of entry into a community (Hendry 1999, Leslie 1998, Walsh 2004). Gilmore (1998) argues that lone ethnographers are often not required to discuss translations of their native culture, instead concentrating on ‘the translation of the culture under study’ (Asad 1986). In contrast, ethnographers accompanied by children or family are frequently asked to explain their own culture for members of the host community which enhances their own understanding in ways that would not happen if they worked alone (Gilmore 1998:40).

Like Gilmore, I was often required to draw on cultural themes to explain my family's behaviour in Japan. During my children's early years, friends and colleagues were constantly perturbed by the fact that my boys slept in their own beds. At the Japanese childcare centre my children attended, it caused problems when I tried to pick my sons up before closing time on days when I had finished work early.⁴¹ According to the teachers, this act could disrupt important *shūdan seikatsu* (group socialisation) processes and had never been considered by local parents for both practical and cultural reasons. From my New Zealand point of view, to leave my children in childcare while I was not engaged in paid employment outside the home made me feel terribly guilty.

During the fieldtrips for this project I would surreptitiously gobble down leftover morsels from my son's plate as we ate prepared hot lunches with classes of kindergarten children. Although I had apologised many times, explaining that he was terribly picky and that back in New Zealand there was no requirement for children to either clean their plates or consume the same meal, Japanese cultural expectations were that children would overcome any *suki-kirai*⁴² aversions in the kindergarten context. Translating practices such as these in the field combined with constant "impression management" (Linnekin 1998:71) gave me many opportunities to reflect on both my own culture and the culture under study. As Flinn (1998:96) writes: "When we as anthropologists make decisions about taking – or not taking – family members with us to the field, we are inevitably influenced by our own cultural understandings of family. Regardless of our recognition, understanding, and acceptance of other constructions of family, and even in the face of some dissatisfaction with our own, we rarely want to completely abandon our own beliefs".

Despite this, McGrath (1998:62) has discussed how women have minimised the impact of family on their research in the fear that their role as an ethnographer might be seen to conflict with that as a mother or a wife. I have chosen to include the voices, frustrations and revelations of taking family to the field believing these insights to be not only a valid source of data but also in an attempt at a more holistic approach. As Amit (2000:7) writes, "The melding of personal and professional roles in ethnographic fieldwork makes for a 'messy, qualitative experience' which cannot readily or usefully be compartmentalized from other experiences and periods in our lives".

⁴¹ Ben-Ari (1997:25) and Fujita (1989:81) have both discussed the rigid attendance structure of Japanese early childhood education which requires children to attend seven or eight hours a day.

⁴² *Suki-kirai* translates literally as "likes and dislikes". This term is often applied quite disapprovingly to children (or even adults) who insist on making their preferences clear.

Others have also taken this approach. During the course of her fieldwork Matsunaga (2000:171) has discussed how she embodied multiple identities in her Tokyo neighbourhood, including mother, teacher and housewife, which allowed her access to a variety of groups. She suggests that being a white, English-speaking *gaijin*⁴³ provides a point of entry into Japanese society.⁴⁴ Both Matsunaga (2000) and Goodman (2000) draw on Ohnuki-Tierney's (1984) explanation of foreigners as an ambiguous source of both benefit and threat whose value changes according to circumstances and context. Singleton (1989) argues that the Japanese value participation over learning. This means that for the anthropologist undertaking fieldwork in Japan, one's presence is not only accepted, it is generally expected that one will participate fully in local life. The anthropologist then has a responsibility not only to reflect on the impact the fieldwork experience has on one personally, but also to consider how this affects the society one is interacting with and the insights it reveals (Goodman 2000:155).

However, this position is also contradictory. Just as Goodman (2000) was asked to comment on Japanese elections or children's homes, my time in Japan was marked with requests to give public speeches or opinions to newspapers about issues such as birthing in Japan versus New Zealand, wool products, and parent associations. Like Goodman, some of these topics I had direct experience of, but of others I was relatively ignorant. It is suggested that while, on the one hand, foreigners can never fully understand Japanese society (Nagashima 1973), their opinions are sought out to take part in Japanese debates in order to provide an alternative model against which Japanese society can uniquely develop (Goodman 2000:159).

Matsunaga (2000) asks if writing on the personal experience adds depth to anthropological analysis, or risks becoming a self-indulgent exercise. How can personal vignettes be incorporated into wider social themes? Like other anthropologists before me who have written reflexively about their fieldwork in Japan (Benjamin 1997, Goodman 2000, Hendry 1992, Iwallyen 2008, Love 2008, Matsunaga 2000, Moeran 1985, Walsh 2004) I intend to intertwine the personal with the professional. Matsunaga (2000:182) has identified the problems of distancing the two, noting that dramatic events in particular are difficult to analyse and fall prey to gaps in memory. Furthermore, when recollecting events centred on the actions or emotions of the anthropologist it is

⁴³ *Gaijin* is the Japanese word for foreigner, literally 'outside person'.

⁴⁴ This comfortable sense of acceptance was challenged, however, when Matsunaga experienced a miscarriage and her outsider status was abruptly brought into focus by the attending doctor who saw her as an AIDS risk within the political climate of the time.

impossible to give an objective, neutral account. While Matsunaga identifies these as limitations, I would argue that ethnographic description should not strive for objectivity but is instead necessarily “messy” (Amit 2000).

Since I had lived for several years in Hokkaido and worked as a teacher in the Japanese kindergarten I researched, I considered myself both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ to the community. In New Zealand, I was seen as an ‘insider’ to the culture but I viewed myself an ‘outsider’ to the world of early childhood education in my own country. I came to see my position as a unique opportunity for “utilising self as a key resource” (Voloder 2008:27).

In the New Zealand context, teachers talked about not needing to explain certain culturally sensitive issues to me (such as refraining from filming naked children) and being left to make my own cups of tea (unlike guests) because “you know your way around here, you know how everything works”. In Japan, the teachers explained to children in their classes that there was no need to modify their behaviour the way they usually did when external visitors came to the kindergarten. My presence was seen as a somewhat altered return to my previous role as the centre’s English teacher. The children again addressed me as *sensei*⁴⁵ which marked me as part of the inside (*uchi*) world of the kindergarten (Peak 1989).

Goodman (1990) suggests that it is important to offer background information about the anthropologist in order to evaluate ethnographic writing based on the subjective experience of fieldwork. In his own case, Goodman’s academic and theoretical position altered considerably in line with his changing personal experience of Japan. In the same way, my research was affected by my journey through and amongst the data. As Corbin and Strauss (2008:32) state: “Researchers bring to the research situation their particular paradigms, including perspectives, training, knowledge, and biases; these aspects of self then become woven into all aspects of the research process”. The question becomes how best to acknowledge and incorporate those aspects of self.

This thesis, therefore, seeks neither to remove the anthropologist from the text nor to make her voice heard over all the others. Through the processes of observation, participation, reflection, dialogue, critique and discussion many layers of cultural complexity have slowly emerged. Following the flow of thematic patterns that

⁴⁵ This is the honorific term for teacher, but may also be applied to others in a professional position such as a doctor, professor, dentist etc.

identified themselves directly from the methodology, I have arranged the thesis to reflect these themes which often overlap and intersect much in the same way fieldwork cannot be separated from life back home. As Amit (2000:9) puts it, “However much ethnographers may seek to leave the field, whether through travel, changes in activity or shifts in perspective, they cannot help but take it with them because ‘the field’ has now become incorporated into their biographies, understanding and associations”.

Theoretical underpinnings

This thesis draws on participant observation methodology to generate data and a theoretical framework. Bernard (2006:344) defines participant observation as “immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you’ve seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly”. Participant observation is regarded as the defining research method of social anthropologists (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002:1). Through first-hand observation of real-life situations, known as fieldwork, the researcher becomes the “instrument for data collection and analysis” (Bernard 2006:359). Rather than commencing with a theory to prove, social anthropologists draw on their experiences in the field to shape their analysis, then look to theory to explain or clarify the associations (Bernard 2006:64).

In the case of this study, the empirical data has been generated from the many hours of video, discussions, analysis and feedback from the participants in the two field sites and during the focus group sessions.⁴⁶ The data was very rich in terms of the breadth of experiences and issues raised through this process. At first, I began to see many different themes emerging from the words and images of early childhood teachers across New Zealand and Japan. But, as I worked through the data more carefully, I was struck by the overlapping, concentric circles of commonality. At the very centre of these circles was the body. Over and over, the prevalence of children’s (and teachers’) bodies permeated the discussions, and therefore, the data. I realised that the body was the primary locus for my analysis. In line with a participant observation approach, my next step was to look to anthropological theory to provide a framework for my data.

The body has been the subject of anthropological interest for several decades. In the late 1970s the body first emerged as the focus of ontological and epistemological

⁴⁶ Tobin and Hsueh (2007:77) claim that the films are not data, but instead a means of stimulating dialogue. I would argue that they are, in fact, another form of data which contribute to the overall picture.

research by social scientists. By the 1980s the body had become such a significant object of study that “the anthropology of the body” was recognised as a subfield of the discipline (Mascia-Lees 2011:1). In the case of other disciplines, such as sociology, studies placing the body at the centre of research exploded during the 1990s when the paradigm of embodiment was developed. This paradigm takes the actual, lived experience of the body or “being-in-the-world” as a starting point. Csordas (1999) distinguishes this from the anthropology of the body which considers the body as an external object of analysis through a focus on bodily metaphors. Space limitations do not allow for a comprehensive review of the vast literature devoted to the body but Lock (1993), Csordas (1999), Fraser and Greco (2005) provide clear overviews and a starting point for further understanding.

Marcel Mauss and the emergence of the body in anthropological theory

Although there is a diverse range of scholars from various academic disciplines now concerned with the corporeality of the self, it is claimed that the body emerged for the first time in anthropological theory as a central object of research through the work of British anthropologist, Mary Douglas (Synnott and Howes 1992:159). Yet, in her book, *Natural Symbols* (1970/1996) Douglas draws on the work of Marcel Mauss who initially outlined a systemic anthropology of the body. In his pioneering essay, “Techniques of the Body” (1936/1973) Mauss identifies ordinary bodily actions as “techniques”. By techniques he means the varying ways people in different societies know how to use their bodies. Rather than viewing these techniques as natural and outside the remit of culture, Mauss argues that these actions can be classified as cultural practices. Therefore, the naked body can be repositioned as “man’s first and most natural instrument” (Mauss 1973:70).

The work of Mary Douglas

Douglas (1996:74) builds on Mauss’s assertion that the human body be treated “as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension”. In other words, every natural symbol originating from the body contains and conveys a social meaning, and every culture selects its own meaning from the myriad of potential body symbolisms. Douglas argues that Mauss’s view of bodily actions as techniques prioritised cultural variation to the point of discounting any behavior as natural. This approach contrasts with Lévi-Strauss (1964) who focused on symbolic universals which he felt informed

the way human bodies were socially constructed. Douglas's work addresses the space between these two contrasting theoretical approaches.

Douglas argues that the "natural" body, in the sense that it is universally apparent across cultures, is not the physico-biological body but the exchange of meanings between *two* bodies, the individual body and the social body.

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experiences so that each reinforces the categories of the other (Douglas 1996:69).

These two bodies, the individual and the social, are sometimes "so near as to be almost merged; sometimes they are far apart. The tension between them allows the elaboration of meanings" (Douglas 1996:87). Critics such as Van Wolputte (2004) have argued that Douglas's distinction between the "two bodies" only serves to reaffirm the dualism of mind and body, and privilege the former. In contrast, the theory of embodiment does not imply "the neglect of 'mind', but it does situate mind in 'practice'" (Strathern and Stewart 2011:397).

Michel Foucault and the body

While Douglas viewed the individual, physical body and the social body as reciprocally symbolic, Michel Foucault (1975/1995) saw the body as a site of discipline, domestication, training, and punishment by the state. Through these measures, the body is rendered "docile" for economic or military purposes. "The body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault 1995:26). The creation of these docile bodies is accomplished through the micro-physics of bio-power, which is the power exercised on the body through to the minutest physical actions. Foucault's theories contend that the state produces docile bodies through institutionalised structures such as the prison, the hospital and the school. But Foucault goes further than that, arguing that, through constant surveillance and inspection, society itself becomes a prison:

[The political technology of the body] cannot be localized in a particular type of institution or state apparatus. For they have recourse to it; they use, select or impose certain of its methods. But, in its mechanisms and its effects, it is situated at a quite different level. What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces. (Foucault 1995:26)

Through this process of assessment, coordination and ultimately, surveillance, emerges the “disciplinary individual” who has been created by these new techniques of power (Foucault 1995:227). Foucault’s theories have been criticised as overly pessimistic through his neglect to consider agency, and his inability to provide a means of overcoming the current forms of power (Erickson and Murphy 2008:184). Despite this, Foucault is regarded as making a significant contribution to anthropology, through the way he repositioned the body at the centre of scholarly consideration (Synnott and Howes 1992:162).

The three bodies

While Foucault was concerned with the body as political, and Douglas the body as symbolic, in the mid-1980s medical anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987:6) called for anthropologists to problematise the body another way. Taking a view of the body as “simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and as securely anchored in a particular historical moment”, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:7) proposed “three bodies” and three anthropological approaches. At the first level of analysis is the “individual body” in the phenomenological sense of embodied experiences people have of their bodies. With reference to Mauss (1973), Scheper-Hughes and Lock assume that all people share a sense of the embodied self as separate to other individual bodies. At the second level of analysis is the “social body” which functions as a natural symbol with which to think about social relationships, culture and nature (Douglas 1996). At the third level is the “body politic” which asserts that power and control are also embodied. Here the work of Foucault (1973a, 1973b, 1980, 1995) is evident through the ways in which the body is subjected to surveillance, regulation and control. The stability of the body politic depends on its ability to regulate the social body and to discipline individual bodies. In outlining their theoretical approach, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:8) state that:

The “three bodies” represent, then, not only three separate and overlapping units of analysis, but also three different theoretical approaches and epistemologies: phenomenology (individual body, the lived self), structuralism and symbolism (the social body), and poststructuralism (the body politic).

Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:28) argue that what mediates between these three bodies, are emotions. Whether public or private, individual or collective, emotions are imbued with cultural meaning, providing an important missing link between the mind and body, the individual, social and body politic.

Inspired by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), this thesis will move back and forth between a discussion of “the three bodies” as a means of illuminating and understanding the place of the body in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts. My search for an applicable theory had already led me to the work of Mauss, Douglas and Foucault. The ideas of Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) lent validity to using these three theorists to explore different aspects of the data. However, rather than expanding on the theories of Scheper-Hughes and Lock, this thesis looks back to the original theorists to examine the individual, social and political body.

This means that the work of Mauss (1936/1973), Douglas (1970/1996) and Foucault (1975/1995) provide a framework for analysis, and while these theories are classic rather than contemporary, I propose that they remain a valuable means of unpacking the ethnographic data. I acknowledge that while Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) see emotions as binding the three bodies together, this study stops short of exploring this aspect of the data. The study of emotions reflects the post-modern turn towards the paradigm of embodiment. A decision was made not to explore children’s agency, or interview them directly, as access was difficult due to ethical guidelines for research with children. As a result, this study does not take “being-in-the-world” (Csordas 1999) as its starting point, but follows the lead of Mauss, Douglas and Foucault in approaching the body as an object of study.



Figure 8: Kaimai Kindergarten children

Chapter 4: New Zealand and Japanese Approaches to Child-rearing and Early Childhood Education

How we envision and regulate childhood tells us as much about ourselves as a people or a state as it does about the lives of children. (McGillivray 1997:2)

Approaches to child-rearing in New Zealand

The theories of Mauss (1973) were significant for the way in which they constructed the lives of children. Mauss observed how each society imposes a rigidly defined use of the individual body through the training of a child's bodily needs and actions. Through an examination of child-rearing practices it becomes clear how "natural" bodily practices such as sleeping, toileting and feeding are, in fact, reflections of social and cultural contexts.

While Japanese approaches to child-rearing and socialisation have been the focus of ethnographic research resulting in a large number of publications, much less has been written about the situation in New Zealand (Gordon 1991:113). Although research was eventually undertaken with Māori families, early studies concentrate on the experiences of the European children living in the country (Mechling 1975). The Pākeha⁴⁷ New Zealand family was seen by historians as closely resembling the British family but it differed due to its pioneer and rurally-oriented character. Pioneer families tended to have large numbers of children, maintain kinship ties and traditional roles over the generations, and deal with issues and control within the family structure (Houston 1970:36). The colonial child was considered a chattel and therefore shown minimal care and affection (McDonald 1978).

Between 1890 and 1920 children came to occupy a new, more valued position in New Zealand society. Rather than being seen as chattels, children were now viewed as "social capital" and government policy reflected this shift. Children's health and education were given importance and scientifically-based guidelines were introduced which recommended that mothers commit themselves full-time to child-rearing

⁴⁷ The indigenous Māori called the new arrivals to their land Pākeha. This term has been debated as having various origins and meanings. Briggs (1990) defines Pākeha as a "white person" however this term was expanded by King (1985:12) to include all "non-Māori New Zealanders". Ranford (2011) suggests that the term is derived from 'PakePākeha', a mythical human-like being with fair skin and hair. The interpretation and usage of the term Pākeha remains contested and open to debate in contemporary New Zealand society.

(McDonald 1978). Women were urged to produce large families which would not only boost New Zealand's population but increase national productivity (Kedgley 1996:38) in line with eugenicist beliefs popular at the time.

These ideas also resonated with Dr Frederic Truby King who, in 1907, formed the Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children, later known as the Plunket Society. King's regimen required mothers to follow a strict schedule of feeding, washing, toilet training and putting babies down to sleep. Babies were to be fed at four hourly intervals during the day and ignored if crying began before the specified time. King also advised mothers to refrain from giving their babies too much attention or overly handling them as this would not only spread germs, but could lead to behavioural issues later in life (Kedgley 1996). Through the work of King and the Plunket Society, a pattern of New Zealand child-rearing developed which emphasised domesticity, routine and limited physical contact between mother and baby (Olssen and Levesque 1978:12).

The 1930-36 Depression years and World War II saw a retrenching in services to children as the nation redirected funds to the war effort. The post-war years, however, saw a renewed focus on children's well-being and socialisation. Children's preschool experiences both at home with mother and in newly created early childhood settings were seen as crucial to personality development (McDonald 1978). Scholars reporting on the New Zealand family stressed the importance of children gaining independence from mother (Houston 1970:21).

The post-war years continued to be dominated by the teachings of Sir Truby King.⁴⁸ Yet many mothers during the 1950s not only had trouble maintaining the strict feeding schedules advocated by Plunket, they felt a sense of failure and embarrassment about their abilities (Morris 1992). Other mothers found it very difficult to refrain from cuddling or picking up their babies which left them feeling upset and guilty (Kedgley 1996:91). During the fifties, the Plunket ideology began to be challenged by a new generation of child-rearing experts such as American pediatrician Benjamin Spock, New Zealand psychiatrist Maurice Bevan-Brown and British doctor John Bowlby. Spock (1946) advocated a flexible approach to child-rearing based on mother's natural instincts. Bevan-Brown (1950) believed that routine should be abolished in favour of greater physical and emotional contact. Bowlby (1971) proposed a theory of maternal deprivation which stated that children needed to have constant contact with their

⁴⁸ King was knighted in 1925.

mothers until the age of three. Fears about the effects of mother-child separation also had an effect on state policy regarding early childhood services as the government became increasingly reluctant to support facilities where children were apart from their mothers (May 1992).

While Māori methods of child-rearing were not initially given attention by scholars, they gained focus within wider ethnographic studies on the family and kinship commenced in the 1940s and 1950s (Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1946, Metge 1964, Ritchie 1957, Ritchie 1963). The Ritchies (1997) found that Māori children enjoyed almost constant physical contact with adults and co-sleeping was the norm. Most Māori families were large so that children not only grew up with a number of siblings but also engaged regularly with many playmates from the wider community. This engagement ensured childhood socialisation occurred through peer interaction (Metge 1970).

Physical violence was not endorsed by traditional Māori society and children were indulged rather than strictly disciplined (Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1946, Cruse 1824, Salmon 1991). Ritchie and Ritchie (1997:46) found that this approach to behaviour control changed with urbanisation however, as isolated from her community of support, Māori mothers resorted to physical punishment to control their children in front of Pākeha neighbours. This trend was to continue along with rapid mobilisation of Māori from rural areas to the cities. By 2003, the likelihood of a Māori child being abused or neglected was double that of a Pākeha child (Ministry of Social Development 2004a).⁴⁹

In contrast to the relaxed methods of discipline attributed to traditional Māori families, scholars argue that physical punishment has been a regular part of Pākeha child-rearing patterns from colonial times (Ritchie and Ritchie 1997) and continues to occur despite parents' misgivings about administering it (Rayner 2008). In 1960s New Zealand Ritchie and Ritchie (1997:41) found that mothers took a negative approach to discipline. Children were regularly smacked or were subject to threats, warnings and shouting in an attempt to correct inappropriate behaviour. Both emotional and physical distance was deliberately established between parents and children by the age of four.

As feminism took hold in the 1970s, New Zealand women began to reject traditional gender roles of marriage and family. Men were expected to help more with

⁴⁹ “The Social Report on Child Abuse and Neglect” assessed the likelihood of children to be abused or neglected according to ethnicity. It concluded that the rate of occurrence per 1,000 children was 11.9 for Māori and 5.9 for Pākeha.

child-rearing duties and while the traditional New Zealand father may not have paid much attention to child-rearing, men now began getting up in the night to the baby, talking with their children and participating in early childhood and school experiences (Kedgley 1996:212, Ritchie and Ritchie 1997:91). The introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit⁵⁰ in 1973 had a major impact on the way New Zealand families were structured. Although single women (and later men) were now able to support themselves and their children, there were incredible pressures associated with solo parenting (Kedgley 1996:274) and physical punishment remained widespread (Ritchie and Ritchie 1989:74). By 1996 23.6% of New Zealand children were living in single parent families, a huge increase from the 8% recorded in 1978 (Statistics New Zealand 1999). In 2011, an OECD study reported that this rate had changed very little (23.7%), but it still represents one child in four as living in single parent homes (Torrie 2011).

In post-millennium New Zealand the blended family is becoming more common as marriages dissolve, children are born to different partners, and children from previous relationships are absorbed into a new family structure (Cribb 2009, Ministry of Social Development 2004b). Parents are having children later, and one in three children are born to at least one parent who did not grow up in New Zealand (Morton et al. 2010). New Zealand families are also increasingly multicultural and while it is beyond the scope of this brief overview to discuss the child-rearing practices of each ethnic group in the country, it is clear that such diversity has implications for early childhood education (Chan 2006:34).

Mauss argued that the impact of society on the individual can be seen most clearly in the domain of child-rearing (Fournier 2006:332). Within this framework, familiar child-rearing practices, such as the toileting, sleeping, feeding and disciplinary practices described above, can be reassessed as culturally constructed body techniques. Even an act as simple as walking is, therefore, reflective of training that has been imposed on the child's body (Mauss 1973:79). The way in which early childhood services are developed in each society also reflect and reinforce this training of one generation by another.

The development of early childhood services in New Zealand

As in Japan, the roots of the New Zealand kindergarten service sprung from social concerns about abandoned and impoverished children (May 2002, Munro 1996,

⁵⁰ This is a weekly payment which helps sole parents with one or more dependent children

Prochner 2009). In 1899 New Zealand's first kindergarten opened in Dunedin following the efforts of locals who were concerned about the unsupervised children of working parents. This group agreed to employ a trained teacher and provide free early childhood education for disadvantaged children, a philosophy which has continued to the present day (Davison 1997:9). By the late nineteenth century, the government had begun to embrace the idea of a free kindergarten as part of a moral agenda to stem political concerns over social problems (May 1997).

By the first half of the twentieth century the state had increasingly turned its attention to the health of the nation's children and kindergartens were quick to stress their role as supporting the efforts of the well-regarded Plunket programme. Child psychology had become the dominant ideology of the early childhood arena and government policy makers emphasised the value of progressive education practices such as 'free play' (McDonald 1978).

In 1947 the New Zealand government commissioned the Bailey Report to guide future directions in early childhood education.⁵¹ This document called for total state control over all early childhood services. Despite assuming greater responsibility for funding and regulations, this aim was never realised and to this day services remain in the community-private sector. As the Bailey Report was based on sessional early childhood education for three and four year olds, kindergartens and Playcentres⁵² came to be seen as superior to other preschool services (May 2002). State policy for early childhood services was formalised in 1948 when kindergartens and their staff came under government control (Dalli and Te One 2002:178). This was seen as a significant step towards an on-going state commitment to children's early education (Davison and Mitchell 2008:125).

From the 1950s to the early 1980s kindergartens grew in popularity, and benefited from generous state support. This support included funding for teacher salaries, professional development, administration, building maintenance, equipment and operating costs (Davison and Mitchell 2008:125). Following a great deal of political activism during the 1970s and 1980s advocating the rights of children to access high-quality childcare and women's rights to participate in the workforce, the state began to

⁵¹ The full title of the Bailey Report is the "Report of the Consultative Committee on Preschool Education Services" (1947).

⁵² Playcentres are managed and staffed by trained parents working as a community cooperative, and provide half day learning sessions for children aged birth to school entry age, as well as support and courses for parents.

focus on the issue of early childhood education. By this time, kindergartens across the country had developed a relatively standardised service operating on a sessional basis for children aged between three and five years old. In line with the kindergarten's philanthropic origins, fees were not charged although parents were asked to make a donation (Davison 1997:10).

The 1980s also marked a period of great diversity in the early childhood sector with over twenty different types of services available, each with its own particular ideology and operating style (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group 1988). The dichotomy remained between services promoted as education based and those of childcare which many viewed as targeted at the disadvantaged (Consultative Committee on Pre-School Services 1947). In 1986 the government moved administration of early childhood education from the Department of Social Welfare to the Education Department (Mead and Podmore 2002). The following year, a three year Diploma was introduced for training early childhood teachers that replaced the previously separate kindergarten and childcare staff instruction (Smith and May 2006:27).

While the New Zealand government had funded kindergartens since the late 1940s, other forms of early childhood services had been forced to compete for state funding resulting in a plethora of differing services and fee structures by the end of the 1980s. Publication of the Meade Report⁵³ in 1988 drew attention to the inequalities in early childhood services in terms of access, funding, and quality. The report also addressed the low status of early childhood work, lack of support for Māori children and the historically privileged position of kindergarten over childcare services in terms of state fiscal support (Dalli and Te One 2002:178).

The state policy document *Before Five* (Lange 1988) responded to these findings by outlining new quality standards and a plan to regulate funding structures that would bring all early childhood services up to the same level within four years. However, a change to a right-wing National government two years later meant that these policies were soon cast aside (Dalli and Te One 2002:179).

This period marked the emergence of a new ideology based on neo-liberal ideas that privileged private provision over state services (Kelsey 1993). Kindergartens, once revered as the “flagship” of early childhood education, began to suffer at the hands of

⁵³ Commonly referred to as the Meade Report, after its author Ann Meade, the correct title of the document is actually “Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group” (1988).

these new policies (Davison 1997:11). This turbulent time in New Zealand political history also resulted in the early childhood sector being caught up in the redesigning of the welfare state system (May 1992:84).

In 1990, New Zealand was the first country in the world to make the transition from administering separate education and care departments to an integrated approach for preschoolers under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (Moss 2000). This meant that the same funding structures would be applied for kindergartens, education and care centres, Playcentres and *kōhanga reo*.⁵⁴

The adoption of Te Whāriki as the national early childhood curriculum in 1996 also served towards resolving the historical dichotomy between education and care (Cullen 1996). Positioning Te Whāriki within an appropriate theoretical framework meant considering a number of philosophical approaches (Bronfenbrenner 1979, Bruner and Haste 1987, Vygotsky 1978) but the authors ultimately settled on a curriculum that reflected a New Zealand flavour. Following consultation with the many diverse stakeholders in the early childhood education arena, a bicultural curriculum framework was developed using the metaphor of a *whāriki* (woven mat) for all to stand on. Both developmental and social/cultural ideologies were included in the curriculum through the key theme of empowering children to learn and grow. Te Whāriki also emphasised the importance of children's reciprocal relationships and included family, *whānau*⁵⁵ and community within its structure (May and Carr 2000:157).

The authors were careful to stress that Te Whāriki is not a curriculum that requires educators to adhere to a strict set of instructions, but one which allows for multiple interpretations to be included and developed according to the needs of each centre (May and Carr 2000:156). It is this context-specific fluidity and departure from previous developmentally driven goals that marks Te Whāriki as a unique document (May 2004). Te Whāriki has been recognised internationally in early childhood circles for its inclusive cultural nature (Sobstad 1997), focus on children's rights (Nutbrown 1996), encouragement of family, *whānau* and community interaction, as well as a holistic approach which includes children from birth (White et al. 2009).

The creation of a national curriculum was an important achievement for the early childhood sector during the 1990s, however the turn of the century saw the arena

⁵⁴ *Kōhanga reo* is a total immersion Māori language family programme for young children from birth to six years of age.

⁵⁵ *Whānau* is a Māori word for extended family.

dominated by a new government policy entitled “Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki 2002-2012”. This policy had its roots in a working party appointed by the Labour Government in 2000 with the aim of increasing quality and improving participation levels in early childhood education. Released in 2002, the plan made a commitment to improving funding levels to sustain diversity and quality, state support for community-based services and qualified early childhood staff (May 2009:268).

After successfully lobbying the government, pay parity between kindergarten and school teachers was also introduced in 2002. However, this agreement did not extend to other educators in the early childhood sector leaving many to question how it would impact on centres that were not kindergartens. There were concerns that kindergartens would now attract the best teachers forcing other centres to charge higher fees in order to pay competitive staff salaries. Others felt that pay parity sent a clear message for early childhood educators to be regarded as professionals with qualifications and training (Evans 2002). This aim was realised in 2008 following a collective employment agreement negotiated by NZEI Te Riu Roa.⁵⁶

At a closely fought 2005 election the Labour government was re-elected with a proposal to introduce 20 hours-a-week free early childhood education for three and four year olds attending community based services. Detractors of the policy pointed out that this privileged teacher-led centres (Farquhar 2007, Woodhams 2007) while the private sector complained of the economic repercussions for their childcare businesses (May 2009:290). The policy was later extended to private centres as well, and despite widespread debate, “20 hours free” was implemented in mid-2007. This was seen as a landmark political decision which diverted state focus from viewing children as the responsibility of their families towards a discourse of rights of the child (Davison and Mitchell 2008:133).

Under a centre-left Labour government (1999-2008), measures, which had been taken under the previous government’s neo-liberal approach, were addressed in the early childhood sector. With the return of a right wing National government in 2008, critics are concerned that neo-liberal thinking may again become the dominant ideology. The word “free” has been removed from the “20 hours free ECE” policy as some services are charging optional fees. Planned increases in the number of qualified

⁵⁶ NZEI (New Zealand Education Institute) Te Riu Roa is New Zealand's largest education union representing teachers working in early childhood centres, primary, area and secondary schools, as well as special education and school advisory services.

teachers and improvements in ratios have also been suspended pending state reviews (Davison and Mitchell 2008:135). As early childhood scholar Helen May writes, “The new political and economic times are undoubtedly going to need new strategies for politics in the playground” (May 2009:303).

The transition from home to early childhood education in New Zealand

The New Zealand curriculum, Te Whāriki expresses the belief that “children and their families experience an environment where connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended” (Ministry of Education 1996:56). The curriculum also recommends that children entering early childhood settings should encounter an environment that fosters and supports the child’s culture. Families are not only welcomed, teachers make an effort to acknowledge their contributions and to instil a shared sense of belonging (Ministry of Education 1996:42). Nuttall’s (2003:169) research into the role of the teacher within the New Zealand curriculum shows that teachers see the creation of a homelike environment as the most important part of their role. Teachers interviewed as part of this study were also specific about the need to make the centre resemble a home, as these comments from Kaimai Kindergarten show:

I guess for us here, this centre here, we value peacefulness and orderliness, but also at the same time that homeliness but [the Japanese centre] is so regimented.

It’s institutional.

Yes, at this centre we try and recreate a home.

Creating an inclusive environment where all children are valued, acknowledged and respected is an important tenet of the New Zealand early childhood setting although this may not be achieved in practice in all centres (MacArthur, Purdue and Ballard 2003). This sense of belonging extends to children’s families as part of the New Zealand early childhood sector’s commitment to a sociocultural approach. As outlined in the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, there are four guiding principles which underpin the aims and goals for children attending early childhood centres. One of them is *whānau tangata* or family and community which maintains that the wider world of family and community is a vital part of the early childhood curriculum. It is important that children and their families feel they belong at the centre. In order to create that sense of belonging, links between the family and the wider community are acknowledged and extended. Parents are encouraged to enter the early childhood setting and become familiar with the routines and rituals of their child’s centre (Mitchell et al.

2006). Through these acts, parents and children become comfortable in this new domain and, ideally, come to see it as an extension of the home environment.

Unlike in Japan, where periods of arrival and departure are marked by ritualised greetings, New Zealand teachers are free to construct their own ways of recognising these transition periods. At Kaimai Kindergarten, parents arriving with children in the morning are greeted by staff as the preparations for the day are taking place. Rather than employing a formal greeting process, teachers take a casual approach through relaxed, short chats with mothers and fathers as they drop off their children. A small percentage of parents sometimes stay on during the session. When it is almost time to go home, the children assemble for mat time and teachers lock the doors until the five or ten minute ritual is finished. While it is quite common for Japanese parents to wait outside until a session has ended, focus groups in New Zealand saw the practice of closed doors as not only unwelcoming, but a contravention of the sense of belonging encouraged by the curriculum. As kindergarten teachers in Napier pointed out, transition rituals such as mat time offer parents valuable learning opportunities, and are a useful means of building continuity between the centre and home:

There's also that inherent learning for parents [at mat time] ... the way we model language and the activities. You are robbing them of perhaps some incidental learning. Like, so that's the story that they read today, or that song I've heard you sing in the car, that's why you know that song. I think of our kindergarten where the afternoon is incredibly popular with parents to stay which can be a problem but they really want it, don't they? They are excited about what their darling little children are learning and they want to know and share and I think they would feel very bereft if you tried to take that away from them.

There are also benefits for the children in having their parents participate in the early childhood environment. Scholars have argued that learning dispositions are acutely influenced by the cultural and social context of children's experiences (Carr 2001). Teachers' familiarity with children's home environment can assist them to more effectively co-construct meaning from the child's body of knowledge (Jordan 2004). When children's interests are identified by parents and teachers, then extended through project work at the centre, it can lead to a rich interface between learning experiences at home and the early childhood setting (Cullen 2003). Mitchell et al. (2006:10) suggest that there are two principles for effective relationships to support children's learning and wellbeing in the early childhood environment. The first assumes that children, parents and whānau all have strengths and skills that are of equal validity to those of educators.

This has elsewhere been described as ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005). The second principle is for aims and hopes to be openly talked about by children, parents, whānau and teachers. In order for these aims to be achieved it is imperative that the early childhood centre functions in a way that includes and supports the home environment.

Mauss (1973:76) writes that “the constant adaptation to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim (e.g. when we drink) is pursued in a series of assembled actions, and assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society to which he belongs, in the place he occupies in it”. In New Zealand, child-rearing practices, the education system, and the wider community, all work to reinforce ideas about appropriate bodily practices. This notion is equally relevant to the Japanese context, but as the next section outlines, the body techniques internalised by Japanese children are specific to their society.



Figure 9: New Zealand early childhood centres try to create a homelike environment

Japanese approaches to child-rearing⁵⁷

Although Japan is often included as part of the group of “Confucian heritage cultures” alongside China and Korea (Ho 1994), Kawashima (1950) argues that the pre-modern feudal Japanese family structure differed from other Asian nations. Japanese family relations resembled contractual relations which relied on indebtedness and obligation (*on* and *giri*). This structure of mutual love and affection is seen by Kawashima as the basis of the ideal modern family. Traditionally, children under the age of seven, were seen as being among the gods (*nanatsu mae wa kami no uchi*) and various rituals connecting them with the supernatural were commonplace (Chen 1996).⁵⁸ While the government has introduced measures to educate parents on the ‘science’ of child-rearing, many of these beliefs still persist today (Hara and Minagawa 1996:22, Hendry 1995:134). Above all, the pregnant mother is expected to provide a calm, loving atmosphere for her foetus which is seen as a vital basis for her child’s later transition into wider society (Hendry 1986:97).

After the child is born, its umbilical cord is preserved in a small wooden box, marking the first of many well-defined traditional rites of passage which take place during the early years (Lock 1980:73). After arriving home, there is a naming ceremony (*nazuke iwai*), followed a month later by a visit to the local shrine (*omiyamairi*) and the baby’s first taste of solid food (*kuizome*) (Yamamura 1986:30). The most important annual event for Japanese children is the celebration of Girls’ Day (3 March) and Boys’ Day (5 May) when elaborate dolls are displayed in the house for daughters, and massive fabric carp streamers fly from flagpoles for sons. As the child grows up s/he will probably participate in the *shichi-go-san* celebrations in November, in which children of three, five and seven years old are dressed in kimono and taken to the shrine to pray for protection and good fortune in the future (Hendry 1986:38). What is significant about this is the way in which the child’s milestones are linked to those of their peers, teaching them early on that they are part of a wider group, and thus forming an important part of the Japanese cultural landscape.

Befu (1971:151-157) argues that there is a common pattern to Japanese child-rearing. The Japanese mother spends a great deal of time in close physical contact with

⁵⁷ Parts of the sections on child-rearing and the development of early childhood education in Japan have been reproduced from my Masters thesis (Burke 2007).

⁵⁸ See also Jolivet (1997:115-117) for description of Shinto rituals regarding young children, and how this belief could be used to justify infanticide as children were “returned to the gods” before their existence became permanent at age seven. In contrast, others see the recent availability of contraception and abortion as major factors leading to modern parents’ rejection of this Shinto belief (Yamamura 1986:32).

her baby, and avoids separation even if it means her husband must sleep in another room, or that she must forego social evenings out with friends. Japanese mothers generally feed on demand, to reinforce the baby's emotional dependence on her. Punishment of young children is rejected in favour of reasoning, cajoling, or even bribery.

Caudill (1972) identifies the ideology of *skinship*⁵⁹ as pivotal to Japanese methods of child-rearing. His research found that Japanese mothers seek to achieve *skinship* through almost constant physical contact with their babies, yet they view verbal interactions as much less important (Schooler 1996). In the post-war years, a return to *skinship* ideology was seen in the way mothers embraced traditional child-rearing methods such as relaxed breast-feeding routines, homemade baby food and co-sleeping (Matsuda 1973). This approach also contained political overtones as it was a means of rejecting American child-rearing methods which had been widely promoted following the end of World War II.

Caudill and Weinstein's (1969) study links the bodies of mother and child as natural and cultural communication channels through the reproductive and birth process. This form of naturalism is prevalent throughout the Japanese child's early years and encouraged by the Japanese way of life where co-sleeping is common. According to Lebra (1994:260), concepts of naturalism are in the minds of Japanese mothers when they allow their children to behave freely (*nobi nobi to*) and spontaneously. This is seen as naturally childlike (*kodomo rashii*) behaviour which is indulged rather than curtailed by parents. Lebra (1994: 273) sums up the mother-child dyad as typified by continuity even in the face of seemingly oppositional forces such as the kind of boundary training encountered at kindergarten. This is possible by creating multiple selves to deal with the changing context.

While mothers are the primary agent for socialising children in the home, they are also constantly being socialised themselves into embodying *ryōsai kenbō* or a good wife/wise mother (Fujita 1989).⁶⁰ This expectation and pressure on mothers has been used both by the government to promote the birth rate, and by women to subvert pro-natal policies. In post-war Japan, the move from an agrarian to an industrial society,

⁵⁹ *Skinship* is a word borrowed from English and put into *katakana*, a phonetic alphabet reserved for words borrowed from foreign languages, e.g. *skinship* is written as *sukinshippu*. While the Japanese insist the word is still ultimately English (or German or French etc) the pronunciation of it renders it almost unrecognisable to foreign ears.

⁶⁰ For detailed analysis of the concept and impact of *ryōsai kenbō* on Japanese women's lives, see Uno 1993.

from extended family living to nuclear family households, and the rise of the workaholic salaryman father means that the full burden of child-rearing is borne by the Japanese mother (Buckley 1993, Imamura 1987). Cross-cultural studies show that Japanese fathers spend less time with their children than fathers in either Western countries or in other Asian nations such as Korea and Thailand (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004, Makino 1995). Beyond the arduous early years spent at home raising children, mothers realise that once their child enters kindergarten or childcare demands on her time will continue to be made by the education system (Allison 1996, Benjamin 1997, Hendry 1993:220, Imamura 1987:19, Peak 1991).

Implicit in the cultural ideology of the mother and child is the belief that the construction of this relationship is fundamental not only to the family, but builds aspects of character seen as uniquely Japanese. According to Doi (1973), central to this belief is the concept of *amae*, which is difficult to translate accurately into English, with the closest meaning being “dependency”. He argues that “*amae* is a key concept for the understanding not only of the psychological makeup of the individual Japanese but of the structure of Japanese society as a whole” (Doi 1973:28). *Amae* is seen as essential for babies and young children, allowing them to feel secure in their mother’s love.

The early years at home are also the time when children learn to distinguish behaviour appropriate for the setting. For Japanese society, an essential element of socialisation is the classification of *uchi* and *soto*, which roughly translate as ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. This may be a physical distinction, such as within or outside of one’s home, but also extends to members of one’s family as opposed to members of the outside community, and to members of a person’s wider groups, such as the neighbourhood, kindergarten, school or workplace, as opposed to other people beyond those groups.⁶¹ For young Japanese, the acknowledgement of this distinction begins by repeating their mother’s ritualised greetings, which are given both by those leaving or entering the house, and those seeing off or receiving a guest or a family member home, and even small children will quickly learn to utter them at the appropriate time (Hendry

⁶¹ *Uchi* is the informal name for *ie*, the traditional Japanese family system which was officially abolished in 1947 in favour of the more ‘democratic’ *uchi* structure. Nakane (1970) argues that Japanese society gives little weight to kinship, but places more on those included within the social group. The *ie* is a group residing within an established frame of residence which is characterised by its vertical structure and strong patriarchal control. What is significant in this context, is that the human relationships within this group are seen as more important than all other relationships outside it. In other words, wives and daughter-in-laws who have married into the *ie* hold greater importance than one’s own female kin who have married into other households.

1995:43-44). While children can expect indulgence and sympathy in the home or *uchi* arena, in the outside or *soto* world, they must learn to assume a public persona in which individual desires are subjugated to those of the group (Peak 1991:7).

As the child learns to discriminate between these two social spheres, s/he also comes to realise that *uchi* is a place where *amae* will be accepted and even praised by mother, as opposed to *soto* where *amae* behaviour is inappropriate and discouraged (Azuma 1986:8). In contrast to the relative freedom of the *uchi* environment, when interacting in the *soto* world, one is expected to show *enryo*, which translates roughly as “restraint” or “holding back” (Doi 1973:29). To be able to function smoothly in Japanese society as an adult, it is essential that children learn to distinguish between the *uchi* and *soto*, and adjust their behaviour accordingly. While Japanese mothers promote *amae* behaviour within the family home, they expect children to learn to display *enryo* towards peers, neighbours and members of the wider community. For most Japanese children, the first time they encounter this expectation is when they enter the early childhood education environment (Peak 1991:16, Tobin 1992:25).

Hendry (1986) identified the home, the neighbourhood and the early childhood setting as crucial early “arenas and agents of socialisation” for young children as they journey towards “becoming Japanese”. However, these social arenas are undergoing startling transformations. An increase in child abuse has been linked to a variety of issues including rising unemployment and economic problems, social changes faced by isolated mothers in urban areas and limited public facilities to support families (Kingston 2004:259). The dropping birth rate is also an issue of major concern in modern Japan. Raymo (1998) attributes this to increasing numbers of women deciding to postpone or reject marriage. Smaller families have become more common as women choose to enter the workforce in higher numbers and dedicate time to their education. There is also the problem of overworked fathers who scarcely interact with their wives or children (Yuzawa 1994:66), let alone have the time and energy to have sex (McCurry 2008). The low birth rate symbolises the failure of the government and major employers to introduce measures that would enable women to reconcile their multiple roles in contemporary Japanese society (Kingston 2004). This issue looks set to influence the coming decades of child-rearing practice and policy.

Mauss argues that “man is an animal that rears and trains his children” (Fournier 2006:332) and draws on actual examples from quotidian life to illustrate his argument. The way a mother responds to her child’s cries, carries him, or teaches tables manners

all reflect learned body techniques. For example, while New Zealand child-rearing practices encourage children's bodies towards gradually gaining independence from that of their mothers, Japanese practices work to foster interdependence between the two bodies. As Mauss (1973:70) points out, "a child carried next to its mother's skin for two or three years has a quite different attitude to its mother from that of a child not so carried; it has a contact with its mother utterly unlike our children's". Implicit acceptance of these techniques also plays a role in the development of early childhood services.

The development of early childhood services in Japan

Early childhood education occupies a powerful place in Japanese society, with over 90% of preschool aged Japanese children attending sessions or classes at an early childhood institution (Ellington 2009:209). While the relevance of early childhood education to Japanese families appears undisputed, the kind of centre they prefer is changing. Statistics show that in 2009 there were 13,516 kindergartens in Japan with 1,630,000 children on the enrolment lists. These numbers are decreasing however, in line with the dropping birth rate and the increasing number of working mothers.⁶² In contrast, child-care centres have seen their enrolments rise to 2,138,000 children in 2008 while the number of institutions has remained relatively stable over the past twenty years (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2010).⁶³

Anthropological studies of Japanese early childhood settings have tended to either emphasise the uniformity or the diversity of the system (Imoto 2007). On one hand, the early childhood institution can be identified as a crucial means of socialising children to incorporate key Japanese values through a standardised curriculum which emphasises group identity over academic teaching (Ben-Ari 1997, Hendry 1986). On the other hand, the early childhood system can be viewed as contested and diverse due to the large numbers of privately run centres, religious affiliations, economic forces and the pressure to adapt in the face of rapid depopulation (Boocock 1989, Holloway 2000, Peach 1994, Peak 1992). In reality, both perspectives are represented within the myriad of early childhood settings spread throughout Japan, but the vast majority of these centres can be categorised as either a kindergarten (*yōchien*) or a child-care centre

⁶² Almost twenty five years earlier (1985), the number of kindergartens stood at 15,200 with 2,068,000 children enrolled.

⁶³ In 1985, the number of child-care centres was listed at 22,899. Twenty three years later, (2008), this number had barely changed at 22,898.

(*hoikuen*). Within these categories, there are public and private institutions, licensed and unlicensed centres, those that are linked to churches, corporations or educational institutes and even some that operate from the lounge of a rural household.

While the dropping birth rate has seen the kindergarten and the child-care centre come to resemble each other more and more, the historical origins and aims of these two institutions were distinctly different (Ishigaki 1992). Japan's first private kindergarten was founded in 1875 and attached to a primary school in Kyoto (Imoto 2007). A year later, the first national kindergarten opened in Tokyo following the theories of educationalist, Froebel, which was seen as a way of introducing Western ideals by Meiji Japan (Shoji 1983). Until 1897, educational methods used in foreign countries were favoured by the national kindergarten and by Christian kindergartens established by missionaries (Ishigaki 1992).

In 1899, the Act of the Content and Facilities of Kindergarten Education was passed, which identified four educational forms: play, song, speech and handicrafts. This period was marked by the government's introduction of the *ryōsai kenbō* (good wife, wise mother) concept which encouraged women to take full responsibility for child-rearing and domestic duties. In accordance with this belief, kindergarten operating hours were limited to five hours a day to ensure that middle-class mothers spent adequate time in the home with their children (Imoto 2007).

By 1965, kindergarten instruction had been pared down to six main areas with the issue of the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education. Enforced by the Ministry of Education, the core content of kindergarten education was identified as health, society, nature, language, music and rhythm, art and craft. This was a deliberate attempt to link the kindergarten to the primary school and to replace the earlier life-oriented curriculum with one that emphasised specific subject matter (Oda and Mori 2006). By late 1989, these guidelines were revised to reflect social change (Ishigaki 1992:117) and the subject-oriented curriculum was moderated in favour of practice that focussed on children's individual abilities and personalities (Oda and Mori 2006). Despite Western perceptions (Cummings 1989), the aims of early childhood education have never promoted academic ability, but have evolved to reflect the prevailing social conditions.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ For a comprehensive history of early childhood pedagogic concepts in Japanese preschools, see the excellent article by Ishigaki (1991) which discusses prominent theorists and how their views influenced Japanese educational trends.

In contrast to the historical path followed by kindergartens, the *hoikuen* or child-care centre had quite a different beginning. The roots of the modern Japanese child-care facility can be seen in the *takujisho* (day nurseries) founded in Kyoto in 1875 to serve the needs of women working in weaving and dyeing factories. The level of care at these nurseries was minimal, “so that women could work, reflecting a different purpose from the education-oriented kindergartens” (Shwalb et al. 1992:332). This period was marked by rapid industrialisation and urban drift leading to a structural collapse of the extended family. The concept of *ryōsai kenbō* proved impractical for working class mothers who were required to contribute income to the household leading to the demand for childcare (Imoto 2007).

Japan’s first modern child-care centre was established in Tokyo in 1900 (Uno 1987:65-6, Uno 1993:56). In contrast to the limited opening hours of the kindergarten, this centre operated for the full working day and throughout holiday periods (Imoto 2007). Unlike the educational emphasis of the kindergarten curriculum, the child-care centre (*hoikuen*) concentrated on improving children’s eating habits, personal hygiene and morals (Boocock 1989:45, Imoto 2007:93). During World War I, the government increased spending on child-care centres (*hoikuen*) in an attempt to support impoverished mothers and women employed in the war effort and by 1919 the first public child-care centre was established in Osaka, followed by others in the slums of Tokyo, Kobe and Kyoto (Shirai 1985). With the forced conscription of women for factory work during World War II, temporary *hoikuen* were established in any available space, including temples, shrines, libraries and schools. While many of these closed at the end of the war, the Japanese government (under the American occupation) passed the School Education Law in 1947, which placed kindergarten (*yōchien*) under the control of the Ministry of Education (*Mombusho*),⁶⁵ and the Child Welfare Law, which made child-care centres (*hoikuen*) part of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Kōseisho*) (Boocock 1989:45). For many scholars, this remains the fundamental difference between the two forms of early childhood education in Japan, with the *yōchien* seen as preparing children for school, while the *hoikuen* serves the needs of the poor and working women (Boocock 1989:46, Hendry 1986:126, Shwalb et al. 1992:336, Smith 1995: 69).

⁶⁵ *Mombusho* has since been renamed *Mombukagakushō* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

In 1989 and 1990, following reports by international media that focused on the image of Japanese children as young as two heading off to cram school⁶⁶ (“In Japan a tot’s first taste of schooling is ‘examination hell’” 1984:46), the Ministry of Education issued new guidelines that stated early childhood institutions should view spontaneous play as their primary aim, and refrain from academic instruction (Ishigaki 1991). While some scholars write that as far back as the Edo period theorists were recognising the educational value of play (Ishigaki 1991, Shoji 1983), others argue that the concept of free play is relatively recent, and such institutions in fact represent cultural values accepted by modern Japanese society (Davies and Kasama 2004:76, Holloway 2000:3).

Policy change in the early childhood sector can be seen as part of wider reforms undertaken by the state in the education sector (Aranil and Fukaya 2010). The effects of these changes were also felt in the early childhood sector when critics linked the new practice, known as *yutori-kyōiku* (relaxed education), to poor school performance. These critics claim that the problem stems from an abundance of free play in early childhood education, causing children to become selfish, disruptive and unable to adapt to the more structured classroom environment of the primary school. As a result of these criticisms, a number of early childhood centres have instigated academic lessons to prepare children for school and upwardly mobile parents look to cram schools to provide a balance to the perceived problem of too much free play. Japanese early childhood teachers were left to ponder exactly what form the appropriate practice and curriculum for young children might take (Oda and Mori 2006).

In October 2006, the Japanese government hurriedly introduced a new category of early childhood institution: the accredited children’s centre (*nintei-kodomoen*). Combining characteristics of both the kindergarten and the child-care centre, the impetus for developing the *nintei-kodomoen* focussed on relieving the stress of working parents, reducing waiting lists for institutions, and to balance the inconsistencies between demand and supply of places at kindergarten and childcare centres (Imoto 2007). This move marked a radical departure from governmental policy which had always emphasised the separation of the *yōchien* (kindergarten) and *hoikuen* (child-care centre) in both administrative and ideological terms. While the historical origins of early childhood education in Japan resembles New Zealand (and many other countries) the Japanese case is distinctive in its continuation of the dual system which separates

⁶⁶ This is a school that prepares its students for entrance exams through an accelerated curriculum.

children of the same age into different types of institution based on whether a child is “in need of care” (Torimitsu 2003 cited in Imoto 2007).

The *nintei-kodomoen* represents a third alternative to the long-serving dual system, but its introduction has been met with resistance by unions and left-wing political parties who see the move as a chance for government to take less responsibility for vulnerable children. Teachers in the early childhood sector have also expressed their concerns over the new measures which require educators to work together in the same *nintei-kodomoen* despite their contrasting teacher training, educational values, and concepts of pedagogy (Aoki 2010).

As of 1 April 2010, over 26,000 children were listed as seeking childcare in government subsidised centres with the majority of those aged two years or younger. Only 69% of Japan’s kindergartens, however, were operating at full capacity (Takahara 2010). The government believes the solution to these issues is the creation of a new ministry to deal with child care issues and the introduction of a merged facility to be known as the *kodomo-en* (children’s facility or children’s garden). The integration process is scheduled to begin in 2013 and be completed within ten years.

Much like the criticism directed at the *nintei-kodomoen*, the new policy has its detractors, mainly in the form of kindergarten operators who believe the quality of education may suffer if teachers must spend more time in care-based duties rather than preparing for classes. The new ministry will need to take into account the challenges of combining the differing aspects of the new types of facilities such as their hours of operation, holiday periods, fee structures and traditionally separate roles as educational and welfare institutions (Takahara 2010). This period promises to be one of provocation and transition in the Japanese early childhood sector as the government seeks to address these issues. These changes have the potential to fundamentally affect how Japanese children’s bodies are socialised in early childhood settings, because as Mauss (1973:78) notes, “the child’s education is full of so-called details which are really essential”.

Maintaining the boundaries between home and centre in Japan

In contrast to the New Zealand context, where teachers and parents encourage continuity between home and the centre (Ministry of Education 1996, Jones 2006), the Japanese early childhood centre has a different focus. The path to early childhood education begins at home where Japanese child-rearing practices promote interdependence between family members (*amae*) to give children a strong emotional

base. While mothers lovingly indulge their children in the home (*uchi*) environment, early childhood teachers see their role as preparing children for life in Japanese society (the *soto* world) through practical application of *shūdan seikatsu* socialisation methods.

The profound difference between the behaviour of children at home, and the behaviour expected at kindergarten can be attributed to *shūdan seikatsu*, with *shūdan* meaning group or collective, and *seikatsu* meaning life or daily living. The defining characteristic of a *shūdan* group is the expectations concerning behaviour rather than the number of people (Peak 1989:97). Put simply, the early childhood centre is *shūdan seikatsu* and the home is not. The family cannot be a small *shūdan* as its members are free to express their own feelings and desires within the *amae* environment of the home, where it is quite appropriate to expect understanding and indulgence from the other members for any selfish behaviour. In contrast, in the early childhood setting participation by children in the *shūdan* environment means that they must realise “that their own desires and goals are secondary to those of the group” (Peak 2001:144).

Peach (1994: 3) argues that “because the cultures within and outside the home are so different, and because it is culturally inappropriate for mothers to train children in behavior and attitudes appropriate for the outside world, the Japanese have come to believe it is the responsibility of the school to socialize children to the cooperative and self-effacing norms of ‘*shūdan seikatsu*’ or ‘life in a group’”. The explicit socialising function of the Japanese early childhood centre is recognised by both parents and teachers, who accept that a ‘bridge’ is needed between the culture and behaviour of the home and that of the outside world (Peach 1994). Teachers do not expect pupils to commence kindergarten or childcare with any understanding of appropriate classroom behaviour, just as parents feel it is not reasonable to manage children’s actions at home according to the rules of the early childhood environment. The two environments are naturally seen as quite distinct (Lewis 1995, Peak 1991:11, Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:62).

The belief that boundaries between home and centre are appropriate is supported by the children’s mothers who are careful not to enter the kindergarten unless invited by teachers or to attend a special event. At the kindergarten where my research took place, a group of mothers could be found patiently waiting outside the *genkan* (entrance) each day until children were released from their classes. Unlike the New Zealand context, where teachers at my field site were reproached by their peers for locking the doors during mat time, both Japanese parents and teachers accept that the kindergarten is not

the domain of mothers. Although mothers I spoke to in Hokkaido said that they would like to see what the children were doing each day, they did not try and subvert the implicit rules at play in this situation. Instead, they waited expectantly for the regular open days (*sankanbi*), birthday celebrations and events such as the kindergarten concert when families are encouraged to come along. These acts show that, like their children, mothers must learn to suppress their own emotional desires for the good of their child and for that of the group.

Like their mothers, children are required to modify their behaviour in the early childhood context. While some children find the transition to kindergarten or childcare relatively painless, many have trouble adjusting to the new environment. Peak (1991:145) has reported that tantrums, crying, passive withdrawal and refusal to attend are all common. Despite children's attempts to avoid attending, mothers invariably continue to bring them to the centre each day. Rather than being seen as separation anxiety, both mothers and teachers believe challenging transitions stem from difficulty in adjusting to *shūdan seikatsu* routines. Although the transition period may be turbulent for some mothers and children, most problems have disappeared by the time children have spent about three months at the centre.



Figure 10: Parents at Oka Kindergarten watch events at the annual sports day

While children eventually adjust to “life in the group” at the centre, they continue to expect indulgence from their mothers at home. Teachers recognise that, as a counterpoint to the initial early childhood experience, mothers may need to cosset their children more than usual. The following comment from a teacher in Eniwa, Hokkaido, reflects the expectation that children may display changed behaviour at home once they begin kindergarten:

Kindergarten is tiring for children. That is true. Anywhere in Japan you will find it's the same. It is not a place where they can just do what they want all day, instead they learn to consider others and fit in and that is tiring for them. They come home exhausted and their behaviour at home might even change quite drastically. They might want to eat lots of sweet food and behave selfishly at home. All day long at kindergarten they are learning to suppress their own desires for the good of the group so when they get home they want to break out. I hear that a lot from mothers. My own child also acted that way when he was small. He would come home from kindergarten and sit still for about an hour sucking his thumb before going out to play. I think that hour of sitting quietly was essential for him to readjust to the different atmosphere at home.

In recent years, however, the balance of power between mothers and teachers appears to be changing. While the view of teachers' and parents' roles as discrete is rooted in cultural beliefs about the effective socialisation of Japanese children, the effect of the dropping birth rate is increasingly eroding this ideology. With fewer children entering the early childhood arena, kindergartens and childcare centres must compete for enrolments giving parents a new-found power to influence policy and practice. The intense competition between mothers that has escalated in the post-war period first spawned the dedicated *kyōiku mama* (education mother) (Simons 1991). In recent years the Japanese media has reported on the rise of an emerging class of “monster parents” whose demands on the education system are seen not only as extreme but a threat to Japanese society (Lewis 2008). In response, many mothers see their actions as beneficial for their child and in line with basic consumer rights which have previously been ignored by the education system. As the birth-rate continues to fall, it seems inevitable that the early childhood sector will need to continue to accommodate mothers' demands.

Conclusion

Although the purpose of this chapter has been to give a brief overview of child-rearing, early childhood education and transition strategies, the spectre of the body is never far away. In New Zealand, the body of the colonial child was considered

insignificant, but around the turn of the century children's bodies were repositioned as a form of social capital. This ideology is reflected in the way mothers' and children's bodies were medicalised and regulated through the regimes of the Plunket Society in the 1950s. Through the work of the Plunket Society, a pattern of child-rearing developed that emphasised routine and limited physical contact between mother and baby. This approach contrasted with traditional Māori society which encouraged co-sleeping and limited mother-child separation (Ritchie and Ritchie 1997). In order to discipline children, punishment was administered directly to the body in the form of smacking, and continues to occur today despite parents' reservations.⁶⁷ In post-millennium New Zealand, families are increasingly diverse, in terms of both structure and ethnicity, resulting in a wider variety of child-rearing practices (Morton et al. 2010). In order to facilitate a smooth transition between home and the early childhood setting, links between the family and the wider community are acknowledged and extended to create a shared sense of belonging (Ministry of Education 1996:42).

New Zealand child-rearing approaches contrast with Japan, where the ideology of *skinship* prevails. The bodies of mother and child are seen as linked through embodied practices such co-sleeping, massage, and prolonged physical contact. Rather than taking a disciplinarian approach, Japanese mothers indulge their children in order to foster *amae* or dependency. Japanese mothers also carefully monitor everything that enters and leaves her child's body, to the extent that even minor illness in a child is attributed to a mother's lack of care (Lock 1980:76, Picone 1989:485). This attention to the body continues in the early childhood context, where children spend a great time of learning to control their bodily activities and develop orderly habits (Hendry 1986:139). In fact, transition from home to kindergarten is marked by the separation of the bodies of mother and child. While an indulgent home life provides children with a strong emotional base, in the early childhood setting children's bodies are ordered and regulated to assist them in realising that their own desires are now secondary to that of the group (Peak 2001:144).

In both the New Zealand and Japanese contexts, the acts of children, teachers and parents reflect implicit expectations surrounding appropriate practice in the home, in the early childhood setting, and beyond, in wider society. In drawing on Tobin et al.'s

⁶⁷ In 2009, the Section 59 Crimes Act Repeal Bill was passed in New Zealand. Popularly known as the "anti-smacking" law, the Bill was the focus of sustained and polarising public debate prior to its introduction. However, a recent poll shows that many parents ignore the law, and continue to smack their children despite the threat of prosecution ("Parents ignore anti-smacking law, poll shows" 2012).

(2009) PS3C methodology, I have chosen to focus on the body as a locus of anthropological meaning. The next chapter marks the beginning of this analysis, through an examination of the early childhood experience as mediated through the lens of the body. The body is “problematized” according to Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s (1987) “three bodies” framework, which situates the body as a product of specific social, cultural and historical contexts (Lock 1993:134, Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:7). The theories of Mauss (1973:70), which have been explored in this chapter, position the body as a crucible of bodily techniques. Mauss argues that such techniques cannot be viewed as “natural” but rather classified as cultural practices. In the chapters which follow, the ideas of Mauss still resonate, but they are complemented by the theories of Douglas (1966) and Foucault (1995). Douglas expands on Mauss’s theories, and introduces the idea of the body as a natural symbol. Her focus is on the exchange of symbolic meanings between the individual body and the social body. The theories of Foucault centre on the body as political, as a site for discipline, domestication and training. Foucault contends that institutionalised structures such as the early childhood centre work to produce docile bodies that can be used for state purposes. Weaving the work of these three theorists through the ethnographic data provides the framework for an examination of Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s (1987) “three bodies”.



Figure 11: Early childhood experiences mark the transition from home to the education sector

Chapter 5: Children's Bodies as a Contested Site

The body both encodes cultural values and creates personal meanings.

(Gottlieb 2004:4)

While anthropologists have called for the body to be located at the centre of anthropological thought (Mascia-Lees 2011, Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987, Synnott and Howes 1992, Van Wolputte 2004), children's bodies are increasingly absent from this discussion.⁶⁸ In 2004, Joseph Tobin (2004:111) asserted that:

The body is disappearing in early childhood education. Once a protected site within the larger world of education in which the body could flourish, preschools are now a battle-zone in the war against the body, sites where the bodies of children and the adults who care for them fall under increasing scrutiny and discipline.

The discourses surrounding children's bodies in early childhood education appear to support Tobin's statement that the body is in grave danger of vanishing in Western contexts (Bresler 2004, Johnson 1997, Shapiro and Shapiro 2002, Surtees 2008). This chapter will discuss the culturally contested space that children's bodies occupy in the early childhood arena.

In the New Zealand context, children's bodies have increasingly become the focus of surveillance and regulation (Foucault 1995). This increased regulation mirrors that of other Western contexts, where the child's body is viewed as a site for anxiety and fear in the face of rising debate over appropriate policy and practice (Phelan 1997, Piper and Stronach 2008). Children's bodies have been repositioned as embodying a moral panic, resulting in previously insignificant early childhood routines to be viewed with suspicion (Farquhar 1997, Jones 2001, Robinson 2008, Tobin 1997b). This has not only impacted on practice but on the quality and type of research able to be conducted around the issue of children's bodies. For example, Montgomery (2009:200) has noted that children's sexuality has rarely been examined through an anthropological lens. She attributes this to Western sensitivities surrounding child sexual abuse. She argues these concerns have not only made it extremely difficult for adult researchers to speak to children about their sexual experiences, but also sensitivity surrounding the issue has discouraged most people from focusing on the subject.

⁶⁸ For example, in a recent publication dedicated to the anthropology of the body (Mascia-Lees 2011), children are referred to only once in the index as part of an analysis of childbirth in Sudan.

This literature, however, contrasts with studies carried out in Japan which still places children's bodies at the very centre of the early childhood experience. Ben-Ari (1997) argues that preschool experiences such as co-sleeping, eating and bathing together serve to embody certain traits and qualities identified as Japanese. Walsh (2004) suggests that the Japanese child is viewed essentially as a physical self whose body is pivotal to intellectual development. Hendry (1986) and Lebra (1976) have stressed the importance of intimate physical contact both within families and in the context of early childhood education. This bodily contact is seen as a natural and necessary part of a child's development. In Japanese early childhood centres it is common to see teachers lying down to sleep with a child who is having trouble nodding off at naptime, bawdy jokes between teachers and children about bodily functions and body parts, or a lone teacher assisting a child with toileting.

As Gottlieb (2004:4) has pointed out, the body reflects both cultural and personal meanings. This chapter argues that in New Zealand early childhood circles, like other Western contexts, the child's body has become the focus of civilising routines which limit physical touch between adults and children, and minimise attention to the body and its products. The chapter will discuss how the New Zealand early childhood centre has become a site of constant surveillance, turning teachers into "disciplinary individuals" who are internally controlled by their own behaviour (Foucault 1995:227).

In Japan, the body is also subject to routine and management, as Chapter Eight explains, but this chapter focuses on perceptions of the naked child and approaches to bodily functions. In contrast to New Zealand, where children's bodies conjure up feelings of anxiety, Japanese children's bodies are still viewed through a lens of nostalgia and innocence (Creighton 1997, Robertson 1988). The strength of this ideology, known as *furusato* in Japanese, persists despite a growing trend towards personal privacy and changing notions of child safety. While orifices and "leaking bodies" (Turner 2003) may be metaphors for disorder in the New Zealand early childhood setting, the Japanese centre reflects a pragmatic, relaxed approach to bodily functions. Here, I draw on the theories of Douglas (1966:121) to show how the margins of the body hold different meanings in different cultural contexts.

The (un)clothed body

The first clue that New Zealand and Japanese perceptions of children's bodies differ came during the screening of each video to the 'outsider' culture. The Japanese

video was shot in mid-summer when the temperature regularly rises above 30 degrees Celsius. The Hokkaido summer is relatively short so the warm days represent a welcome opportunity for children to indulge in water play. The video depicts the teacher first explaining in detail how to get changed into underwear and singlets.⁶⁹ She draws a chubby, androgynous figure on a piece of cardboard pinned to the display board before using a marker pen to outline a singlet over the chest and then a pair of underpants. While drawing she jokes with the children about the breasts (*oppai*) and penis (*chinchin*) disappearing under each layer of clothing.

The teacher tells the children that between taking off their regular clothing and donning the underwear they will all be “completely naked” (*zuponpon*) just like when one enters the bath. The children shriek but not as loudly as when she explains the class will be barefoot during the water play. Several calls of “no way” (*iya da*) are heard from around the room but the children begin pulling off their socks and searching for the bags which contain their change of clothes. The camera pans across the classroom as children run about in various states of undress. Some have already changed, others are struggling with pieces of clothing and a few are standing naked watching while a group of boys clad only in singlets chase each other around. Eventually all thirty three children have changed and they are led outside by the teacher who has spread outdoor tatami matting and prepared the water play equipment.

Following an exuberant period of splashing, pouring and squirting water, the children are instructed to line up according to gender. Once again they are given instructions, this time about the correct procedure for undressing and washing the dirt off their bare feet. In their two lines the children remove their wet clothing then wait naked as each one has their feet cleaned by the teacher using a hose. The girls begin first and after being washed they move to the outdoor tatami mat to find their towels. As there are a large number of children, this procedure takes over twenty minutes during which time the children remain lined up naked in full view of the adjacent road and park dotted with elderly men playing mini-golf. The teacher carefully sprays the hose over each young body and kneels down to wash away any offending grains of sand from the children’s feet. The children are helped by a teacher aide to locate their towels and dry

⁶⁹ At this kindergarten, the children changed into underwear brought from home for water play. At other kindergartens that I visited, especially those which had a swimming pool on the grounds, children would wear swimsuits.



Video sequence 1: Children wait to be washed down by their teacher at Oka Kindergarten⁷⁰

⁷⁰ This sequence has been rendered with a paintbrush effect in order to protect the children involved.

off on the tatami mat. Gradually, each one moves back inside the classroom to conduct the undressing routine in reverse.

This scene provoked no response from the Oka Kindergarten teachers when they viewed their own video, but as I had felt ethically conflicted during the filming I specifically asked them to comment on the footage. The teachers were puzzled by what I was asking them to address. I was reluctant to frame the matter within my cultural context for fear of influencing their responses, but sensing their confusion I asked if they could see any issues around the children's nudity in a semi-public place. Their response was illuminating: not only was the scene of little consequence to them, they were intrigued as to why I was enquiring. In brief, I explained how New Zealand early childhood institutions had changed their policies and practices in recent years in order to stem public concerns relating to potential sexual abuse of children. As a result, it was less likely children would be naked for any length of time in a New Zealand early childhood setting. I was also concerned about the ethical implications of filming the children and unsure whether it would be appropriate to show the footage to viewers outside Japan.

The teachers responded swiftly and simply. Children were beautiful and innocent, not objects of adult sexual desire. Seeing the video merely reminded them of how cute (*kawaii*) young, naked bodies can be. One teacher commented, "They all just look so cute running around like that, so free and playful. I especially liked the little, round bottoms (*oshiri*) poking out from the classroom door when the boys were heading inside to get changed". Another teacher questioned what kind of country New Zealand could be if teachers were afraid to let children enjoy the freedom which comes with a naked state. When I explained that the scene was potentially more contentious because of the men playing in the park across the road, one of the teachers burst out laughing and asked, "Are there perverts lurking behind all the bushes in New Zealand then?" The teachers agreed that they could not see any problems with screening the footage to an outside audience.

This response is interesting on two counts: the first because their views resonated with many (but not all) Japanese reactions I encountered around the country and secondly because their comments strongly contrasted to those of the New Zealand viewers. What could this mean? In the following section, I discuss Japanese cultural

contexts in reference to the body in early childhood settings before moving on to frame the New Zealand responses within the current political and social climate.

The naked child in Japanese educational settings

Unlike their New Zealand counterparts, none of the Japanese kindergarten teachers viewing the scene of naked children expressed shock at the images. At a childcare centre on the opposite coast of Hokkaido to where the video was shot, the scene even appeared a bit tame in contrast to their usual approach:

When we are finished playing we also wash everyone down with water like in that video, but we get much dirtier in the first place. We don't have a sandpit so we play in the mud. Afterwards we use a bucket to wash the children as there is not a bathtub here either. The children are washed down naked outside until they are nice and clean, then they come inside to get changed back into their clothes. The boys and girls all get changed together in the classroom.

For these teachers, the most startling contrast to their own centre was the reserved manner in which children conducted both their play and the orderly way in which cleaning of the body was carried out. At another Hokkaido kindergarten located in the grounds of a Buddhist temple, staff were perplexed by children's resistant shrieks when instructed by the teacher to remove their shoes and socks. The issue of children's clothing was even less pertinent for this group of viewers who advocate "naked education" within their kindergarten grounds. These teachers explained that forsaking clothing was encouraged "for the sake of the body. So that fingers and toes can be refreshed, so that the body can experience some different sensations".

Teachers in Osaka echoed the belief that child nudity was nothing unusual in the early childhood environment and linked it directly to cultural influences: "Japanese people have a bathing culture so they are comfortable being naked. Children understand that their unclothed bodies are different but when they are kindergarten age it's no big deal being naked". The majority of teachers in the focus group sessions gave similar explanations for the water play scene and several groups did not feel the need to address the issue at all until questioned directly about it. In contrast, teachers in a Catholic kindergarten expressed some surprise that older children in the senior classes would be comfortable totally naked for any length of time. They made a clear distinction on the basis of children's age and areas of the body which might be appropriately left unclothed: "I think it's quite usual for children to be naked from the waist up together but from the waist down I think it might be a bit embarrassing".

For some of the urban centres where I conducted focus group sessions there were elements of surprise in the comments made. A teacher in Saitama commented that:

Perhaps there were some regional differences. For example, they played outside in their swimsuits, right? At that time, were they completely stark naked? It was for a very long time, wasn't it? Seeing that, I thought we're really in the middle of a big city here. If we did that here at our kindergarten we would have a problem. We are conscious of the amount of time children are naked. Once play has finished and children are getting changed from swimsuits into their clothes, we are also aware of the time it takes. If possible, we find a way to avoid being stark naked for everyone to see.

At that kindergarten children wear swimsuits when using the pool on the grounds. At the end of the swimming session, children are washed down with water, and just before entering the classroom their swimsuits are removed and a towel is wrapped around them. As in the Hokkaido kindergarten, both boys and girls changed in the same classroom but teachers in Saitama identified a clear difference in the way the procedure was carried out:

The children [here] get changed together but they don't do it in such a relaxed, slow manner as in the video. I wonder if that's a regional thing?

Yes, it would be nice if we could be more open minded like they are up there. (Everyone nods).

Scholars have concluded that regional differences between early childhood centres across Japan do not exist, insisting that experiences of both parent and child are relatively homogeneous (Ben-Ari 2002, Kotloff 1998, Peak 1989). However, Hendry (1993:225) notes that most anthropological studies of Japanese mothers and small children have been carried out in the Kanto region. This suggests there may be differences in other prefectures throughout the country.⁷¹ Contrasting responses to the water play scenes certainly seemed to support a view of rural centres as less prone to urban pressures and demands. During viewing many of teachers sighed wistfully and remarked how lucky the children were to be growing up in Hokkaido where life was still so free and surrounded by nature. There appeared to be a nostalgic tinge to their

⁷¹ Most ethnographic studies of early childhood settings have been conducted on Japan's main island of Honshu: Ben-Ari 1997 [Kyoto]; Boocock 1989 [Kyoto]; De Coker 1990 [Kyoto]; Hendry 1986 [Chiba]; Holloway 2000 [Osaka, Kobe]; Kotloff 1998 [Kanazawa]; Lewis 1995 [Nagoya, Tokyo]; Peak 1991 [Nagano]; Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989 [Kyoto]; Walsh 2004 [Yashiro, north of Osaka] and most of them have examined institutions in urban areas. An exception to this is the study by Hendry (1986) which is based in part on fieldwork in kindergartens in rural Kyushu.

cries of “*ii na...*” (that’s great, isn’t it?). When I asked them if they thought the relaxed attitude could be due to the rural location of the kindergarten, teachers replied that:

Well, it’s true that in a rural area like that you can enjoy a leisurely, relaxed way of life.

They were right beside the road! The children were just getting changed right there! We can’t really do that here.

That’s right! The road was right there. It was just like Japan in the old days!

In the past it was also like that in this area. About thirty years ago, the children would just take off their underwear and run around the kindergarten naked. Everyone was completely relaxed about it. These days the teachers have to put a stop to it.

*Is this change because of the mothers concerns?*⁷² Yes, that’s right.

If it were possible, it would be wonderful to be able to return to that kind of carefree existence. A life where children can run around and be free like that. It looks like in Hokkaido children can still enjoy a relaxed lifestyle and I envy that.

As the next section will explore, these comments serve as a reminder that views on children’s bodies can vary across Japan according to ideological axes.

The Japanese child’s body as a symbol of nostalgia

The island of Hokkaido retains a utopian image for the Japanese public, especially those in crowded, urban areas. Many of the Japanese teachers who viewed the video had never visited Hokkaido. This seemed to add to the illusion that the area was somewhat mystical and detached from the rest of the country in terms of cultural practices. In metropolitan areas my participants nostalgically linked rural communities to a romanticised, less threatening era for children and parents. Clark (1994:69) has discussed the phenomenon of Japanese describing aspects of culture that they believe are more faithfully replicated or preserved in other parts of the country. In urban areas, Clark was advised to visit the countryside where he would find the real (*hontō no*) Japan and witness traditional practices. Conversely, his trips to rural regions resulted in the advice that such practices no longer continued in that particular area but could be found elsewhere where customs were “more backward or more traditional, depending on the informant’s perspective” (Clark 1994:70).

⁷² The italics indicate my voice in the conversation.

Nostalgia for a more “authentic” lifestyle has become personified in the ideology and symbolism of *furusato* (home village or native place) which has become increasingly ubiquitous throughout post-war Japan. In the minds of the Japanese public, the notion of *furusato* is strongly linked to a rural landscape, an agrarian existence and a community-based social life which shaped a shared sense of belonging (Creighton 1997). *Furusato* imagery has been used extensively in the travel industry for promotional purposes, with some villages even reviving once defunct festivals and crafts to satisfy the demands of tourists.⁷³ Robertson (1988:495) has linked the growing cultural significance of *furusato* ideology to a feeling of “nostalgia for nostalgia, a state of being provoked by a dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of a remembered, or imagined, past plenitude”.

Viewed through the lens of *furusato* ideology the unclothed child’s body takes not a menacing form, as it might in a New Zealand context, but a nostalgic, benign objectification. Many Japanese teachers around the country made implicit reference to the desire to return a less constrained existence, both professionally and personally. Others had taken more concrete action to recreate experiences for children from a Japan many see as disappearing (Kerr 1996). I visited a kindergarten in Yokohama where the principal spent some time outlining the philosophy of his centre. Aware the children were growing up in the midst of a sprawling urban area the staff try hard to offer opportunities to interact with nature. The principal was especially proud that his staff and students attend an annual overnight camp in the countryside. He explained that this presents an opportunity for them to be at one with nature on a more profound level. A defining feature of the camp is the large bath that the teachers and children share in the evening. He produced a picture of smiling children and young female teachers crammed into a huge communal tub. It appeared that all were naked and when I asked about this, he told me proudly that *skinship* is a very important part of Japanese culture and that this bathing experience embodies that notion perfectly. Seen as vitally important as a

⁷³ Martinez (1990) has wryly observed the re-creation in Kuzaki of the indigenous *ama* who traditionally worked as abalone divers without the use of oxygen tanks. In their new form the *ama* are sexy, young women who pursue the more aesthetically appealing pearl. This phenomenon has been used equally successfully to market traditional food products which have seen a huge rise in popularity in the past decade (Love 2007). *Furusato* ideology is strongly linked with the *muraokoshi* (village revitalization) movement which has reinvented depopulated country areas for consumption by urban tourists (Moon 2002).

means of promoting close bonds between parent and child, *skinship* is also relevant in the early childhood centre.⁷⁴

Skinship as cultural ideology

As discussed in Chapter Four, the origin of the term *skinship* is linked to research by Caudill (1972) who identified a difference in the way Japanese mothers interact with their children. Caudill concluded that the Japanese mother views the baby as an extension of herself, therefore unnecessary verbal communication is limited in favour of more vitally important physical contact (Schooler 1996:145-146).⁷⁵ Picone (1989:485) suggests that within this cultural ideology the bodies of mother and child become irrevocably linked, to the extent that mothers are understood as “constantly recreating or preserving her children” well beyond the months of pregnancy. Ben-Ari (1997:38) has noted *skinship* is an integral part of many daily activities carried out within the home such as co-sleeping, breast-feeding, nonverbal communication and bathing together. In the early childhood setting too this close physical contact is seen as a valuable means of embodying the group experience. Here the emphasis is firmly on intimacy rather than sexuality. This kind of interaction is not limited to kindergarten children and their teachers, it is a feature of many Japanese organisations. Ben-Ari (1997), Clark (1994), Hendry (1999), Kondo (1990) and Rohlen (1974) have discussed trips and overnight stays with friends, work colleagues, classmates and club members which have culminated in shared bathing and sleeping experiences.

The recollections of these writers echo my own experiences while working at the kindergarten in Hokkaido. Once or twice a year a teachers’ trip would be organised to a hot spring resort (*onsen*) at a nearby lake where the entire staff would end a day spent sightseeing with an evening meal and a bath together before heading back to relax on *futons* in the communal sleeping spaces. While almost all of these *onsen* enforce separate areas for men and women, during my first experience of an office trip in an isolated, rural part of Hokkaido all members of the organisation bathed together naked in a natural spring in the middle of the forest. This recollection has been met with

⁷⁴ In his observation of a group who regularly bathed together (Clark (1994:79) used the term *hadaka no tsukiai* or “naked association” to express a similar feeling of physical and emotional closeness. In this case, the bathers were members of a company baseball team but other sporting, club and business groups that Clark interviewed articulated the same desire to develop a deeper and more productive relationship through naked bathing customs. These practices are also called *hada to hada no fureai* in contrast to the word *skinship* which implies a broad range of intimate physical contact rather than simply the experience of being naked with others.

⁷⁵ The full results of Caudill’s study are contained in four core papers, Caudill and Weinstein (1969), Caudill (1972), Caudill and Schooler (1973), and Caudill and Frost (1974).

surprise by Japanese in other regions who insist this is very unusual in modern times although it was apparently quite common in the past.⁷⁶

The collective unclothed body

However, there are signs that Japanese attitudes to the collective unclothed body are changing amid rising perceptions of personal privacy. Clark (1994:52) associates sensitivity to cross-sexual nudity to the decreasing custom of visiting public bathhouses (*sentō*). Guichard-Anguis (2009) writes that Japanese inns or *ryokan* serve as important producers of Japanese identity, adding that conceptions of privacy are beginning to creep into the bathing rituals which play such a major role during a visit to these establishments.⁷⁷ Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:118) have addressed changing notions of the communal body as seen in rising levels of privacy in public spheres and a more conservative approach to sexually provocative dialogue.

In the small fishing village where I first lived, on the isolated Shiretoko Peninsula, this change has also become evident even within a much shorter time frame. Twelve years after I left the village, the members of the organisation I worked for no longer bathe together during their office trips to the hot springs. The groups now conduct their parties at a newly constructed hotel which has segregated areas for men and women. Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:119) identify this shift as “a form of embourgeoisement, the spread of middle-class Western styles, values, and notions of the self to other classes and cultural contexts”. They argue that like the public bath (*sentō*) and hot springs, early childhood centres are one of the few sites in which contemporary Japanese can embody pleasure in a public context. They also see these opportunities as diminishing, therefore early childhood settings are significant for maintaining or reviving cultural values and practices that are either threatened or need to be restored.

⁷⁶ Clark (1994:17) has noted that regional differences in bathing practices do exist in Japan. He also observes that mixed-sex bathing has taken place since ancient times and continues to occur today (Clark 1994:33). However, the practice began to decrease after the start of the Meiji era in 1869 following negative reports by visiting Westerners which described it as “promiscuous”, “licentious” and “lewd behaviour” (Clark 1994:32).

⁷⁷ In both these spaces it was once common for the attendant (*bandai-san*) to position themselves in an area where they could view both the men’s and women’s dressing and bathing areas. This position allowed the attendant to supervise children moving back and forth between their mother and father in the baths, monitor bathers’ possessions and enjoy conversations with customers as they dressed and undressed. To address issues of privacy, attendants in some newer facilities have been relocated to a space where they cannot see either gender.

Japanese early childhood teachers and academics in the focus group sessions appeared to support Tobin et al.'s suggestion that early childhood centres can play a large part in forming cultural constructions of the body. While the Hokkaido kindergarten's practice of structurally organising children in a naked state was not common and some of the respondents found it surprising, the overwhelming response was one of approval due to the implicitly understood and shared ideals of *skinship* and bodily freedom. There were also positive links made between the state of the child's unclothed body and traditional cultural values which teachers saw as eroding under multiple pressures: urbanisation, parental demands, environmental risk and the shrinking family unit. While the practice of allowing children to interact naked in a Japanese early childhood setting may not be common, the "cultural logic" is (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:9). Although New Zealand may be regarded as a liberal environment as far as nudity is concerned (Carr-Gomm 2010:97), communal nakedness is not a part of New Zealand cultural identity due to Christian influences which discouraged this practice (Barcan 2004:108-130, Morris 1992:28). However, New Zealand teachers indicated that allowing children to play naked was once relatively common in their centres as well, but in recent years not only has the unclothed child become much rarer s/he has the potential to incite danger and suspicion within the early childhood environment (Jones 2001). The following section draws on the work of Foucault (1980, 1981, 1995) to explore these fears and the state policies that have become ingrained in the cultural fabric of the modern early childhood setting.

The protected body in New Zealand early childhood education

For the Japanese teachers and children at the centre of the water play scene, the fact that members of their kindergarten were unclothed for a relatively lengthy period of time in direct view of the passing public was unremarkable. For Japanese viewers of the scene the reactions ranged from surprise to total indifference but most expressed their support of the ideals associated with nakedness which they linked to *skinship* and nostalgic images of a rural past lost to urban dwellers (Robertson 1988). This represents a contrast to the New Zealand teachers who were immediately perturbed by the scene, yet reluctant or unable to initially verbalise what the offending issue appeared to be. However, a Foucauldian analysis of these responses would suggest that the teachers are internally regulating their gaze and reproducing safe behaviour. Through a process of assessment, coordination, and ultimately, surveillance, the teachers emerge as

“disciplinary individuals” who have been created by these techniques of power (Foucault 1995:227).

The following discussion, between Kaimai Kindergarten teachers viewing the footage, reveals their ambivalence about the unclothed child. There are distinctions made about the appropriateness of children who are “necessarily” naked for brief periods of time in order to change clothes and those who are clearly seeking pleasure from their naked state.

I don't have a problem with it.

No, if you'd come outside this morning we had water slides outside today and we had nude children walking round, but not while they're sliding. I mean just while they're getting changed, not while they're playing. They can do that, it's fine while they're getting dressed but I wouldn't want them running around naked.

As the discussion progresses it becomes obvious that, according to the group, a myriad of potential dangers exist for naked children in the early childhood environment: damage from the sun, potentially conflicting messages regarding behaviour at home and centre, a lack of dignity, a missed learning opportunity.

Why are naked children sensitive in kindergartens in New Zealand?

I don't know, it's respecting dignity for us ... I dunno.

Hmm ... it's a funny thing.

It's what's appropriate at home and what's appropriate at kindergarten which is public. And that's how it is. You are respecting your body but you are respecting other people as well.

And also we don't know, in their own homes [parents] might be not quite comfortable with it either so when we've got their children running around naked, they could be quite uncomfortable.

And it's not necessary to run around naked at kindergarten. You know it's not a feature that you set up.

Well, what does it do for you? Can you learn from it?

If a child wanted to be naked would it be a problem?

Yes! *Why?*

Sun, for one thing. Sunburn, and at kindergarten we wear clothes.⁷⁸

Well, it's not acceptable.

You don't say that to the child. You say at kindergarten we wear clothes. It's probably a cultural thing altogether. If you wear no clothes at home, that's fine but at kindergarten you do. Plus, it's like, you don't jump on the couch at kindergarten. You might jump on the couch at home, you don't eat your food nicely...

Yes, these are the rules we have here.

It's just a standard really.

Yeah and it's going to be the same in virtually every kindergarten.

So it hasn't got anything to do with being prudish or hiding yourself or being bad.

However, as scholars have pointed out, the real message seems to be that naked children are a danger not to themselves but to the staff who may feel afraid of being accused of inappropriate behaviour (Duncan 1998). Kaimai Kindergarten teachers made a distinction between parent-led centres and their own teacher-led centres where they felt the need to be particularly vigilant about being responsible for the physical state of the child.

It's also a lot to do with respect. Like at Playcentre it might be completely different because you've got the mothers there whereas you haven't got family members here.

And you sort of have to be a stand-in for them really so we have to be conservative and even if they don't mind their children running around naked we still need to be aware of that.

It's also a staff safety issue now. That has changed with those cases more than anything. That you have someone to back you up, that you're not on your lonesome.

⁷⁸ A Japanese kindergarten teacher I interviewed, who is now working in New Zealand, also gave the potential for sunburn as an explanation for contrasting attitudes to child nudity in early childhood settings. She commented that "I think nudity at kindergarten is usual. I like it. I think it's usual but maybe for New Zealanders it's not so usual! But I think it's very different in New Zealand because you need to worry about sunburn. There's a very, very strong sun in New Zealand so they [the teachers] don't want [kids outside naked]".

The teachers were not only mindful of respecting parents' wishes and values, they were anxious about the impressions unclothed children might create in the wider public sphere. This led to links with possible pedophilia, accusation of inappropriate staff behaviour, right through to the unauthorized exchange of children's images over the internet. One teacher felt that the Japanese policy of allowing photographs to be taken (in that particular kindergarten, at least) to be extremely naïve, commenting that "I think over there it will probably change too when they see information zipping around the world".

For all the teachers interviewed in both the field site and the focus groups there was a very real sense that the levels of nudity seen in the Japanese video were no longer either appropriate or comfortable in New Zealand early childhood settings.⁷⁹ In contrast, Japanese viewers overwhelmingly linked the images of children's naked bodies to expressions of approval, pleasure and a sense of nostalgia. Scholars writing about the issue of touch in the New Zealand early childhood context suggest that the difference lies in the changing perception of the space "between the bodies of the teacher and the child" (Jones 2001:9).

Bodies under surveillance

The rising anxiety and regulation associated with children's bodies has been labelled a moral panic by New Zealand researchers (Jones 2001, Farquhar 2001) but it is a phenomenon common to other Western nations as well. In Australia, McWilliam (2003:35) has repositioned the child as a new pedagogical subject with the "fleshy body" being replaced by an object of "risk minimisation". In the United Kingdom, Piper and Stronach (2008:36-44) have discussed educational settings where all or part of children's bodies are designated dangerous and viewing or touching them can result in the prosecution of teachers. And in an American context, Phelan (1997:84) has suggested it is not only the children who have experienced the erasure of pleasure derived from the bodily but teachers who must repress their own desires in the classroom.

⁷⁹ A section of the water play scene has also been screened at conferences in Australia. The audiences were comprised mainly of Australian and Japanese viewers, along with smaller numbers of viewers from a variety of Asian countries. While the Japanese viewers did not find the video particularly surprising, I was approached by a number of Australians (including several of Chinese descent) who said that they were shocked by the images and astonished that I had filmed them.

Duncan (1999) has pointed out that the concerns of most New Zealand kindergarten teachers do not centre on fears about child abuse occurring or the trustworthiness of their colleagues but rather the threat of an allegation of child sexual abuse. Duncan draws on Foucault's notions of surveillance to examine the changing nature of policies designed to prevent child abuse in early childhood settings. She suggests that much of the current climate of fear and anxiety stems from the 1993 trial of Peter Ellis, a Christchurch childcare centre worker convicted of 16 charges of sexual abuse against children (McLoughlin 1996). After the trial many regular practices carried out at early childhood centres, such as a lone adult changing a nappy or supervising children on a walk, came to be viewed with suspicion. The early childhood sector swiftly developed policies to allay public fears and after a period of consultation a code of ethics was also released.⁸⁰ From these documents four key recommendations emerged: increased visibility; adults could not be alone with a child; tasks requiring physical contact such as toileting and bathing must be carried out by at least two centre staff visible at all times; and parents must be kept informed. Comments from the teachers Duncan interviewed revealed this has meant a huge change in practice. They cited staff members being required to supervise other teachers showering a child, referring to toileting contracts listing which staff have permission to remove children's clothing (for example, in the case of a toileting accident), and needing to fill in a detailed form every time this occurred.

Drawing on Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault (1980) describes a state of constant visual attention by which "people turn themselves into self-observing subjects who are controlled inwardly by their own constraints and actions" (Duncan 1999: 245). In this way, the early childhood setting becomes a site of constant surveillance, both in structural terms as buildings are redesigned to open viewing and in terms of policy which sees staff, parents and members of the community entering in, out and around the centre each day. The teachers are also policing themselves, reproducing safe and controlled behaviour as expressed in child protection documents yet all the while mindful of powerful public opinion expressed through media and community outlets (Piper and Stronach 2006).

Jones (2003) has pointed out that policies relating to the sexual abuse of children were based on dubious research at a time when social anxiety about the issue was

⁸⁰ See Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (1993) and Early Childhood Education Code of Ethics National Working Group (1995).

particularly high. She rejects the notion that the risks were carefully considered, instead linking the change in New Zealand early childhood policy to a combination of a focus on child protectionism, sensationalist American research into abuse and the high profile allegations against Peter Ellis in 1992. Jones argues that the ‘abusing teacher’ was not in fact a new risk but one created by media attention with the perception that this individual was potentially lurking undiscovered in every centre across the country. In reality, it was often difficult to ascertain if sexual abuse had occurred and prosecutions against child care workers for such a crime were rare. As Duncan (1999) as shown, the result of this intense public scrutiny resulted in teachers becoming the object of surveillance and the accusing children turning into the risk. Jones sums up this new risk nicely. “For staff, the ‘risky business’ in which early childhood workers find themselves is not the risky environment where child abuse can occur, but the risky environment where they are open to unfounded accusations. Staff willingly co-operate in the new ‘safe’ practices not so much because these practices protect children, but primarily because ‘safe’ practices are insurance for themselves” (Jones 2003:24).

Normalising the clothed body

For the New Zealand teachers involved in this project the feelings of being under constant surveillance were clearly omnipresent even when the children, their parents or members of the wider community were not present. As articulated by Foucault (1981, 1995), they had come to internalise and enforce the belief that viewing images of naked children’s bodies was not only inappropriate, it was quite possibly dangerous. During a screening of the Japanese video at Kaimai Kindergarten one evening, the tape was paused so the group of staff could hear the comments being made. It is important to note that there were no children or parents at the centre during this screening. By chance the video froze on the image of a naked boy’s bottom framed by a classroom door. The group quickly pointed out that maybe the tape needed to be moved on to a more appropriate point.

Well, that’s an awesome place to stop!

Oh, that’s a bit sensitive ... quick, fast forward, fast forward!

However, they swiftly engaged in some critical cross-cultural consciousness and began to examine their own reaction to the completely unplanned result. One of the teachers noted that “yeah, that’s interesting they [the Japanese] wouldn’t comment!” but the group reasoned that it was necessary to be more careful in a New Zealand context

considering the current climate. Douglas (1996:76) argues that a community under threat responds by expanding the number of social controls relating to the body. In contemporary New Zealand, the threat of child sexual abuse allegations is the omnipresent threat which serves to both reproduce disciplined individuals (Foucault 1980) and regulate the adult gaze. The child's body is also subject to these diffuse forms of power rendering the naked body as a menace to order (Foucault 1995). In contrast, the clothed body has become normalised under arbitrary criteria such as those given by the New Zealand teachers earlier in this chapter.

Like the nostalgic Japanese teachers however, some of the more experienced educators could remember a time when New Zealand children also spent long periods of time outside naked and they expressed their regret at how the early childhood environment had changed. At a focus group session in Wellington, one teacher drew on her own embodied experiences as a child that she used as an argument for being more relaxed in contemporary settings. However, this approach brought her into conflict with the dominant discourse expressed by others around her.

I didn't think there was an issue with the whole naked thing. But only because it was similar to an experience I had at primary school as a five year old but I wouldn't have expected it in an ECE centre.

You personally?

Me personally as a five year old. That's what we did, everyone got naked because there was a teacher.

You wouldn't be allowed to do that now.

Well, I have no idea. I don't expect that they do because we are all "ooh, bodies, don't want to talk about it". We don't want to deal with naked bodies.

They don't do it now and I never went through anything like that.

I think nowadays and just in the last few years in particular in ECE we are trying to be more accepting of bodies and talk about that sort of thing because of the whole violence and sexual abuse issue. We are trying to make children more comfortable with talking about body parts and naming them.

In this case, the teacher made a positive, if tenuous, link between her own memories of unrepressed embodied play and the eradication of violence and child sexual abuse. However, the majority of New Zealand teachers interviewed associated the unclothed child with negative outcomes and they were cautious about the potential of images of

Japanese children to end up on illicit websites. The most frequently asked question was: “Is there no child sexual abuse or pornography in Japan?” It is an interesting question.

Keeping the Japanese child’s body safe

Douglas (1996:76) sees the physical body as a “microcosm of society, facing the centre of power, contracting and expanding its claims in direct accordance with the increase and relaxation of social pressures”. Examining the Japanese child’s body under this rubric, it becomes clear why early childhood teachers in Japan do not work in constant fear of abuse allegations. While measures concerning Japanese children’s physical safety have certainly become more stringent in the past two decades following a sharp increase in reported child abuse (Al-Badari 2006, Record 44,210 child abuse cases logged in 09, 2010), the same attention to child sexual abuse has not been evident.⁸¹ Historically this issue has received less scrutiny in Japan than in other countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States where sexual abuse has almost become synonymous with child abuse as a whole (Hacking 1991). The first government survey, in 1973, to address issues of child abuse in Japan did not include a category for sexual abuse but concentrated on murder, violence and abandonment. In 1988 a major survey was conducted which included sexual assault under the umbrella of child abuse yet the numbers affected by this crime were said to be less than 5 percent (Fujimoto 1994). More recent statistics show that these figures have changed very little in the two decades since that survey was released, with a paper by the Department of Health, Labour and Welfare (2008) reporting that sexual abuse still only accounted for just over three percent of the total number of child abuse cases in 2007.⁸²

Kingston (1999:28) suggests that Japan’s massive sex industry is generally tolerated by both the wider public and the authorities. This attitude contributed to Japan’s tardiness in legally banning child pornography and child prostitution in 1999. According to Kingston, this ban was not realised out of moral concern but in order to protect Japan’s image at a time when the country was internationally being viewed as a

⁸¹ This nonchalance was evident at one Japanese junior high school I taught at in the late 1990s. Following a long day at the school sports festival, the staff retired to a local bar run by the mother of one of the school students. After copious amounts of alcohol had been consumed, teachers donned the school uniform and fake genitalia before dancing around the room with maracas. At the time, this stuck me as both highly inappropriate but also somewhat comical.

⁸² The survey of child abuse reported that out of a total of 40,639 abuse cases report in 2007 there were 1,293 sexual abuse cases (3%) compared with 7,621 cases of psychological abuse (19%), 15,429 cases of neglect (38%) and 16,296 physical abuse cases (40%).

leading producer of internet child porn. In his discussion of child pornography on the internet, Jenkins (2001) also accepts that Japan is a prolific source of soft-core images of naked children in utopian settings. Prior to the 1999 legislation, the volume of images was considered so high that Interpol suggested up to 80 percent of internet pornography originated from Japanese sources. Jenkins (2001:199) disputes this claim but concedes that Japan remains legally permissive of pedophile boards which “advertise illicit materials posted on temporary and transient pages on otherwise innocuous servers”.

Goodman (2000b) agrees that external pressure propelled the Japanese government towards legislating against sexual offences, but cautions that tacit acceptance of certain sexual practices and a reluctance to investigate cases in order to avoid embarrassment has since hampered progress. He uses the example of incest that is still not recognised as a crime, making it difficult for victims to press charges unless rape has taken place. As a result, most of the sexual abuse cases involve girls over the age of ten who are willing to take on the difficult task of proving the assault has occurred. Goodman (2000b:142) points out that “the idea that young boys and girls can be sexually abused has proved to be the most difficult perception to change”. More than a decade after the anti-child porn legislation was passed it seems to be having little effect due to permissive attitudes to pornography, sexual exploitation and a huge, thriving sex industry.

This issue has not gone unnoticed within the early childhood community or the wider public. An editorial in *The Japan Times* called for readers to pressure the government for change to halt the sexual exploitation of children, musing that “child prostitution and pornography are not just a matter of unsavoury international reputation; they reflect the values of our own society” (Kingston 1999:273). There are indications that these values are indeed changing and during focus group sessions several Japanese early childhood teachers expressed concerns similar to New Zealand teachers over the possibility of children’s images falling into the wrong hands.

Unlike the New Zealand context where the perceived threat to children often appears to be from *inside* the institution (in the form of the teacher as potentially abusive) the Japanese teachers, however, were specific about dangerous elements penetrating the kindergarten environment from the *outside*. In areas that were highly populated the risk seemed to them to be heightened. In Saitama, the teachers contextualised their concerns in the light of increasingly violent and random attacks on

children by strangers.⁸³ They explained that while children were free to roam around, even to remove their clothing and play naked in the past, “These days, ideas about those kinds of things have very much changed”. When questioned as to why the change had occurred, the Saitama teachers revealed concerns on multiple levels:

Well, as you know, it’s about threats to security from the outside. The mothers have asked us to take precautions as they are worried.

It is because of the emergence of suspicious characters (*fushinsha*), isn’t it? Since then it has changed. Here, there, all around the country, there were various cases of questionable circumstances and after that it all changed.

We had an incident in which children were involved. Not exactly a case of a peeping tom but involving an adult who had an interest in looking at and videotaping children. Mothers at this kindergarten became very anxious about it all. We had to reassure them that everything was fine and that we were doing everything possible to avoid that kind of incident here.

At Oka Kindergarten, teachers were certainly also aware of the sensationalist media coverage given to gruesome events involving young children or staff of early childhood settings (Lewis 2006, Sims 2001, Toyama 2008, “Woman knifes teacher at school” 2001, “Boar attacks 5 in Osaka then barges into kindergarten” 2008). Not long after a mentally disturbed man wandered into a childcare centre in Tokyo, the principal made the incident the topic for his weekly assembly talk. The children were told to remain vigilant for the presence of strangers in the playground and to alert a teacher immediately if they saw something strange. The teachers also discussed the appropriate response to this kind of threat during their daily staff meeting. As a large part of the grounds are unfenced and there are no security systems or locked doors at the entrance this gesture seemed to be more of a token than indicative of concrete action. Within two or three weeks, the behaviour of the children and the teachers returned to normal. The perception seemed to be that it was unlikely the same kind of trauma would occur in a small Hokkaido town on the periphery of Japanese society.

⁸³ As a response to perceptions of rising risk in educational environments, schools are adopting more stringent safety measures designed to assuage the fears of anxious parents and children. For example, Ikeda Elementary School in Osaka (which was the site of a massacre of eight children in 2001) became the first primary school in Japan to be designated an international safe school in 2010. To be awarded this status the school employed a number of measures such as posting security guards at the entrance, instigating patrols by parents around the school grounds and conducting safety class in which students are taught to defend themselves (“Ikeda Elementary School designated international safe school” 2010).

Framing the child's body

How do these contrasting views of children's bodies, both clothed and unclothed, seen as in need of protection yet often given great freedom, objectified at once as sexualised and non-sexualised fit into the early childhood setting? And what do they reflect about the cultural processes within and around them? The major difference seems to lie in the way the body is perceived and re-produced by others. Viewed through a Japanese lens a child's naked body can be seen as a gateway to a nostalgic, remembered or re-created past. In this case, sexuality is not explicitly linked to the child's body which instead represents a form of purity, innocence and beauty (Chen 1996). For teachers working within the Japanese early childhood setting, looking at the physical form neither implicates nor condemns. However, there is a cultural shift taking place within these arenas. While *furusato* ideology may support the nostalgic notion that a child can run free and unclothed without fear of prying eyes or danger this attitude is being challenged in the light of rising awareness of child abuse issues (Goodman 2002b), international media attention and changing notions of privacy. There is a growing realisation of the need to protect children from external threats, most often identified by my participants as the internet and strangers entering the early childhood centre.

In a New Zealand context, the child's naked body has become a site for danger and surveillance for those who come into contact with it.⁸⁴ Sexuality, through its overt repression, becomes a more salient part of embodied interactions. The teachers recreate these powerful dominant cultural discourses through their actions and language (Foucault 1980). While the New Zealand teachers expressed their fears of being "on your lonesome" and the need for "someone to back you up" the Japanese teachers were not operating in a comparable environment of constant observation and anxiety. Many New Zealand teachers could also remember a time when they practised in a similar political and social climate, but that style of education was longer an option for most. In a moment of reflection, several of the New Zealand group surmised that the real key to the relaxed Japanese attitudes to nudity and comfort with the body lies in Asian bathing and toileting practices which they contrasted with prudish Anglo-Saxon upbringings. As

⁸⁴ This issue is not restricted to a New Zealand context, nor is it just the children's teachers who are under surveillance. For example, in the United States, Furedi (2002:74-75) describes a society that suspects almost every home hides a potential abuser. In these communities children are taught to mistrust adults, parents wonder anxiously about a hug their child received from a teacher, and neighbours watch for signs of abuse. Furedi argues that the changing view of the naked child, from symbol of innocence to provocation of immorality, is linked to society's negative perception of itself and its members.

one would expect, toileting takes place at the Japanese early childhood setting but bathing practices have also been incorporated. Likewise, in New Zealand, toileting and washing are a necessary part of daily procedures. Both the Japanese curriculum (Ministry of Education Science Sports and Culture 2001) and Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education 1996:49) make explicit reference to this use of the body as a tool for learning, but as this next section will explore, they are carried out in quite different ways in the two contexts.

Notions of privacy

Clark (1994:8) has pointed out that the seemingly mundane activity of bathing is not only a cultural act, it may be deconstructed as a means of understanding deeper values and beliefs. Bathing is “embedded functionally, symbolically, and behaviourally” in the Japanese cultural system through its practices and ideas which reflect wider social patterns. The same could be said of a study of such practices in New Zealand. Washing, bathing and toileting routines in early childhood settings mirror the systems of the dominant cultural group which dictate the ‘correct’ manner in which to deal with such necessary bodily functions (Elias 2000, Foucault 1973a).

In contemporary Japanese society technological and economic developments mean that most households now have a bathroom of their own but the culture of public bathing remains strong. Many of Japan’s public bathing facilities were destroyed during World War II (Clark 1994:59). This resulted in difficulties in bathing which lead to the domestic bath becoming a symbol of both recovery and social status in the post-war period. While less than 66 percent of Japanese houses had baths in 1968, only fifteen years later this number had risen to just over 88 percent (Clark 1994:61). The decline in the number of public bathhouses has been similarly dramatic.

Participants interviewed by Clark (1994:80) spoke sadly of this decline as the public bath house represents a space for young children’s introduction to sex education. To be naked with one’s peers allows an opportunity to learn the differences between the sexes, the functions of the genitals and not to be ashamed of the body. Media reports link more Japanese families bathing at home to children who are embarrassed to bathe naked with their classmates during school trips. While it would be considered inappropriate in a New Zealand context to even consider that 12 or 13 year-old children would bathe naked together, in Japan children who insist on wearing swimsuits are treated with derision by teachers and other students.

These differing attitudes are also prevalent in the early childhood arena where showering, toileting and often the changing of clothes associated with these activities takes place. Showering or bathing is not common in the New Zealand centre but may be necessary after a child has soiled themselves through illness or a toileting accident. This is usually an individual affair for the child who will be assisted or supervised by at least two staff members as per state policy. In Japan, there are more opportunities for children at a centre to share a communal bathing experience, either through water play, at the pool, at a summer camp or during a kindergarten sleepover night. In the case of visiting hot springs, staff may also enter the water as well as get changed alongside the children. While I was teaching at a kindergarten in a small town in Hokkaido, it was common to encounter children and their parents while bathing naked at the local hot springs. This issue arose while viewing the Japanese video with the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers, bringing into sharp relief the contrasting views on professionalism, the body and bathing practices.

It happened to me once [getting changed in the same room] and I waited until that child had finished.

I would have to go into a side room or something because I wouldn't be changing in front of children or parents.

I'd be turning around and going away!

For these New Zealand teachers, keeping the body covered was linked to multiple issues: a need to maintain professionalism, feelings of embarrassment and a desire to protect the children even as they acknowledged this did not seem to be working in reality. But yet for this group, allowing the body of both child and teacher to be viewed during washing represented a conflict with their aims of safety and protection. Paradoxically, in the very same interests of safety, children's bodies have become more exposed. Following policy changes to increase visibility in New Zealand early childhood settings, many toilet spaces have become more open by removing doors or installing mirrors. At Kaimai Kindergarten, each toilet was divided by a partition but open at the front which meant anyone washing their hands at the sink or passing by the area could see children urinating or defecating. This was in contrast to the Japanese field site where the toilets all had doors which were brightly decorated with anthropomorphised animals such as elephants or hippos. Ironically this means that New

Zealand children are in many ways far more exposed than Japanese children while carrying out toileting rituals.

Duncan (1998) has reported that this kind of structural change to New Zealand kindergarten and childcare centres has resulted in “constant surveillance”. It seems ironic that teachers at Kaimai Kindergarten mentioned privacy (in the earlier section on the unclothed child) as one reason why nakedness was inappropriate considering the lack of toilet doors which means children are now in full view of other children and adults passing by the bathroom area. As Duncan (1998:12) has asked, “What messages do children get about their own bodies, and how they feel about being watched by adults, or other children when they are being changed? Are they learning that adults cannot be trusted? That it is okay for adults to watch you dress and undress? To toilet? To shower?” Under the rubric of child protection and safety, New Zealand children have become the subject of “permanent visibility” concealed within the apparatus of supervision and building structures (Foucault 1995:201).

In the United Kingdom, Piper and Stronach (2008:71) have also touched on the irony of new policies designed to protect children from potential abuse. As in New Zealand, privacy has been sacrificed for safety leading to children being dressed, toileted and changed in public areas or within sight of more than one adult. Piper and Stronach perceive this scenario as part of an ever expanding set of circles of observing researchers, teachers, managers, parents and the media, each contributing a level of surveillance. They note that while these “circles of concern” are intertwined, practice in early childhood is dominated by the need to protect the adults from accusation rather than the children from abuse.

A good example of these circles of concern became apparent to me when I took part in a Kaimai Kindergarten trip to a local garden centre. At the time my son was attending the kindergarten and I was assisting on the trip as a parent helper in charge of my child and another little boy. All the parent helpers were instructed by the teachers that if any of the children needed to go to the toilet we were to come and find a staff member to accompany the child. In reality, when the little boy suddenly felt an urgent need to urinate, we couldn't see a teacher in the vicinity. The three of us were, however, right next to the toilet which the child begged to be allowed to enter. Realising that he was about to wet his pants, I pushed him into the toilet and called through the door asking if he was alright, all the time feeling like a potential criminal in the midst of watchful shoppers. Afterwards, I dutifully reported the incident to the teacher in charge

while later reflecting on the foreignness of the panic I had experienced.⁸⁵ Changing notions of privacy can be seen as an attempt to regulate behaviour within a disciplinary society (Foucault 1981:46, 1996:190). Elias (2000:139) suggests that an inhibited attitude towards the body emerged as Europe became civilized around the sixteenth century. At the same time, natural bodily functions came to be seen as shameful and dirty (Elias 2000:114). These ideas persist today, as the following section explores.

The body as a site of excretion

Douglas (1966:121) claims that the extent to which bodily fluids and excretions are regarded as polluting varies from culture to culture. This section argues that while bodily processes and functions may be seen as metaphors of disorder (Douglas 1966, Turner 2003) in the New Zealand early childhood context, the Japanese construct these secretions as functional, organic matter. New Zealand concepts of bodily processes and secretions are embedded in European constructs of the civilised body (Elias 2000). Holliday and Hassard (2001:9) argue that the disciplined and regimented docile body, as expressed by Foucault, is accorded high status in Western culture. In contrast, Bakhtin's (1984) grotesque body is linked to loss of control, and therefore reviled and denigrated. In a reflection of the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy said to be characteristic of Western philosophy (Lock 1993:135), the mind is privileged. While the disciplined body is connected with the mind in order to overcome bodily excesses, the grotesque body is associated with a weak mind whose inferior status has (historically) justified its exploitation.

In contrast to the Cartesian mind/body dualism, Japanese concepts of the body have been described as holistic. Picone (1989:469) suggests that "all aspects or parts of a person's body are thought to be interrelated, and the body in turn is itself only one element in a universe of interrelated entities". Within this framework, bodily processes and fluids are not positioned as metaphors of disorder (Douglas 1966, Turner 2003) as they may be in the West, but reconstructed as legitimate, organic functions and products.

While greater surveillance has become a feature of ablution routines in New Zealand, quite the opposite has occurred in Japan with toileting having become a private matter in contrast to the past when open, communal toilet spaces were a feature of early

⁸⁵ My reaction very much replicates the feelings of guilt and panic experienced by Tobin when a mother arrived to pick up her daughter from childcare. At the time, the child was sitting in Tobin's lap but he quickly pushed the child off and explained himself to the mother, only later reflecting on why he had reacted in such a way or how it may have affected the young girl (Tobin 1997b:120).

childhood settings. Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:51) recount the story of a Japanese preschool director who insisted on having his photo taken while squatting over a Chinese communal toilet trough which he viewed nostalgically as a “disappearing cultural artefact”. In both the Japanese and Chinese contexts, Tobin et al. view newly partitioned public toilets as a symbol of modernity expressed through modified concepts of privacy, space, modesty and the body.



Figure 12: Partitioned toilets with lockable doors are a feature of this modern Hokkaido kindergarten

Despite these rising levels of privacy however, there remains in Japanese early childhood settings a level of comfort with the body not replicated in the New Zealand centres. Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:117) have noted how relaxed Japanese children and adults are about discussing bodily functions. Tobin et al. (2009:114) describe at length a “pee lesson” given by a five year old boy to a two year old child learning how to use the urinal. Acting without the presence of adults, the children are comfortable with discussing the functions and apparatus of their bodies which makes the lesson a relaxed, enjoyable experience.⁸⁶ By the same token, cartoons and television programmes that deal with these themes are a regular feature of daytime television. When living in Japan, one of my children’s favourite television programmes featured an animated character called *Unchi kun* (Mr Poo) who would carry out all manner of

⁸⁶ As Tobin et al. (2009:115) point out this vignette takes on a different cast in an American setting when viewed through lens of sexual abuse fears.

adventures sliding around in the toilet bowl. When the children's grandfather visited from New Zealand he was both surprised and mildly disgusted by the content of this series. Although my children were very young at time, they sensed there was some kind of cultural misfit occurring and delighted in turning up the volume every time *Unchi kun* appeared for the benefit of Granddad.

More recently, during the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami which devastated northern Japan, the *unchi* metaphor was used to explain the unfolding Fukushima nuclear crisis to children ("Nuclear Boy" 2011). In the animated clip, which was posted on You Tube and widely viewed both throughout Japan and the rest of the world, the nuclear power plant is depicted as "Nuclear Boy". In the clip, Nuclear Boy is suffering from a sore stomach and declares he can't hold his poo in any longer. At this point, he releases a powerful fart (*onara*) which is deemed to be particularly smelly. The fart represents the potentially lethal gases coming from the plant which the clip assures viewers may be smelly to those nearby but are hardly discernible to those further away. The narrator declares that it would be disastrous if Nuclear Boy could not contain his poo as the smell is truly awful, therefore "doctors" are sent to administer "medicine" in the form of seawater and boron which will cool him down. Other previous nuclear accidents are also personified, with "Chernobyl Boy" described as having contracted diarrhea and making a huge mess everywhere.

The body as teacher in Japanese early childhood education

The discussion of body parts and of bodily wastes is as implicitly accepted as normal in Japanese early childhood circles as it is considered unfit for conversation in New Zealand circles. In discussing this topic in New Zealand it was pointed out to me many times that it was not something that should be talked about at the same time as eating, or it was embarrassing, or it was just not worthy of discussion. The casting off of waste products is seen by Douglas (1996:76) as the most unwanted, irrelevant of social events. Acts such as defecation, urination and vomiting, and their products, "carry a pejorative sign for formal discourse" and therefore need to be screened out of regular social intercourse.

However, Japanese concepts of the body locate it within a complex feedback system, where the relationships of the body parts, orifices and organs are linked to one another, and to other phenomena both inside and outside of the body (Lock 1980:31, Picone 1989:469). This notion is nicely illustrated by a display on the wall of a

childcare centre in Hokkaido (Figure 12). The display shows how the acts of eating, sleeping, and playing are linked directly to defecation. Prepared by one of the teachers, the title (*ii unchi o suru tame ni*) could be translated formally as “in order to pass a good bowel motion” or less formally as “how to have a good poo”. Accompanied by diagrams to make it easier for younger children to understand, each segment of the poster stresses a particular action which will contribute to the desired result. The first segment advises children to “go to bed early” while the next box notes one should “eat everything on the plate and not be fussy” (*suki-kirai*). The following segment links vigorous outdoor play with the functions of the digestive system, asking children to “play energetically” followed by “eat a good breakfast”. The final segment admonishes children to “chew your food thoroughly”. The links between consumption of food, movement of the body, periods of physical exertion and rest, and the correct means of consuming food are made eminently clear even at this simple level of expression.



Figure 13: Display in a Japanese childcare centre explaining how various actions are related to producing a good bowel motion

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984: 52) uses the notion of ‘good’ bowel movements to illustrate how Japanese mothers employ more indirect modes of communication than parents in the West. She points out that “a mother uses a statement about her infant’s bowel movement as a way of expressing her feelings toward him or her”. It is also common to see Japanese mothers using a clean towel to wipe sweat off their young

children's back or forehead as it is believed that perspiration left on the body will lead to a cold. Ohnuki-Tierney explains that it is expected that children will report both the condition of their body and bodily functions to their mothers as they traverse from childhood to adulthood.

As Tobin et al. have pointed out, joy, openness and pride in the body is not seen as limited to the individual but something to be shared with the group. "The comfort with touch and with the body characteristic of Japanese preschool is the kind of pleasure in the body ... to be found not in the body of the individual, but in the collective body of the people, in bodies in contact in large gatherings, and in the gleeful acknowledgement of the fact that everyone has a body and these bodies have orifices" (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009:117). At the kindergarten where the Japanese video was filmed, this shared implicit cultural knowledge of bodily process and practices was brought home to me one day at the regular morning assembly. On stage with the other teachers during a lecture on healthy habits as the winter loomed, the principal suddenly turned to me with the microphone in his hand. He had been extolling the virtues of eating nutritious food, but his question to me came as a surprise: "Rachael *sensei*, what shape was your bowel motion (*unchi*) this morning?"

With over one hundred and sixty small pairs of eyes trained on me, I was completely stumped. I had no idea what I was supposed to reply but I gathered by the way the other teachers were looking expectantly at me that there was indeed a correct response. Unfortunately I was culturally ignorant of just what that response should be. After a long, pregnant pause, one of the more sensitive teachers piped up and said, "What was that? Did I hear you say, a banana shaped poo?" Everyone looked very relieved and the principal proceeded to launch into a detailed explanation about the merits of banana shaped bowel motions which indicated a healthy, varied diet. He went on to contrast the banana with other shapes which revealed nutritional or lifestyle deficiencies. Bowel motions which resembled a bunch of grapes indicated constipation due to a lack of vegetables and fruit. A round shape like a peach indicated the reverse (diarrhea) and so on. Back in the staffroom, the other teachers were very amused that I was more ignorant than kindergarteners about the metaphorical links between fruit and bowel motions.

In international circles, this relaxed attitude towards scatological issues has been viewed as inappropriate and been the subject of ridicule on websites. Toys such as poo hats, "pee and poo" soft toys, children's interactive board games focussed on toilet

training, and golden poo chains have been labelled “downright weird” and “baffling” by viewers from outside Japan (Bucholz 2007). The issue of excrement (*unchi*) crops up regularly not only within Japanese society but in icons of popular culture such as animated comic books (*manga*) which have become globally popular. This has presented difficulties for translators in cultures who are unused to being so open about the issue and struggle to find the correct nuance in translation (Lee and Shaw 2006).

Body image

While less specifically focussed on the matter of bodily functions, a direct approach to the body can be often seen in the Japanese early childhood environment. An anecdotal example of this was evident during a skit put on by the Hokkaido kindergarten teachers. The main character chosen for the play was the teacher of the four year old class I was observing. Her role involved gobbling down copious numbers of cakes as part of the plot. The children found the play hilarious and once back in the classroom a number of them remarked that their teacher must have been chosen for the part because she was so fat (*futtote iru*).

I wondered if she would be a little embarrassed or even annoyed by the children’s comments as she was indeed a large woman by Japanese standards. Instead, she cheerfully agreed that the children were correct and added that the cakes were a great perk of the job. Later that day in the staffroom the other teachers began teasing her, stating that she was the only choice for the part because of her enormous size. Again, the teacher in question took all of these comments in her stride, laughing that she was fat but blaming it on her new husband who had encouraged her to cook every night. During the viewing of video, the Japanese teachers freely commented not only on the physical appearance of themselves and the children at their centre but also asked questions about the bodies of their New Zealand counterparts. In their eyes, there was nothing taboo or potentially offensive about these direct observations of the state of the body.

Foucault (1981) argues that the external state of the body can be seen as symbolic of internal moral character in Western cultural contexts. Viewed through this lens, the physical appearance of the body becomes the focus of “normalisation” within the diffuse mechanisms of bio-power. It is therefore not only important to control and monitor the kinds of foods and substances which enter the body, but also to take responsibility for any environmental conditions the body may be exposed to (Thompson

and Hirschman 1995). From a New Zealand perspective, drawing attention to the overweight, symbolically immoral body of the Japanese teacher represents a rupture with civilised behaviour (Elias 2000). Although it may be acceptable for children, who are not yet fully versed in these niceties, to make this mistake, adults are expected to have internalised this concept.

While it may be considered inappropriate to comment on the bodies of others around you in a New Zealand context, in Japan it is less problematic. Clark (1994:108-109) has described the discussions that take place in public bath houses where the official line was “seeing but not looking” at naked bodies. In reality, many people made comments ranging from the positive, such as *sutairu ga ii* (nice figure) through to the less flattering, like *daikonashi* (fat legs). As Clark notes, it is not necessarily improper to either voyeuristically gaze at the body or to make remarks about it. A humorous comment would be met with laughter, a compliment with grace and less flattering observations were usually moderated.

Literature regarding the body in New Zealand educational contexts takes a different approach. Articles in both scholarly journals (Drummond 2001, Palmer 2007) and the popular press (Goodchild 2010, Grant 1997) are careful to advise educators and parents on how to avoid a child forming a negative body image through careful use of language, diet and exercise. Teachers in early childhood settings are not only seen as contributing to children’s social construction of the body, they are expected to model appropriate behaviour in regards to this issue. A scene eventually cut from the final Japanese video was the topic of discussion between the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers as it was seen as a clear violation of this expectation. In the scene, the Oka Kindergarten principal gave his regular morning talk at assembly with an unlit cigarette stuck in each ear. The principal, who was indeed a smoker like a large proportion of the male population in Japan, pretended he simply didn’t notice the cigarettes which the children all found uproariously funny.⁸⁷ Throughout his solemn speech on avoiding the flu by washing hands, gargling and donning masks, the irony was palpable. The Japanese teachers saw neither any harm in using the cigarettes as props nor a conflict of interest over the lesson of bodily wellness. The New Zealand teachers, however, were horrified:

⁸⁷ In Hokkaido the habit of smoking is especially common. The prefecture is home to the highest number of female smokers in the country and has the second highest rate for male smokers (Statistics Japan 2010b).

In New Zealand, there are so many reasons why that is just wrong.

It's promoting smoking, cigarettes are dirty.

How can you have any respect with cigarettes in your ears? I mean, honestly. If you're meant to be a professional.

At this age group, we model our behaviour on what we want the children to see. I don't want the kids to be racing around with cigarettes, or anything, in their ears.

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, states that the health and well-being of children at early childhood settings must be protected and nurtured. The ways in which this can be achieved are outlined under the strand of "well-being" (Ministry of Education 1996: 46-53). While the simulation of smoking, or the use of cigarettes as props are not directly mentioned in the curriculum as unsuitable for the early childhood arena, it is implicitly understood by the New Zealand teaching community that the topic is inappropriate except as a health warning.⁸⁸ Interestingly, the Oka teachers were equally appalled by scenes of the Kaimai teachers unfairly eating cookies while the children consumed fruit at morning tea time. The differing reactions to these scenes highlight the contrasting cultural categories that the acts of smoking and eating have been assigned in terms of the adult and child body. For the Japanese teachers, the idea of consuming sweet food (*amaimono*) in front of the children is inappropriate not because of the impact on the child's body but due to the very reasons articulated by the New Zealand teachers over tobacco. Consumption of food is treated very seriously in the Japanese kindergarten and teachers are expected to be a good role model for this important daily ritual (Hendry 1986). Smoking, on the other hand, is considered an adult pursuit and while the female kindergarten teachers did not smoke on the premises, the male principal and visitors smoked freely in the office.⁸⁹ In each case, food and other substances which enter the body are culturally defined as either acceptable or unacceptable according to cultural categories (Douglas 1972) and notions of the "normal" body (Foucault 1981).

⁸⁸ This may eventually become the case in Japan too, where anti-smoking policies are being introduced in some workplaces and restaurants ("Workplace smoking ban likely next year," 2010) just as they have been in New Zealand.

⁸⁹ It was traditionally considered unfeminine for women to smoke and that social stigma exists to an extent today. As a result, many women who indulge in the habit restrict it to the privacy of their own homes or during social occasions.

Reflecting on children's bodies as culturally contested

This chapter has discussed the culturally contested space that children's bodies occupy in the early childhood arena. In Western contexts, the child's body has become a site for anxiety and fear in the face of rising debate over appropriate policy and practice. This construction is reflected in the New Zealand early childhood setting, where children's bodies are increasingly subject to surveillance and regulation (Foucault 1995). As Tobin (1997:143) writes: "the pervert lurking in the cracks and on the fringes of the world of early childhood education is a spectre that haunts our thinking and practice, distorting the way we see ourselves and each other and the decisions we make about practice". In terms of this project, Tobin's statement has an eerie truth about it when one considers that Japanese teachers literally asked if New Zealand was "full of perverts" during discussion over policy relating to children's bodies. A group of naked children outside on a hot summer's day after water play looked to be an innocent, even beautiful, scene to the majority of Japanese viewers. During many of the focus groups these images on the screen created links to a nostalgic, remembered or (re)imagined past (Robertson 1988). However, concepts of privacy combined with changing notions of child safety have become a reality especially in urban centres. Japanese teachers are increasingly aware of both the possibility of external threats to children's bodies and the need to balance traditional pedagogies with the anxieties of modern mothers.

For the New Zealand viewers, the "pervert lurking in the cracks" is an omnipresent phantom which prevents the kind of sensory and physical interactions between teacher and child that were common in early childhood settings twenty or thirty years earlier. Under the rubric of greater visibility and safety, the bodies of children have become more exposed through measures such as removing doors and installing mirrors. Working within a political environment of constant surveillance teachers in New Zealand early childhood settings expressed their desire to enjoy the same kinds of scenes that they saw at the Japanese centre, but they were mindful of the need to be careful in the midst of a watchful community.

This chapter demonstrates Douglas's (1996:121) assertion that the extent to which bodily fluids and excretions are regarded as polluting varies from culture to culture. In the New Zealand early childhood setting European notions of bodily functions can be seen. Elias (2000:109) contends that the European body emerged as a new canon in the sixteenth century, leading to new standards of refinement and conversely, of disgust. The body became the focus of civilising processes through the

polite management of bodily processes. In contrast, the Japanese early childhood setting frames the body and its products as useful metaphors for educating children. In the same way, social constructions of the body are not assigned the same meanings in each of the two contexts. This is illustrated by the contrasting cultural categories (Douglas 1972) that the embodied acts of smoking and eating certain foods represent in the early childhood setting.

While the teachers at the New Zealand centre may be working in a space of “constant surveillance” and the children the focus of “permanent visibility” (Foucault 1995:201), bodily contact between these two groups has not been completely subjugated. During the focus group sessions, Kaimai Kindergarten was praised by other teachers around the country as displaying an admirable level of personal interaction. For example, Napier kindergarten teachers noted the “shared affection between the teachers and the children which was really nice to see. The kids were climbing over the teachers and sitting [in their laps] and the teachers seemed quite welcome and open to that”. For the Japanese viewers, however, these interactions seemed rather limited and somewhat distant compared to their own approach. They politely suggested that New Zealand teachers appeared to be less engaged with both children’s play and their physical bodies. To illustrate their point, teachers in Osaka showed me photographs of themselves huddled together with children, all of them covered in body paint. In Kutchan, the principal described the experience of nodding off to sleep surrounded by seventy of his pupils in the kindergarten hall. Mauss (1973:80) states that “the notion that going to sleep is something natural is totally inaccurate”. He describes societies where people sleep on the floor, and those that have “instrumental assistance”, those who use pillows, those that don’t, those who sleep together and those that sleep alone, even those who sleep standing up or on horseback. He makes the same argument for “techniques of activity” (Mauss 1973:81) such as walking, playing, jumping and digging. Drawing on the ideas of Mauss, the next chapter examines how children and teachers in both settings embody the curriculum in ways that are specific to their centres and their cultural contexts.

Chapter 6: Embodying the curriculum

The body is, at one and the same time, a malleable material good capable of being fashioned in a certain manner, an entity which represents social relations and notions, and an embodiment of affective attitudes and stances towards the world.

(Ben-Ari 1997:1)

While the previous chapter focussed on how children's bodies are culturally constructed in the early childhood settings of New Zealand and Japan, this chapter looks at the ways in which the body both engages in and reflects the curricula of each nation. Curriculum theory literature defines curriculum as 'everything that happens' (McLachlan, Fler and Edwards 2010, Pinar 2012). New Zealand's early childhood document, Te Whāriki, reflects this philosophy, defining curriculum as "the sum total" of everything children experience (Ministry of Education 1996:10). Curricula are, of course, political documents which reveal agendas of the state yet they are also cultural documents situated within a community (Mutch 2003). During the course of the video screenings and analysis it became clear that despite a written instrument to guide them, teachers invariably implemented their own methods to direct and structure children's bodies during play, learning and periods of orderliness. Using the concepts of sensory play, order and physicality as framing devices, this chapter looks at the ways in which the implicit practice of teachers (and sometimes parents) is reflected through pedagogy and policy. Children are also active participants in this process, sometimes resigning their bodies to the kindergarten structure and at other times, subverting the dominant paradigm to suit their own interests and needs.

The first section of this chapter looks at contrasting views of how the body should engage in sensory play. In Japan, children and teachers are expected to wholeheartedly participate in vigorous, exuberant play. This corresponds with New Zealand ideas that children should freely explore their physical environment. However, teachers in New Zealand appear less likely to engage to the same levels of physicality. The question here is whose bodies are taking part in play, and how? Is it only the children's? Or do the teachers' bodies also reflect the goals of the curriculum? This section also discusses the different meanings messy play has been assigned in each context in accordance with Douglas' (1966) theories about dirt and social order. While it is culturally acceptable for New Zealand children to become dirty or wet during play,

Japanese early childhood teachers employ various strategies to control the types and timing of children's messy play. Teachers in both countries expressed the belief that contemporary children should use their bodies as a counterpoint to modern lifestyles which they equated with reduced mobility and fewer interactions within the natural world.

The following section explores views on how children's bodies should (or should not) be ordered within the early childhood setting. Scholars suggest that the Japanese early childhood centre provides children with the first opportunity to internalise emotions through the practice of attending to the bodies of others (Ben-Ari 1997, Hendry 1986, Kotloff 1993, Lewis 1995). Eventually, these practices become natural which results in a shared set of bodily dispositions vital to 'life in the group'. Touch, in a Japanese early childhood centre, is not only seen as desirable it is necessary for a child's development. Belief in the cultural ideology of *skinship* can be seen in organised communal sleeping arrangements and in the way kindergarten staff encourage intimate contact through policy. In contrast, New Zealand children's bodies are neither required to be regulated in the same way nor the object of regular intimate contact. The issue of touch remains problematic in a New Zealand context and teachers instead place emphasis on verbal communication to maintain order.

The final section discusses levels of physicality within the two early childhood contexts. Walsh (2004) suggests that Japanese notions of the child as physical self not only embrace risk to the body, they support pushing the boundaries in terms of perseverance and hardship. These ideas are institutionalised in the form of events such as the sports day or in tangible merit systems which reward perfect attendance records despite ill health. In New Zealand, discourses of safety and protection play a major role in influencing how children's physical play is supported. This chapter draws on the ideas of Mauss (1973) who points out that while seemingly insignificant acts such as walking, digging or jumping may be appear "natural", children's embodied play is always culturally constructed.

Engaging the body in sensory play

In discussions with teachers in both New Zealand and Japan, the importance of children using their bodies within the context of play was stressed many times. This view is supported by the literature (Mori et al. 2009, White et al. 2009) and the curricula of the two countries therefore it is not surprising that the issue frequently arises. The

ways in which the bodies of children and teachers are incorporated into play situations and routines vary, however, according to the cultural context and within centres. When the New Zealand video was first screened to the Japanese teachers, one of the questions they asked was “Do the teachers also take part in games where they run around in a ‘*genki*’ manner like the children? It looks like they are sitting quietly most of the time.” To conduct oneself in a *genki* way means to behave energetically or enthusiastically and there is great emphasis on this in the Japanese early childhood setting (LeVine and White 2003). The extent to which children are encouraged to display *genki* has been commented on by visiting scholars who have been shocked by the resulting behaviour and the tolerance levels of teachers present (Lewis 1995, Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989, White 1987). Early childhood teachers are also expected to be able to keep up with children’s high energy levels and to participate whole-heartedly in games and activities.

For the Japanese teachers, watching scenes from Kaimai Kindergarten, it appeared that their New Zealand counterparts were less than enthusiastic about embracing play with their whole selves. They suggested that this might be linked to the age of the teachers in New Zealand who appeared to be considerably more varied in terms of experience than their Japanese counterparts.

How old are those teachers? It looks like experience is respected in New Zealand, whereas here the administration wants *genki* young teachers rather than older ones.

If the teachers are too old they don’t have the energy to run around with the children.

Yes, that’s why kindergartens prefer younger teachers.

What about in the sandpit? Do the teachers get in there and make things for the children as well, or do the kids have to make it themselves?

In New Zealand, teachers were quick to point out that what may appear as reluctance to engage is often a deliberate strategy to allow children to develop their own working theories. For example, in the case of the New Zealand sandpit scene teachers sat on the side offering suggestions and resolving conflicts as children built waterways and mounds. But they did not often climb into the sandpit or squat in the muddy puddles with the children. This part of play was left to the children. Teachers explained that sociocultural theory, on which the national early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki is based, views children’s development as occurring through activities framed within a larger social and cultural context (Carr 2001, Flerer 1992). Rather than being the recipient of adult’s efforts, children are encouraged to actively explore their

environment and take charge of their learning with assistance from their teachers when required (Smith and May 2006).



Figure 14: A New Zealand teacher observes children's play in the sandpit

The Japanese teachers' assessment of their New Zealand peers echoes the findings of Fujita and Sano (1988) who conducted cross-cultural research in early childhood settings in Japan and the United States. Japanese teachers interviewed in the study felt that their American counterparts appeared lazy as they did not get down and play at children's level. For the Japanese teachers the epitome of internalising a learning experience involves the whole bodies of all members of the group, therefore the teachers will also join in and energy levels are high. An illustration of this kind of thinking can be seen in the criticism which was leveled at staff of the Japanese kindergarten by focus groups in their own country. Following the images of water play at the Hokkaido kindergarten, a teacher in Osaka commented that:

The water play was fun but I think the activity could have been made more dynamic. They were playing quite reservedly with that mud but if it had been me I would have piled mud all over their bodies, on their heads. In our kindergarten, the teachers would also join in. We would put mud all over our bodies too and join in the play with the children. We're always doing that, teachers and children together getting all muddy and wet. When you do that children get really excited, their eyes come alive with it all and they call out, "We want to do that too!" That really gives them something to think about.



Figure 15: Japanese children enjoy body painting at kindergarten

At kindergartens in Yokohama and Osaka teachers gave me photographs of their classes involved in body painting. The images showed children wearing nothing but underpants, their bodies and faces completely smeared with brightly coloured paint. In amongst the groups of children the teachers could also be seen dressed in t-shirts and shorts and similarly streaked in paint. The teachers explained that the children particularly enjoyed this activity during the summer months when all members of the centre could experience the pleasure of body painting together in the warm sunshine. One photograph depicted two children deep in concentration as they painted yellow flowers on their teacher's shoulders. She in turn was squatting to face the exposed belly of a young boy as she covered him in vivid green. This image contrasts sharply with the American early childhood context where scholars have noted that "children's bodies, especially in their proximity to other bodies pose a menace to order. Proximity is taboo in many childhood classrooms" (Phelan 1997:82). In Britain, there are strict guidelines on how to deal with children's "dangerous bodies" (Piper and Stronach 2009:36).

Messy play

While the issue of touch is similarly contentious in New Zealand early childhood settings (Jones 2001), the body has not been completely subjugated in New Zealand contexts in the way that American and British scholars suggest is occurring in their countries (Tobin 2004). Children at Kaimai Kindergarten regularly enjoyed face painting which would either be carried out by teachers or on each other (Figure 16).



Figure 16: A young New Zealand girl paints a Spiderman design on her friend's face

Akin to the joy expressed by Japanese children during bouts of body painting and water play is the pleasure drawn from “messy play” in the New Zealand early childhood setting. Messy play is seen as an integral part of the New Zealand curriculum by many teachers who see it as an opportunity for children to integrate sensory experiences, express their creativity, develop theories about the material world and learn new vocabulary (Bradley 2007). At Kaimai Kindergarten, messy play was represented by a variety of different activities that changed every day. During the filming a very popular activity was the “slime” table where children could enjoy playing with the slippery substance. The slime was a mixture of cornflour, water and soap flakes dyed various colours with the addition of food colouring, but most often a livid green or bilious yellow. Other instances of messy play included a table covered in shaving foam, a large shallow bucket full of watery clay and finger painting sessions. In most cases, however, the emphasis seemed to be on children engaging tactilely with “mess” through their fingers and arms rather than their whole bodies. In a rare article written specifically about messy play for the New Zealand Playcentre Association, the accompanying photographs show children taking part in such play throughout the country (Bradley 2007). All of the eight images depict children touching the substances with just their fingers or hands although one child has something smeared across her face.

During the New Zealand focus groups, teachers frequently identified the opportunity for “messy play” as pedagogically unique and valuable to the country. For example, in response to a question on the purpose of early childhood education, kindergarten teachers in Nelson replied:

To be a child.

Yeah, I think that’s what it is. You only get one opportunity [to be a child]

To have fun, get dirty, play outside.

Sometimes now people live in such perfect homes and there's not the opportunity for them to experience some of things that they get to do during outside play. There can be a lot of structure, especially if the parents are working, and this is a place where they can come and be free.

Just as there is nostalgia in Japan for the days when children could play naked in public spaces (Chapter Five), New Zealanders reminisce about times when children were able to run wild with little fear of adults intruding. However, as discussions of "cotton wool kids" (Jones 2007, Dungey 2008) become more common in the media, New Zealand early childhood centres also see their role as providing a space for play that may not occur elsewhere. This can be clearly seen in the provision of "messy" play activities which parents may be reluctant to provide at home due to the energy required to clean up and raised expectations for tidy homes. Encouraging children to experiment with messy or wet substances was seen as a defining mark of the early childhood experience by the New Zealand focus groups:

I couldn't help but look at it with a Kiwi eye and think, ooh, I wonder what other cultures would think of this. The mess, particularly things like the finger painting, especially there at the end where there is a big mess but also the boy at the beginning who was mixing dye with felts.

In some places children in the sandpit would be an absolute no-no because children have the risk of getting dirty and they have the risk of getting wet. That wouldn't necessarily happen in all contexts, you don't get dirty and you don't get wet.

It's like the messy play too. The finger play was very messy and I could imagine that's not necessarily the way some places would do it.

In some places you wouldn't paint your bodies. They would just be horrified! The clothes were getting dirty, it wasn't just their hands, their clothes were getting quite dirty so I could imagine it would be horrifying to some people.

Many of the Japanese teachers were openly envious of the scene described directly above (Video sequence 2), in which two little girls liberally daub paint over their canvases then proceed to squeeze and squirt the liquid between their fingers and up their arms. By the end of the activity the girls have paint all over their hands, arms, on their faces and smeared across their pale-coloured clothing. While openly admiring of the creative freedom on display, the Japanese teachers were concerned about parents' reactions to the girls' spoiled clothing.



Video sequence 2: Girls at Kaimai Kindergarten enjoy a finger painting session

Douglas (1966:35) argues that dirt is never an isolated event, but can only be found where there is a “systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements”. For example, food may not be dirty in itself, but becomes dirty when it is splattered on clothing. In other words, pollution occurs when objects or ideas confuse or contradict cherished classifications. In the Japanese early childhood setting, paint is not inherently dirty but becomes so when it is splashed across uniforms, shoes or clean table tops. For the Japanese child, interacting with paint means one must first change into an art smock which has usually been sewn by mother for this very purpose (Allison 1996). Only once all the children are appropriately dressed and the paint laid out on the table, does the painting activity begin.

Art sessions are not seen as a time to allow the wild disorder of free play to creep in. Children come to internalise social values by embodying them through their clothing (Turner 2008). At Oka Kindergarten, neat, unblemished clothing reflects a child’s understanding of Japanese constructions of dirt, and displays self-management and independence skills. The well turned out classes at Oka also reflect a collective pride in the aesthetic. The child that fails to put on his art smock during a painting session, or pack a change of clothes for water play, has neglected to internalise these ideals. While Japanese teachers may embrace the notion of using the whole body in play there are clear expectations around the appropriate clothing required for potentially dirty situations.

Wrapping and unwrapping the body

Messy play has been identified as presenting a challenge to children and parents arriving in New Zealand early childhood settings from diverse cultural backgrounds. Terreni (2003) describes the reactions of mothers from Jordan and India who were initially upset to find their children wet and dirty at the end of a day at kindergarten. This was in direct contrast to their own experiences with centres in their home countries, where it was important to ensure the children were well-presented at all times and that clothing was kept clean. At Kaimai Kindergarten, substances such as paint, dye and “slime” on clothing are not currently classified by teachers, parents and children as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966:35), yet there are signs that this may be changing.

In recent years some parents have suggested that aprons be introduced to protect children’s clothing, but this idea was rejected by staff and other parents, who argue that early childhood settings are a sacred space for children. Here, the constructions of dirt

which might apply in the home are waived in the name of childhood freedom and creativity. The enquiring parents were therefore reminded that children should be sent to the centre in worn, valueless clothing. In another example, a mother, who had served on the Parents' Committee at Kaimai Kindergarten, told me that staff were eager to build a mud pit in the grounds so that children could freely engage in a more visceral way with nature. However, parents were not so enthusiastic about the new venture and the idea was quietly shelved. The mother indicated that parents of girls were especially unsupportive of the idea. She felt that parents didn't want their daughters rolling around in the mud and getting their clothes filthy.

Montgomery (2008) has noted how the study of gendered play of boys and girls has been overlooked by anthropologists but works by Davies (1989), Davies and Kasama (2004), and Thorne (1993) maintain the view that children engage in separate forms of play according to gender. This distinction is often supported, consciously or not, by the actions of parents and teachers. Ritchie and Ritchie's (1989:53) research revealed that New Zealand mothers had higher expectations of neatness, tidiness and quietness for their daughters, whereas sons were free to be more boisterous and physical. Also in a New Zealand context, Mitchell (1992) argues that gender divisions are clearly apparent in children's choice of play areas. She observed that in school playgrounds boys tend to utilise the more untamed and "dirty" spaces such as the field whereas girls prefer the cleaner asphalt areas. Mitchell found that girls dressed (or were dressed) inappropriately for school which made it almost impossible for them to run, jump, hop or scramble due to their restrictive clothing or tottering shoes. In many cases, the offending clothing was the school uniform prescribed by adults.

At Oka Kindergarten, many of girls were dressed in restrictive, fussy outfits, reflecting the Japanese obsession with all things cute (Richie 2003, Uchino 2009). Despite this, Oka staff encouraged boys and girls equally to take part in activities involving dirt, water or mess. However, while reactions from the Japanese focus groups showed the importance of using the body in a dynamic, whole-hearted manner in sensory play opportunities, it remained important to take the appropriate steps beforehand. Smocks are required before art sessions, gloves are donned during work in the garden, and the children change into underwear before taking part in water play. At the centres I visited it was clear that children and staff were also expected to "unwrap" the layers surrounding the body before engaging in vigorous play with mud, dirt or



Video sequence 3: Children at Oka Kindergarten wear smocks during an arts and crafts session

water. The body could then be cleaned and “rewrapped” before returning to the internal space of the classroom (Hendry 1993).

In New Zealand, the distinction between clean and dirty bodies was blurred, with teachers happy to allow children to partake in activities that left them soiled. However, the bodies of the teachers generally remained clean throughout the day, as no expectation existed for them to participate at the same level of physicality. Although ‘getting dirty’ is seen as linked to childhood freedom in New Zealand many of the ‘activity tables’ set up both inside and outside privileged children’s use of fingers and hands over other parts of the body. These activity tables also support the development of gross and fine motor skills but it is interesting to note that I never saw any children sliding their faces in the slime, for example.

This is in contrast to scenes from Japanese centres I visited where children would pile mud on top of their heads or strip to their underpants to roll in water-filled sandpits. Sometimes children would engage in this kind of play spontaneously but more usually it occurred after being encouraged by their teachers to do so. During the Japanese video the teacher rolls up her trackpants and tries to engage the children first in squirting each other with water pistols and later in squishing their feet into mud. “Look”, she exclaims, “all the water has made the mud into a kind of hot pool. Come and try it, it feels good”. The little girls watching around her are reluctant at first to squeeze the mud between their toes but eventually squat down beside their teacher and replicate her actions.

The body as a counterpoint to modern lifestyles

Foucault (1973a:189) argues that radical changes in medical discourse occurred towards the end of the 18th century, when “the being of the disease” disappeared. With the development of clinical medicine, bodies were transformed into objects. A concern with body hygiene, longevity, and the rearing of vigorous children emerged (Foucault 1981:125) which positioned dirt as dangerous to health (Elias 2000:530). Today, these same medical discourses suggest that some exposure to dirt is actually beneficial to children. This is known as the hygiene hypothesis (Czeresnia 2005). The focus on messy, embodied play can be seen as both a response to new constructions of dirt, and to provide an adult-sanctioned space for resistance to dominant notions of order and cleanliness (Foucault 1973a).

Just as the Nelson kindergarten teachers commented on New Zealand children's diminished opportunities for messy and outdoor play in the home environment, modern Japanese children also have fewer chances to experience an unsanitised play environment (Hendry 1986). In the post-war decades, the world of the Japanese child has shrunk as nuclear families have replaced three-generational families (Thang 2002), urban apartments have become the most common family home (Sorensen 2002) and Japan's fertility rate has plummeted to 1.25 children per woman (Rosenbluth 2007). The number of working mothers has also risen significantly over these years, which has resulted in more families requiring child-care support (Boling 2007). In urban areas especially, this translates to children spending long hours in early childhood facilities.

The Japanese teachers' efforts to engage children in vigorous, embodied play can be seen as an attempt to mitigate these changes. Tobin et al. (1989:60-61) give a perfect example of this kind of thinking in action through their description of an impromptu play session at a Kyoto childcare centre. That day, the principal led a group of children, their teachers and the visiting American researchers to an unused construction site. As it had rained the night before, the ground was muddy and covered in dirty puddles in amongst the construction debris. The children were instructed to go and play, eventually leading to exuberant mud pie making, splashing in the muddy water, collecting of discarded rubbish and submerging of cans in the murky puddles. By the time the teachers rounded the children up for the return walk to the centre, the group were covered in mud and litter. When questioned later by Tobin on his choice of play area, the principal explained that modern children need to learn how to play without special toys or equipment:

It's because I knew it was muddy that I chose to take them there today. I went by there this morning and saw the mud and decided to bring the older children. You noticed that most of them were afraid of getting dirty? These days many children don't know how to be children. Especially *hoikuen* children like ours, who are in school all day, every day. They grow up not having the opportunity to play in the mud if we don't arrange for them to get it here with us (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:61).

While engaging the body in sensory play experiences is seen as important in both the New Zealand and Japan early childhood contexts, comments about my edited videos revealed variations in the way in which the body is manipulated, which parts of the body is used and whose body takes part. Both New Zealand and Japanese teachers expressed the very real need for children to use their bodies as a counterpoint to

perceived restricted, (sub)urban lifestyles. The degree to which the teachers' bodies participated in these acts of play was more noticeable in the Japanese context and often contrary to stereotypes that the New Zealand teachers had formed prior to seeing the video. A Wellington teacher tried to explain how the young, playful Japanese teachers did not initially strike her as qualified professionals:

I made an assumption after seeing some of the teachers playing with the children during the free play. In the beginning, I assumed they were assistants. I'm not sure if it was because of the aprons or because they seemed quite young or perhaps because I had an assumption about what Japanese teachers would be like and they didn't meet it so perhaps that was a role that I put on them because of my [cultural perspective]. I would have expected it to be a lot more rigid and the teachers to be more "teacher-like" and less like what we consider ECE teachers to be like ... playing along with the children and that sort of thing. Perhaps I assumed that that was a lesser job that they would hand off to assistants. I don't know why.

It is revealing that this teacher considered that enthusiastic play with children might be assigned a lower value in the Japanese setting than more academic pursuits and therefore likely to be undertaken by untrained staff members. Or does this thinking reveal more about New Zealand attitudes to the early childhood teacher's role? In their study of New Zealand early childhood settings, White et al. (2009:46) describe the adult in play more as a "guardian" of the child rather than an active participant. While teachers might facilitate play through the provision of materials and assist in extending play experiences, children's agency is given priority. However, for the New Zealand viewers, the most striking observation was not the use of the body during play but the way in which Japanese children's bodies were ordered within the institutional framework.

Body techniques

Mauss (1973:75) defines techniques as actions that are "effective and traditional". As man's first and most natural instrument, the body is at the locus of culture. The theories of Mauss were influential in the work of Bourdieu (1977) who developed the notions of habitus and the body hexis. Habitus is a set of dispositions and internalised possibilities which enable a person to function in the social world. In regards to the body, the idea of habitus suggests that the internalisation and mastery of physical actions is a corporeal act that does not rely on conscious thought,

corresponding to Mauss's corporeal techniques (Kauppi 2000:43). To understand how certain experiences become embodied as distinctly Japanese, it is useful to turn to Bourdieu's (1977) thoughts on the body hexis.

Bourdieu suggests that language and emotions are socially structured expressions of the body. Through these body techniques emotions can become embodied without being attributed solely to either natural or social influences. Bourdieu defines body hexis as "a set of body techniques or postures that are learned habits or deeply ingrained dispositions that both reflect and reproduce the social relations that surround and constitute them" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:12). Ben-Ari (1997:73) suggests that it is in the early childhood setting that Japanese children first learn to embody thoughts and feelings through the practice of attending to the bodies of others. Over time these practices become natural and the children begin to share a set of bodily dispositions which Ben-Ari sees as vital for "learning to group". To illustrate this concept, Ben-Ari gives the examples of children's mirrored sitting postures, collective use of voice in greetings and songs, the control of the body needed to quickly incorporate another child into a line, and the universally understood body postures adopted when a child wishes to enter the play of others. As Mauss (1973:86) points out, "in group life as a whole, there is a kind of education of movements in close order". These body techniques become a "natural" part of the Japanese early childhood landscape as encapsulated by the comments of a Nara lecturer upon viewing my video of the Hokkaido centre: "Yes, it looks like a Japanese kindergarten. Everyone is giving greetings, they are doing things at the right time, bowing and doing what they are expected".

Yet for the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers, the way in which the body is arranged and ordered within Oka Kindergarten seemed incomprehensible. Their way of making sense of this scene was to revert to their own interpretations of Japanese culture:

Looking at the whole thing, it's regimenting, they look like little robots to me. They are doing what they are told, they are one after another in lines and they just remind me of little robots. It's just yes ma'am, no ma'am, three bags full, you know.

But I guess if you saw the adults getting on the subway, they would be the same wouldn't they?

Well, that's right. That's what we see as part of their culture. That's what we see that they are like.

Douglas (1996:69) argues that the “the physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society”. While New Zealand viewers might see these scenes as symbolic of a controlling regime, both scholars and Japanese teachers argue that these patterns of behaviour reflect maturity and a growing sense of interdependence which is an important goal for Japanese children in the early childhood environment. An explicitly stated aim for children attending kindergarten is to socialise them to life in the group (*shūdan*) environment where the building of strong, cooperative groups is vital. In contrast to many Western cultures which view independence as the norm (Garbarino and Abramowitz 1992, Higgins 2000), Japanese society promotes appropriate dependence as an essential skill for children to develop (Doi 1973). Child-rearing practices, parental involvement and the education system advocate appropriate dependency in order to achieve a compliant and cooperative (*sunao*) child. The kind of ordering of the body described above is indicative of a child becoming *sunao* but it does not mean an abandonment of one’s autonomy, as it might in the West, but instead demonstrates an understanding of cooperating with others as a means of enhancing the self (LeVine and White 2003:180).

In contrast, writing about the New Zealand early childhood context Sansom (2007:14) argues that requiring the body to be kept still or to conform to acceptable group behaviour places it “in a precarious position because it becomes either objectified or null and void”. The kind of ordering of the body described above in the Japanese context was viewed negatively by the majority of New Zealand viewers. However, Sansom (2007:14) suggests that New Zealand early childhood settings equally endeavour to discipline, control and repress children’s bodies. Examples of these kinds of shaping mechanisms include placing babies in prams or walkers, conducting physical education drills with toddlers and instructing children to sit quietly and listen. Play equipment and containers provided in the name of safety often work, in reality, to deny a child’s body sensory experiences and physical contact with other children or adults. Sansom (2007) has called for a more embodied interpretation of the early childhood curriculum, arguing that children learn to participate and understand relationships primarily through their bodies. Instead children are invariably subjected to modes of bodily control which deny sensory pleasure and self-expression. Despite criticism such as Sansom’s, New Zealand teachers overwhelmingly viewed their own practice as the antithesis of the ordered “robots” they saw on the Japanese video. In reality, both

centres employ systems to control children's bodies at a time and place staff see as culturally appropriate (Foucault 1995).

The cultural meanings of touch

While New Zealand viewers may have regarded the body as repressed in the Japanese kindergarten, scholars such as Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa (2009:116) have found that Japanese centres are far more embodied sites than kindergartens in either the United States or China. In Japanese early childhood settings they found staff and children were comfortable with much higher levels of intimacy, touch, dirt and scatological jokes pertaining to the body. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of touch remains problematic in a New Zealand context. Farquhar (2001:88) suggests that in the New Zealand early childhood setting any form of touch can potentially be seen as abusive regardless of a child's needs. Regrettably for many of the teachers interviewed for this study, the subjugation of touch in their centres has become an example of the "progressive individualization" of the body and the self – "the walls constructed between our bodies and those of others" (Leavitt and Power 1997:65).

However, within the cultural discourse of *skinship* (Matsuda 1973), touch in a Japanese early childhood centre is not only seen as desirable but necessary for a child's development. The close body-to-body contact, the transfer of body heat and the intimate nature of caresses exchanged between teacher and child is called *soine* (Ben-Ari 1997:36). This term refers to the Chinese kanji for river which depicts three lines representing two parents lying either side of a child. Within the early childhood context examples of this kind of "embodied knowledge" (Bresler 2004:127) or "embodied experience" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:12) can be seen in the overnight sleepover (*otomarikai*) and naptime (*ohirune*) which are discussed below.

At Oka Kindergarten, an important event for the oldest children (*nen chō san*) is the sleepover night (*otomarikai*) which occurs during their last year. This special event generally takes place on a Friday afternoon, when the younger children have left for the day. Following time for play and games, the teachers and children cooperate together to prepare the evening meal. In contrast to New Zealand policies relating to overnight stays for school students, a ratio of parents are not required to either attend or assist during the event. After washing the dinner dishes, there is free play-time before preparations begin for the communal sleeping arrangements. Towards 9 pm, the teachers instruct the children to begin pulling out their *futons*. Everyone works to spread

the bedding in the centre of the hall before lying down together and chatting in pyjamas. The atmosphere is one of cosy familiarity as the group gradually drift off to sleep, a replica of the scene that occurs at a lakeside hotel in the spring when the kindergarten staff spend the night together during their annual trip away.

While there is no naptime (*ohirune*) at the kindergarten, it is common for all children to have a sleep after lunch at childcare centres. Even the youngest children learn how to work with their peers to lay out their futons and spread their towels over the sleeping space in the classroom. After the futons have been pushed together, and the children have changed into their pyjamas and brushed their teeth, a teacher will pull the curtains as the soothing sounds of a classical music CD fill the air. Other teachers move quietly amongst the children, stopping to stroke the hair of those who remain restless. It is common to see teachers lying down between the children's small bodies, gently patting their backs and softly humming a lullaby. Even in large centres where there may be up to seventy children sleeping in the same room, everyone has nodded off within twenty or thirty minutes. Sometimes teachers also take the chance to enjoy a short nap which helps children to feel safe and relaxed as well as providing staff with a much-needed respite.



Figure 17: Children at a Japanese childcare centre settle down for naptime

Ben-Ari (1997:51) argues that the accumulated spells of co-sleeping with one's peer group as a child leads to the adult Japanese embodying "the experience of grouping in an intimate manner". The related experiences of co-bathing, and as an adult, drinking and eating parties, form 'key scenarios' (Ortner 1973) which are found in a variety of contexts within the Japanese culture. While it may seem that co-sleeping replicates the home environment, Ben-Ari (1997:52) suggests instead that this shared physical experience helps children to internalise the distinctions between the family and the outside world. Naptime is one way by which the warmth and familiarity of the family dyad is transferred to the wider peer group. Practices such as naptime function to instil particular traits and qualities connected with 'being Japanese'.

The relevance of *skinship* to regular practices such as naptime and the sleepover, and the part the body plays in these rituals are clear to see. However, other practices involving the bodies of children in the Japanese early childhood setting are less explicit. During a focus group session in Osaka, a mother explained why the principal at her children's kindergarten had chosen to cancel the centre's bus service:

At my children's kindergarten, which is a public kindergarten, *skinship* between parents and children is considered very important and for this reason there is no kindergarten bus service. The staff ask that parents walk with their children to kindergarten each morning even if they live far away. Walking in the sun the children can use their legs, their whole bodies while talking with their mothers. They also gain awareness of dangers on the road and traffic safety procedures. The kindergarten staff believe that walking back and forth from home to kindergarten each day provides an opportunity for children to engage in deep conversation with their mothers and for both of them to slow down in their daily life. When my child first entered this kindergarten the principal explained to me how important this is but I wondered how I could manage it as I was very busy with my children and I was always rushing. But I have come to realise how valuable it is to slow down and take this time with my children, to hold their hand and walk with them each day and experience that *skinship*. It is so important to make that time. Otherwise children will think that mothers are too busy for them, and they will feel lonely instead of enjoying the warmth of *skinship*. That's my experience as a mother of a child at kindergarten. I'm not a teacher myself but that change has been quite profound.

By taking the approach that he did, the principal at this kindergarten had addressed a number of social and political ideologies by using the child's body as a catalyst. As discussed in Chapter Four, Japanese mothers are under enormous pressure to meet the expectations placed on them by the education system (Allison 1996, Imamura 1987). Although this mother stated that she was busy, she eventually embraced the ideology of

the good wife/wise mother (*ryōsai kenbō*) construct (Fujita 1989, Uno 1993) through the physical experience of walking each day with her child. Other ideologies raised in this monologue are the notions of perseverance (*gambaru*) as children are required to walk long distances if they live far from the kindergarten; the idea of returning to a less hurried life which has shades of the nostalgia (*furusato*) ideology discussed in the previous chapter (Robertson 1988) and the references to nature as vital to a child's health and well-being. The benefits of children walking to gain an awareness of traffic safety has also been well documented in New Zealand, but in that case the popularity of "walking school buses" has been equally driven by a desire to reduce road congestion (Kingham and Ussher 2007) and childhood obesity. In contrast, the Japanese case described above is based on a desire to promote close bodily contact between parent and child which is clearly articulated by the mother as *skinship*.

The body as a medium of communication

While the body can be seen as a tool for developing deeper emotional relationships as described above, it is also used frequently in the Japanese context as a means of communication. The high levels of bodily contact apparent in Japanese child-rearing methods have been described by scholars who contrast this with a preference for verbal communication in Western countries (Hendry 1986:98). In the Japanese early childhood setting too, the body can display a number of emotions and directives through subtle movements that are quickly understood by those around. In one of the Japanese scenes, the camera follows the children as they come running from all across the kindergarten to line up outside for morning assembly. Slowly, long lines form in front of the teacher's podium, each one defining not only a class but the height of the children from shortest to tallest.

One of these children, Kiharu, is reluctant to take his place in line but he is gently buffeted into position by the others around him. While his classmates all wear the coloured caps which identify them as members of the same group, Kiharu refuses to put his hat on. As the assembly begins, he fidgets, pokes the children to the front and rear of him and begins to break ranks. The teacher comes across and puts his cap back on his head several times, before using her body to block his movements. As Kiharu continues to try and escape, the teacher squats down beside him and holds his hands close to his sides. Throughout it all, she silently maintains her gaze on the teacher giving the

morning speech on the podium at the front (Video sequence 4). In Wellington, a New Zealand teacher was surprised by how effective this approach was:

Kiharu was encouraged quietly by the teacher to hop in line. She physically stayed with him and encouraged him, by being there, to stay in his place. I think in New Zealand there's often not a lot of [physical contact]. I think we can go back to that verbal communication stuff that we talked about in the video. If you are maybe doing mat time and a child is not conforming you will actually just stop what you are doing and say, "Liam, can you sit down. Liam, you need to sit down". Another teacher will get involved and it will be "Liam, sit down" and if he's still not sitting down then physically being there is often the last resort. "Oh well, then I'll just sit with you and then you'll have to sit here!" It's all done quite differently but it was done very peacefully in [the Japanese video] and it was the first step rather than the nag, nag, nag and then I'll be with you. They recognise that that's the way to do it and she managed to do it. She's still looking after 33 children but the others knew well enough what they needed to do that she could spend that extra time with that one child and focus on him which I thought was really neat.

Using non-verbal means of communication as the first method of disciplining a child was viewed as rather unusual by the New Zealand teachers, who admitted that their first response would probably be to speak to the child. The teachers' comments are in line with cross-cultural studies which have shown that while Western societies see engaging children in conversation as vital for developing verbal competency, parents in other parts of the world see it as much less important than other skills (Lancy 2008:186). Employing the body and non-verbal cues to guide children was seen as an interesting alternative by some New Zealand viewers, although it is important to remember that Japanese children are socialised into understanding these prompts through regular routines and repetition (Peak 1991:127-128):

I don't think [the teacher] said anything throughout that whole time. I couldn't really tell but it wasn't a verbal thing. In New Zealand I don't know why you would have children lined up, maybe in an evacuation or something like that when you would be in a situation outside you would still have teachers directing orders. You know, "can you sit over there", "you need to stay with the others", "excuse me, you need to go and do this". It wouldn't be so gently done which I think is interesting and I really like the way that was done. I think there is something to be learnt from it.

Tobin (2004) has argued that the emphasis on verbal communication in American early childhood education is to some extent a reaction to the anxiety surrounding children's bodies. To illustrate his point, he cites the phrase "use your words" which is commonly heard in American centres. The phrase is a feature of New Zealand centres too yet, as



Video sequence 4: The teacher uses her body to control Kiharu at assembly

discussed in Chapter Two, it cannot be translated into Japanese. While Tobin does not contest the aim of early childhood education to promote verbal competency, he suggests that this goal comes at the cost of subjugating the body. Remaining unstated, yet implicitly clear is the clause that follows: “use your words *and not your body*”. Placing emphasis on children’s verbal expression inevitably results in the suppression of children’s bodily expression of feeling. Farquhar and Fler (2007:38) point out that the New Zealand education system expects children to be competent in communicating when entering early childhood education. In line with American ideology, the dominant mode of communication is verbal, rather than non-verbal which may contrast with the practices of families from other cultures. As a result, Farquhar and Fler claim that teachers place little emphasis in seeking out or communicating through non-verbal interactions in New Zealand early childhood centres.

The physical self

Both Ben-Ari (1997) and Walsh (2004) have written about the centrality of the body to the Japanese early childhood experience. Walsh draws on the writings of Harada and Saito (1997) who argue that vigorous physical play is the key to intellectual development. With links to risk discourses, which will be discussed in the next chapter, Walsh (2004:102) was astonished by the daring antics of the Japanese children he observed, such as running across the top of precarious metal swinging frames, perching on the apex of high structures and climbing concrete walls. He also observed his own American-raised children taking more risks and becoming more physically adept during their time in Japanese educational settings. It appears that these activities are not seen as dangerous in a Japanese context as children are given plenty of opportunities to develop ‘a physical self’ from an early age, in contrast to the ‘risk anxiety’ thinking that dominates playgrounds in countries like New Zealand, England and the United States (Freeman and Tranter 2011:60).

During my second fieldtrip to Japan, my eight year-old son accompanied me. As I was conducting an interview with the principal at a kindergarten in Yokohama my son was left to run around outside with the other kindergarten children during free play time. Although it was late summer, the weather was still hot and oppressive and groups of children were busy outside with water and buckets filled with sand. A band of children had led my son over to an arched climbing frame, the very one Walsh (2004:104) describes as “a 20 metre long narrow metal structure, ubiquitous on preschool and

elementary school playgrounds – two parallel elongated inverted-u-shaped bars connected across the top by parallel metal bars at short intervals”. As Walsh mentions, children initially begin using the equipment by swinging from one bar to the next but soon move on to trying something more daring. Apparently in my son’s case, the kindergarten children had demonstrated how to run across the top of bars, the very same thing Walsh’s twelve year-old daughter tried to master during her time in Japan.

The first I heard of this was when a group of breathless children rushed into the staffroom to announce that the foreign boy had fallen and was now stuck between the bars. Much to my son’s embarrassment a large crowd of children and teachers had gathered beneath the swinging structure and were trying to remove his leg from where it was firmly wedged between two of the bars. It seemed that in trying to copy the younger children, my son’s foot had slipped down between the bars with such force that he was stuck up to mid-thigh. No amount of pushing and pulling seemed able to free him and since his knee had now swollen to twice its usual size we were all wondering how we were going to get him off the bars! As it was obviously painful, my son was trying his best not to cry in front of all these strangers whose concerned chattering he couldn’t understand. Finally, one of the teachers poured on liquid detergent and after much massaging and prodding, the leg came free. The crowd of children followed my son back to the staffroom where his grazes were tended to with detergent and ointment, then covered with a large sticking plaster.

Hobbling back to the train station that evening, the leg was very swollen and I asked my son why he tried to run across the structure. He replied right away, “Well, first of all, those kids are younger than me so I thought if they can do it, I must be able to. Also, I didn’t want to look stupid in front of them all”. But in answer to why he didn’t manage the feat, he was circumspect, “We’re not allowed to climb on the top of those back home. I think those kids had been doing that for a while because they were pretty good at it.” Not to concede defeat entirely though, he added, “Also, because they are younger their feet are smaller so it’s much easier for them to move over the bars without getting stuck”. I’m not sure that logic applies to this situation and this is purely an anecdotal explanation but it is interesting how a New Zealand child managed to injure himself after only a short time on a Japanese playground. Mauss (1973) has argued that the human body must be trained to undertake basic activities such as walking, sitting or dancing. Children learn to master these body techniques in order to function effectively in their own cultural context. In the case of the Japanese early

childhood setting, children are given a great deal of freedom and time to practice and perfect complicated body techniques in the playground. While the act of running across the top of climbing frames may have become “natural” for the children in the Yokohama kindergarten, it was not a body technique that was familiar to my son.

In New Zealand, Greenfield (2007) has discussed children’s desire for more challenging outdoor equipment as playgrounds become increasingly sanitised. Using the Mosaic Approach, developed by Clark and Moss (2001) to gain children’s views, Greenfield found that not only was outdoor play hugely popular, particular pieces of equipment such as the monkey bars and the rope ladder bridge quickly emerged as the most preferred. Greenfield concluded that these spaces are popular because they allow children to test themselves physically through new skills, to take risks, and to engage their bodies in increasingly complex ways. Children do this not only individually but also challenge others to meet or surpass their ability which maintains an on-going frisson of excitement (Davies 2003). In reality, New Zealand safety requirements mean that many children’s play spaces are restricted to tame versions of their preferred areas as discussed in the chapter on risk.

Embodying gambaru in the Japanese context

Japanese notions of the child as a physical self not only embrace risk to the body, they support pushing the boundaries in terms of perseverance or *gambaru*. Much has been written about *gambaru* as a key characteristic of the Japanese which is internalised through a series of bodily and behavioural practices (Ben-Ari 1997, Singleton 1989, White 1987). *Gambaru* is the sum of several cultural concepts drawn from the notion of *seishin kyōiku* (spiritual education) including patience (*gaman*), hardship (*kurō*), self-control (*enryo*) and endurance (*shinbō*). Rohlen (1974) has discussed the phenomenon of *seishin kyōiku* (spiritual education) in detail, based on his experience as a participant in a company training programme. The programme took three months to complete and consisted of training sessions lasting up to sixteen hours per day, six days per week.

An important feature of the programme was a twenty-five mile endurance walk which was carefully designed to test not only the body but the spiritual strength of the participants. Rohlen (1974) links *seishin kyōiku* with various characteristics associated with Japanese-style education; nonverbal forms of knowledge and behaviour are favoured over oral expression, hardships are considered opportunities to learn rather than barriers and self-reflection is emphasised as the means to social reform.

Conformity to the group is viewed as a sign of both self-discipline and unity. The suppression of selfish urges is seen as sophisticated and competition is structured between groups to ensure cohesion and without losing sight of individuals' internal struggles. Teachers in a *seishin* environment are not necessarily explicit about outcomes or methods but allow their students to learn directly from their experiences.

The influence of *seishin* thinking could be seen at the Japanese kindergarten where I conducted fieldwork, notably in approaches to the body. For example, a coveted annual award was the certificate or prize that was given to the child in each class who had never missed a single day of the academic year. In the frigid mid-winter this sometimes translated to sick, feverish children arriving at the centre with their mothers who would insist that their child begged to attend kindergarten. The child's temperature would be checked and if it was above a certain threshold the mother might be told to take the reluctant child home. In other cases, the illness was relatively mild and the child would be rewarded by the teacher for making the effort to come to kindergarten despite their discomfort. The child who won the annual prize would inevitably be paraded in front of their classmates as an example of a particularly healthy body and mind.

This is the kind of thinking that has led to the establishment of early childhood centres practicing "naked education" across Japan. Both within Japan and internationally, media coverage has been given to the small number of Japanese kindergartens that advocate children wearing nothing but short pants all year round. Somewhat mistakenly labelled "naked education" this practice makes the body the focus of beliefs linking resilient bodies with a strong spirit and academic success. At centres following this philosophy children go barefoot and bare-chested even during the coldest winter months. Supporters of "naked education" claim that these measures not only strengthen children's physical constitution but also sharpen their ability to absorb intellectual lessons in subjects such as kanji and mathematics (Wakabayashi 2001). Other kindergartens see this approach as developing physical and spiritual fortitude as well as an opportunity for freedom in a more natural state ("Naked education: Learning to undress for success" 1990).

Although I did not realise it before my fieldwork, one of the kindergartens where I conducted focus group sessions had been practicing "naked education" (*hadashi hoiku*) for the past twenty years. Teachers at this centre stated that "being unclothed stimulates the brain resulting in a very positive overall effect". The policy had been

introduced at the kindergarten following discussions in early childhood circles and the media.⁹⁰ It had also proved to be a point of difference to other centres in the region and staff claimed that the kindergarten had become a popular choice for mothers who were seeking to improve the health of their children.

With regards to the body, the kindergarten sports day (*undōkai*) also provides an opportunity for children to show how they have absorbed the lessons of *seishin* through displays of perseverance (*gambaru*). Intensive practice for the Oka Kindergarten sports day begins weeks in advance of the event with children spending hours out in the hot sun to hone marching routines, master ball skills and jog around the track. On wet days, placards and posters are prepared. There are even cheering practices scheduled for the whole kindergarten to ensure the clapping and calls of *gambatte* (go for it!) are sufficiently jovial. As perseverance is more highly regarded than natural ability (Singleton 1991) children are urged by teachers and parents to finish their events despite any setbacks such as falling over or getting injured. Children do not compete as individuals but as part of their class and events are organised to reflect this structure. In Japanese early childhood centres that Holloway (2000) visited, physical experiences were deliberately arranged to prove challenging for children. These included marathons, obstacle courses and, in one case, a three day field trip that required children to climb mountains and cross rivers. Staff were explicit about the goal of such excursions: to expose children to physical hardship (*kurō*). Experiencing hardship, in various forms, is seen as a vital means “of moving from the self-centredness of childhood to the social responsibility of adulthood” (Holloway 2000:70). Official sports days and overnight trips do not feature on the calendar of most New Zealand early childhood settings, but children at Kaimai Kindergarten did participate in races at the annual school sports day held on the field next door. In contrast to the intensity of the Japanese sports day, these races were of a very relaxed manner and over in a matter of minutes.

In Japan, it is not just the sports day which showcases the link between perseverance and children’s bodies. Ben-Ari (1997:84) argues that the daily techniques for controlling the body which can be observed throughout Japanese early childhood

⁹⁰ For example, an NHK study followed the health of children who had been enrolled at Hikari Yōchien (a “naked education” kindergarten) during their six years at primary school. The study found that the children were sick on average less than seven days throughout their entire time at primary school. Compared to their classmates who had attended regular kindergarten, these children had fewer colds, with quicker recovery time. In other research, “naked children” were found to walk about 20 percent more, and consume both more food and more energy (Wakabayashi 2001).

settings are a means of internalising the *gambaru* concept. While viewing the Japanese video, the New Zealand teachers remarked both on the length of the morning assembly and the fact that the children were required to stand throughout. One Kaimai teacher commented, “I can’t believe the kids are all standing. I can’t even stand for 15 minutes”. As Ben-Ari explains, both sitting and standing for long periods of time requires children to learn to control their bodies, to suppress both physical urges and the accompanying discomfort that comes with a static position. In the Hokkaido kindergarten, the *okāsan suwari* (mother sitting) posture was most commonly used for listening to teachers’ instructions, taking turns or waiting in the classroom. In New Zealand, this posture would be referred to as “sitting on one’s knees”. In the playground or during outdoor sports events, children often squat (*shagamu*). For visitors to Japan, both the “mother sitting” and the squat position are difficult to maintain for any length of time without resorting to constant rearranging of the limbs. For the Japanese child, learning to control one’s body is not only crucial for development of the self, it is necessary to successfully exist within the group.

Reflections on embodying the curriculum

This chapter has discussed some of the ways in which cultural assumptions about the body are represented in the curricula and structures of the two early childhood settings where fieldwork was conducted. In both New Zealand and Japan, the body is viewed by teachers as a key means of exploring sensory play opportunities and developing children’s motor skills, confidence and learning. In New Zealand, children are seen as competent and active learners who are encouraged to engage with their environment and others around them. Teachers take responsibility for providing materials and experiences that will challenge and interest children but they are less active participants in play than the Japanese teachers who see their role as energetic group members.

Messy play was mentioned by several New Zealand teachers as a uniquely Kiwi feature of the early childhood scene. With links to freedom and creativity, messy play is seen as an enjoyable way for children to use their sense of touch while exploring scientific concepts such as texture, volume and movement. However, in the early childhood settings I visited this activity is most often undertaken by children themselves or with a teacher acting in a supervisory role. In spaces such as the sandpit, children were enthusiastic about using their whole body to test their own working theories about

sand, water, construction, gravity etc. The resulting wet clothing or dirty bodies are dealt with cheerfully by teachers whose own bodies and clothing remain clean and slightly removed during these sessions.

At the Japanese field site, the teachers have similar aims for children to explore and engage with nature through sensory play opportunities. But whereas this kind of play in the New Zealand centre is often spontaneous and instigated by the children (with support from the teachers) the Japanese children needed to be coaxed into participating in some of the more “messy” outdoor play activities. Embracing dirt and totally embodied play is seen by teachers as one way of counteracting the limits of modern Japanese society. The Japanese kindergarten teachers not only often model play within this belief in mind, they commit their whole selves to energetic participation. Appropriate clothing is usually donned beforehand by all members of the group, and changed again after the activity has finished. In Japanese contexts, the concepts of cleanliness and pollution are learnt from an early age (Hendry 1986:79-81) and have a major influence on routines in early childhood settings. Chapter Nine explores the issue of dirt within the wider context of pollution, both in a tangible and spiritual sense.

Mauss (1973) has shown how different cultures have different body techniques. In order to become a fully functioning member of society, children need to become proficient in these techniques. While scenes of Japanese children simultaneously bowing, chanting, and lining up in an orderly manner were interpreted as disempowering by the New Zealand teachers, Japanese viewers explained that these repetitive body techniques are an essential part of the early childhood experience. Through daily routines, such as the morning greeting, and special events like the sleepover night, children learn to function as a part of a group. This is an essential skill as they move towards adulthood. In New Zealand, neither regular routines involving the body nor close physical contact are major parts of the early childhood landscape.⁹¹ In discussions concerning the body, teachers interviewed placed more emphasis on promoting health and providing opportunities for children to physically challenge themselves within a supportive, free environment.

⁹¹ There are, of course, differences according to age as centres which care for toddlers invariably require practices such as naptime and nappy changing, but this study focuses on the experience of four-year-olds at a New Zealand centre. In Māori culture too, ideas about bodily contact differ from the dominant European narrative. However, the pervasive anxiety associated with the risk of touching children has meant that even in some kōhanga reo traditional practices such as communal sleeping have been discontinued. Hohepa and Tangaere (2001:57) argue that state demands for standardised policies related to the body can overlook “important cultural dimensions of touching”.

The New Zealand curriculum, Te Whāriki (1996:86), makes it clear that early childhood settings should offer children “an environment where they gain confidence in and control of their bodies”. The same expectation exists in Japan (Ministry of Education Science Sports and Culture 2001) where participation in energetic outdoor play is required of all members of the kindergarten and key concepts such as *gambaru* (perseverance) are taught to children through physical endurance training. However, like scholars before me (Ben-Ari 1997, Walsh 2004), I noticed a difference in the levels of children’s physicality which seemed more pronounced at the Japanese kindergarten during periods of free play. Children at the Japanese centre were encouraged to test the limits of their bodies in challenging, risky play, and physical skirmishes were not unusual. In comparison, children at the New Zealand centre engaged in fewer boisterous altercations and were mindful of safety regulations when using play equipment.

Yet New Zealand teachers in focus groups around the country were struck by the rambunctious nature of the New Zealand children in the video. Staff at the centre were described as taking a “very liberal approach” to children’s physical behaviour, with some groups labelling it as “aggressive”, “very rough” and “too rough and tumble”. While the Japanese teachers were intrigued by the high levels of freedom New Zealand children enjoyed, they did not comment on issues of physicality. In line with their own cultural beliefs about the appropriateness of *genki* (energetic) children, the vigorous behaviour of the New Zealand children did not strike them as either unusual or significant. Differing approaches to bodily risk could also be seen in the playground, with children at the Japanese centre free to climb trees and dangle from precariously high equipment, while New Zealand children were banned from scaling heights yet engaged in carpentry with hammers and saws. The following chapter examines these contrasting constructions of risk.

Chapter 7: Risk and the body

Risk is the mobilising dynamic of a society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature.
(Giddens 2003:24)

The concept of risk has warranted increasing academic attention over the past two to three decades (Beck 1992, Caplan 2000, Douglas 1992, Douglas and Wildavsky 1982, Giddens 1991, Giddens 1994, Lupton 1999, Tansey and Rayner 2009). Risk has also become an often uttered word on the lips of parents and teachers alike. Recent publications in the popular press (Davis and Eppler-Wolff 2009) are dedicated to teaching the differences between good and bad risks, while drawing their philosophies from the academic world and analysis of sociologists and anthropologists such as Lyng (2005) and Smith (1998). Others such as Guldberg (2009) reject the argument that the lives of modern children have become riskier and less fulfilling, suggesting instead that our ‘safety-obsessed culture’ is breeding unnecessary panic within family and education circles.

The fact that this debate is no longer limited to philosophical and theoretical discussion among experts in the field has also been noted (Wynne 1996). There is a significant body of work that deals specifically with risk located within the arena of education (Adamson 2005, Bollnow 1971, Dwyer and Wyn 2001, Hope 2005, Monahan 2009, Oliver 2005, Severs et al. 2003). Along with the rise of debate and a risk discourse, we have seen new terms enter the world of parent, child, state and school. Terms such as “helicopter parents” (Guldberg 2009:174, Mercogliano 2007:5), “cotton wool kids” (Jones 2007, Dungey 2008), and “monster parents” (‘Schools grapple with monster parents’ 2007) were not in common usage even a decade ago.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the meaning of the term risk, then proceeds to examine the ways in which risk is culturally constructed within the early childhood contexts of New Zealand and Japan. Douglas (1992) claims that risk has disputed meanings depending on cultural context. In order to see which risks cause concern in a specific culture, it is necessary to identify the cultural biases of the society under examination. Every culture has a unique set of shared values that are supported by social structures and institutions. This chapter argues that, in the New Zealand context, risk is used as a political tool to justify certain policies and practices in the early childhood context, and to assign responsibility and blame. Shaped by health and safety

discourses (Foucault 1995), the New Zealand centre reflects a preoccupation with internal risk over which a level of control is believed to be possible. While the political remains entangled with the individual, physical body in the Japanese context, there is a greater degree of fatalism inherent in the way children's bodies are regulated. Rather than being concerned with exerting control over risk, analysis of the Japanese centre points to a more deterministic framework. In order to explore these ideas, the chapter focusses on five main issues identified as significant by the New Zealand and Japanese participants: the playground, creation of boundaries, teacher supervision, the use of real tools, and definitions of safe objects for play. Other themes in later chapters could also be seen as constituting risky or disruptive practice, but I have chosen to deal with them each in their own right rather than under the umbrella of risk.

Towards a discourse of risk

Beck (1992) states that risk has become such an embedded part of modern life, that we are now living in a "risk society". Rather than being a rational calculation, perceptions and understandings of risk have led to new forms of social phenomena. But risk was not always constructed this way. Giddens (2003:21) argues that risk is a relatively recent concept, which originated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as explorers embarked on lengthy ocean voyages. While its original meaning was connected to space, risk became associated with time in the world of banking and then expanded to various other contexts involving uncertainty. Douglas (1992:23) acknowledges that risk analysis was prevalent in eighteenth century marine insurance, but claims the concept emerged first in the context of gambling. At that time, risk had a neutral value as it was linked purely to the probability of a positive or negative outcome. Gladwin (2008) points out that in modern society "risk" and "hazard" are often used interchangeably, yet they have quite different meanings. Drawing on Adams (1996), Gladwin (2008:68) defines a hazard as that which can be objectively defined, such as an attribute of the social or physical surroundings that could inflict harm, whereas risk is connected to the probability of a possible outcome occurring.

Douglas (1992:24) maintains that the concept of risk has not only developed in relatively recent times, but also its meaning has evolved to reflect contemporary society which has seen a global community replace smaller local centres. Whereas the term was previously neutral, risk is now specific to undesirable outcomes. While risk could

therefore previously be seen as either negative or positive, it has come to be viewed as something to be avoided (Furedi 2002:18).⁹²

Gladwin (2008) traces the journey of risk to its perceived negative position through three historical stages. In the pre-modern stage, the cause of risk is generally unknown therefore humans rely on belief systems to avoid it and look to the supernatural for explanations. In the modern stage, science has identified the cause of numerous risks, leading to humans adopting risk management skills. In the post-modern stage, risk is no longer viewed as an objective phenomenon, but as a social construct. The concept of risk therefore varies according to cultural definitions of acceptable and unacceptable practices (Douglas 1992).

Douglas (1992) argues that a 'blame culture' has developed in modern societies that has led to risk analysis based on concepts of rational individual choice becoming professionalised. Douglas contends that risk must be considered within social context, therefore it remains less an individual choice but an implicitly political issue located within cultural boundaries. She views the rise of the term 'risk' as a new cultural phase in which every death and accident is seen as chargeable to someone's account or viewed as caused by negligence. Within this cultural schema, death cannot be accepted as a natural part of life, but must be blamed on someone and ideally accompanied by financial compensation for the family of the deceased. This establishes the negative connotations associated with risk in modern societies, which may have been expressed as danger in the past. She claims that in contemporary, industrialised cultures the term 'risk' has become dominant due to its scientific and technical implications which are preferable to the vagaries of the word 'danger' (Douglas 1992:14-15).

The position of children in the risk society

Giddens (2003:60) suggests that children occupy a new and somewhat paradoxical position in our increasingly globalised world. Today's children are cherished in part because there are fewer of them, and partly due to the decision process parents go through to commit to having a child. In contrast to traditional societies in which children contributed labour and economic benefits to the family unit, parents in Western countries incur a financial burden. Giddens also points out that modern parents

⁹² The reasoning that risk now refers solely to negative outcomes has been contested by some scholars who argue that this overlooks rising levels of risk-seeking behaviour in modern society such as extreme sports, recreational drug taking and gambling (Baker and Simon 2002).

have higher expectations regarding the care and protection of children which has led to increased anxiety. Guldberg (2009) and Stearns (2003) argue that parenting in the Western world is more complicated than ever before in an age ruled by concerns about children's growth, development, academic ability and exposure to harmful environmental and social factors.

According to several scholars, the drive to reduce risk has not come without sacrifice. Palmer (2007:51) claims that, in attempt to minimise exposure to danger, today's children are being raised akin to battery chickens, while Mercogliano (2007:2) suggests that eliminating potential risk from childhood has ironically lead to children being restricted like never before. In the past two to three decades, children's free time has also come under increasing scrutiny and supervision by adults (Elkind 2007:80, Freeman and Tranter 2010).

Research has shown that in one generation the area in which children are able to travel on their own, also called their 'home habitat', has shrunk to one-ninth of its previous size (Gaster 1991, Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1990). It has been suggested that this fear of strangers is verging on the paranoid. Gill (2007) points out that in the United Kingdom, less than one child in a million is killed annually by a stranger, while in comparison ten times as many children are killed by cars, and five times as many at the hands of their own family members (Thomas and Hocking 2003). In the United States, statistics show that less than one hundred children a year are killed by strangers, but parents remain anxious about the threat of child abduction in the face of rising media coverage of such incidents (Best 1990, Furedi 2002:24).

Likewise, in New Zealand, the national centre for collating and disseminating information about domestic and family violence has stated that child deaths by a stranger are extremely rare events in New Zealand. It concludes that such deaths are much more likely to occur as a result of family violence (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2009). Yet, many parents are not comfortable allowing their offspring to roam around the neighbourhood alone and the number of children being driven to school has almost doubled in the past two decades (Ministry of Transport 2008).

Comparative studies have shown that this sense of parental fear may not be as prevalent in other countries. In Germany, for example, children experience far fewer restrictions on their independent mobility compared to their British counterparts. Hillman, Adams and Whiteleg (1990) suggest that German parents anticipate that other adults will both observe and reprimand children if their behaviour is inappropriate. This

expectation serves as both a powerful means of surveillance and as a mark of mutual trust between parents. As part of a society that encourages autonomous mobility from a young age, Japanese children also enjoy greater freedom than New Zealand children who are increasingly driven to school (Freeman and Tranter 2011:186). From the children's point of view, flirting with danger can offer the chance to learn from risky behaviour. However, much of children's play nowadays is directed and monitored by adults which reduces these opportunities (Elkind 2007:80). This may have implications for the future as Jones (2007:15) muses: "The ability to judge risks as adults is not something that we simply acquire at the age of majority. It is a skill that is learnt through exposure to hazards. When as adults, we encounter a new hazard or risk, we apply those skills that we learnt as children to the situation".

Just as society at large has become more conscious of potential dangers facing our children, the early childhood sector has seen the development of stringent safety standards and workplace policies in order to protect its families and staff from harm. But as comparative studies such as those discussed above make clear, what constitutes risky practice, behaviour, or equipment is clearly a cultural construct. Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) argue that in order to identify which risks represent concerns for a particular culture, it is essential to identify the cultural bias of that group which is the key to social organisation. They note that, "Once the idea is accepted that people select their awareness of certain dangers to conform with a specific way of life, it follows that people who adhere to different forms of social organization are disposed to take (and avoid) different kinds of risk. To alter risk selection and risk perception, then, would depend on changing the social organization" (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982:9). The following sections use Douglas (1992), Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) and Foucault's (1995) theories to frame and explore the ways in which risk to the body are articulated by the participants, and approached in practice in the two contexts.

Perilous play: the kindergarten playground as culturally contested space

Foucault's (1995) notion of disciplinary spaces has implications for the way in which kindergarten spaces are constructed to enclose, regulate and produce docile bodies. He suggests that discipline requires "enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself" (Foucault 1995:141). In New Zealand, institutionally imposed structures and regulations are a feature of the early childhood setting. Douglas (1966) offers a further dimension to the interpretation of

space, particularly visible in the Japanese context, where internalised cultural values serve to control the ordering of bodies within the playground. To unpack the notion of the playground as culturally contested space, a number of questions can be asked. What kind of equipment is permanent and fixed on the grounds? What do the grounds themselves consist of and are there trees, grass, flowers, sticks or other natural resources available for children to access? Are the grounds fenced off or are the children free to roam? Is there a sandpit, and a tap for water? These were the kinds of questions which teachers asked prior to their viewing of the video of “the other”. Following the film screening, however, a significant number of comments were concerned with the potential risk to the body that the play space of “the other” represented.

For the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers, the lack of impact-absorbing surfacing and the height of the slides in the Japanese kindergarten grounds were instantly apparent and quite disturbing. During these discussions, teachers not only demonstrated detailed knowledge of early childhood regulations, they were surprised at the risks being taken with children’s safety. They acknowledged that the use of such equipment in a New Zealand context could be potentially threatening to staff employment and professional reputations as these comments show:

The safety surfacing and the height of the slide and the ratios are noticeable. Is there any safety surfacing? What safety regulations are there?

The slide is too high in New Zealand. If a child fell off and it wasn’t regulation height we would be on national TV.

The regulation for the slide is 1.5 [metres].

I actually even wonder what it’s made out of it. Even if there was a big mound under it, it wouldn’t be ok. You don’t see [metal] slides like that in New Zealand.

No, you don’t, they have all been pulled out. I mean we’ve got plastic now.

There are slides that height but they would be on a bank.

And also the steepness of the ladder ... I don’t know if that would be considered ok.

Yeah, it’s the height and the surfacing not so much the material it’s made of.



Figure 18: Children play a class game on the slide at Oka Kindergarten

From a New Zealand perspective, it is not surprising that teachers were shocked by Japanese playground equipment. In the scene being discussed above, the teacher has led her class over to use a slide that towers over a dirt playground strewn with hundreds of tiny, sharp rocks. “That would be never be allowed in New Zealand!” the teachers state. They are right. Safety manuals for early childhood centres require that the uppermost part of the slide chute be less than 3.6 metres above the ground.⁹³ It is also recommended that centres install the slide chutes facing south or south/east or in shaded areas to avoid children getting sunburnt. It is expected that these slides will be erected on impact-absorbing safety surfacing (Standards Association of New Zealand 1986). In a New Zealand context, the Japanese slide represents a significant safety hazard on all three counts.

Although the video does not linger on other pieces of equipment in the playground, personal observation tells me that Oka Kindergarten’s climbing frame breaks New Zealand safety standards with its highest climbing point exceeding 1.5 metres (Jambor, Chalmers and O’Neill 1994:30). In many other centres I visited in Hokkaido, a popular piece of play equipment was a rotating metal roundabout with a grid-like frame. Again, this would not feature in New Zealand centres according to

⁹³ The requirement is different for embankment slides which must have a sliding surface less than one metre above the ground (Standards Association of New Zealand 1986)

national safety standards which claim these kinds of rotating apparatus present “physical and psychological hazards” due to the fact that children cannot control its movement once in motion (Standards Association of New Zealand 1986: Part 3: Clause 3.5).

The dirt grounds of the Japanese early childhood centre also represent a counter-image to the expectations of New Zealand teachers. While the grounds of Oka Kindergarten are edged by mature trees and wildflowers, the majority of the children play on the vast dirt surfacing or in the sandpit. There is no grass covering any of the play space. Children are permitted to wander into the forest area to pick flowers for daisy chains or gather leaves for pressing but most prefer to roam and wrestle in the dust. The ground is pitted with hundreds of tiny small stones that could inflict a nasty cut if children fell on them. Once or twice a term the principal would gather all the staff and children outside where he had meticulously divided the ground into a grid pattern using a sharp stick. Children and staff would be divided into groups and challenged to pick up as many stones as they could from their assigned square of the grid. The pile of stones collected at the end would be cast into the wild, wooded area at the end of kindergarten boundary, but by the time the next clearing session rolled around the stones always seemed to have edged their way back into the dust. The only exception to this ritual was during winter when the ground would be covered with thick snow and ice.

For the New Zealand teachers viewing the video, this whole play space represented a risky environment for children’s bodies, and the stone retrieving exercise seemed to them to be meaningless and easily avoided by planting grass across the dirt surface. The Japanese principal explained to me that this exercise was not just about removing a potential hazard, however, but also served to build solidarity and cooperation through children of different ages working towards a common goal. Planting grass would not only be an expensive option in the harsh Hokkaido climate, it would eliminate opportunities such as the stone gathering ritual. The tough surfacing is also a reminder for children to persevere in difficult circumstances. This is typified by the sports day (*undōkai*) when teachers instruct children that, even if they fall over and skin their knee on a rock during the races, they should get up and carry on (*gambaru*).

The Japanese teachers were intrigued by the New Zealand playground, which seemed quite organic at first, but on closer inspection was bounded by fences and modified in subtle ways with its safety surfacing barely perceptible under the grass and landscaped paths. These impressions were supported by New Zealand teachers viewing

the video of Kaimai Kindergarten. Implicit in their comments was the importance placed on early childhood environments that outwardly appear natural. A kindergarten teacher in Nelson commented that, “They had a lovely outdoor area too which is pretty reflective of New Zealand ... that range of grass, and trees and the open sandpit”. In reality these spaces had often been carefully altered to eliminate some of the potential hazards to the body that come with a completely untamed area. An early childhood teacher in Christchurch stated, “I liked how it was quite natural, there was grass and that” which was quickly followed by, “That was grass growing through safety surfacing, I’m assuming? I hope it was”. Ensuring that there are adequate soft fall surfaces is an important part of reducing risk to children’s bodies in New Zealand centres (Education Review Office 2008).

A pedagogy of risk

Smith (1998) focuses on the playground as a means of locating a pedagogy of risk. He sees the playground as a valuable space for understanding what is important to children, although it is often overlooked as inconsequential by adults preoccupied with greater concerns. Smith (1998:39-44) notes that while there have been various theories suggested to explain the creation of the playground, the historical reasons for its development remain contested. Some view the playground as a safe and enjoyable space for children to play free of physical and social dangers (Zelizer 1994) while others deride it as a convenient place to confine children and release adults from constant tedious supervision (Wood 1977). Smith argues that modern parents prefer their children to play in places such as school playgrounds or amusement parks than in traditional spaces such as the street or down by the river. Playgrounds that are deemed safe are increasingly characterised as spaces that are in full view of an adult gaze and limited by physical boundaries. According to Smith, contemporary playgrounds are now being designed with the primary aim of protecting children. This design is a reflection of society’s view of childhood through the lens of safety (Smith 1998:42).

Jones (2007:11) agrees that the playground no longer provides a space for children to take risks. In the New Zealand context, slide heights and ground surfacing, spacing between equipment and fencing are just some of the many playground features regulated by national safety guidelines. This kind of legislation is also common in other developed Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and

Australia.⁹⁴ Teachers at Kaimai Kindergarten in New Zealand were ambivalent about the impact overseas influenced legislation was having on the risk-taking culture of the kindergarten:

I think it's because of the whole accountability thing. It's gone a little bit too far. Children are not allowed to take risks in New Zealand anymore because they might get hurt.

Despite the increasing attention directed at reducing bodily risk for children, it is interesting that the introduction of impact-absorbing safety surfacing in British playgrounds in the late 1990s did not result in fewer accidents as predicted (Gill 2007:29). During my fieldwork at the New Zealand kindergarten, an expensive new playground was constructed on the school grounds opposite. Despite having state-of-the-art shock-absorbent surfacing, smooth tubular framing and rounded plastic edging, more children broke limbs in the first month of use than over the course of the previous year on the run-down old playground. Teachers and parents put this down to children being complacent about the hazards inherent in the shiny new equipment. The theories of Mauss (1973) would suggest that these accidents are a result of unfamiliar body techniques that the children have not yet mastered in order to negotiate the new play space. While children growing up two or three decades ago may have effortlessly embodied these techniques, many children today have lost this ability as risk discourses have renegotiated the parameters of safe play (Douglas 1992).

Playgrounds are a response to the increasing desire to protect young bodies, although an element of risk is always incorporated into designs to challenge children. Smith (1998:55) and Jambor, Chalmers and O'Neill (1994:19) have focused on the ambiguous position the playground assumes during a child's search for meaningful play. Scholars have pointed out that while a totally safe playground could indeed be constructed, children would have no interest in using it (Wilkinson and Lockhart 1980:87 cited in Smith 1998). A British survey of young people aged eleven to fourteen found that almost half of them specifically looked for more dangerous places to play (CAPT 2002). As a result, they favoured areas such abandoned buildings, rivers and road underpasses. According to the children they gained a sense of ownership over these

⁹⁴ In the United States, see US Consumer Product Safety Commission (2008) *Public playground safety handbook*, Bethesda, MD: CPSC. In the UK, see British Standards Institution (2004) *Playground equipment*, London: British Standards Institution. In Australia, refer to Office for Recreation and Sport (1998), *Playground manual*, South Australia: Office for Recreation and Sport.

places away from the prying eyes of adults and they relished the challenges posed by unregulated play spaces.

Dominated by vast dirt surfaces upon which perch metal climbing and swinging structures, the largely unfenced Japanese playground appears to be the antithesis of the ideal New Zealand kindergarten outdoor area. However, in the eyes of many of the Japanese teachers who viewed the video of the Hokkaido kindergarten, the playground was an object of envy rather than a source of danger. In Japan, the very same area was transformed into a coveted space that allowed children the opportunity to roam freely, take responsibility for themselves and enjoy a more natural existence. A Tokyo teacher commented, “I liked their big, big playground. It’s impossible to [have that kind of space] in Tokyo. A big playground and with all those trees around it, that was great. They also did water play which I thought was good because some kindergartens never let children do water play or mud play, especially in Tokyo”. In order to create and maintain an environment where children can feel free to safely explore these opportunities for play, boundaries have inevitably been erected in both the Japanese and New Zealand contexts. What is interesting about these boundaries is the way they are structured in both a tangible and intangible way.

Creating real and imagined boundaries to minimise risk

Douglas (1966:115) argues that the body is symbolic of society, and acts as a model for any bounded system. The boundaries of the body can therefore be interpreted as representing “any boundaries which are threatened or precarious”. This section argues that the way that the individual, physical body is bounded and contained, is a reflection of the structural and political discourses shaping the early childhood context. For the New Zealand viewers, a surprising feature of the Japanese kindergarten was the lack of fencing around the outdoor area. While one side of the ground had a loose, strung wire fence running along it, the rest of the area allowed children free access to either the road or a woodland forest. Viewed from the opposite point of view, this arrangement also allowed visitors to easily enter the grounds and kindergarten buildings. This contrasts with the New Zealand centre where the whole of the outdoor area was enclosed by a well-maintained wrought iron fence on one side and high wooden fences and hedging on the other. At the entrance to the centre, children, families and visitors were required to arrive and leave through a self-locking gate. These kinds of gates are

popular in many early childhood settings, as well as in public parks or around swimming pools as they are unable to be opened by young children.

Very few of the children attending the centre could either reach the release catch or had enough power to pull the knob in order to unlock the gate. As a result, the act of entering and departing the centre was controlled either by parents or teachers. Each day a teacher was assigned to be on duty at the gate during leaving time. The purpose of this task was primarily to ensure that children did not leave or enter without an approved adult but it also gave teachers the opportunity to engage in conversation with families. Despite this, teachers in Nelson still felt that the farewell procedure could have been managed in a more structured way. One of them explained that “there is a safety aspect to it in terms of knowing where all the children are, where they’re going with the parents and that kind of stuff. It just seemed a bit [disorganised]”. In contrast to the field site where children were released as a group to their parents following the cessation of “mat time”, this teacher indicated that their Nelson centre preferred to release children one by one after their parent or caregiver had signed them out. In the New Zealand early childhood context, this kind of policy was common and reflected an ideology influenced by notions of health and safety as well as responsibility and accountability. The locking gate and robust fence have become potent symbols of risk minimisation measures as well as tangible boundaries separating children and the potentially dangerous outdoor, unregulated world.

At the Hokkaido kindergarten physical boundaries such as fences and gates do not feature as strongly. With most of the outdoor area uncontained, there appears to be nothing preventing children wandering off the kindergarten grounds. This issue, which is of great importance to the New Zealand teachers, was never directly addressed by their Hokkaido counterparts. When questioned about it, however, Oka teachers explained that they relied on children’s internalised sense of boundaries and on peer control to preclude any problems. Walsh (2002:233) points out that Japanese children are given a great deal of responsibility in a necessary step towards realising interdependence. This shared sense of responsibility becomes ingrained over the course of the kindergarten experience. If a new or younger child ever looks like transgressing the invisible safety boundaries of the outdoor area, s/he is quickly retrieved or assisted by older, more experienced members of the kindergarten group.

While all of the centres I visited in Hokkaido had only partial or incomplete fences around the outdoor play area, several of the urban centres in large cities in

Honshū had sturdy wrought iron fencing and gates controlled by intercom. When I questioned the teachers about these security measures they explained these were relatively recent changes sparked by a savage attack on children by a deranged man who entered a primary school in Osaka prefecture in 2001. The man's stabbing spree killed eight children and left fifteen others wounded ("Eight dead in school stabbing spree", 2001). This case was not an isolated one, however, as before the events in Osaka other violent incidents against children had already occurred on Japanese school grounds.⁹⁵ Violence at Japanese schools has not been limited to outside attackers with several gruesome killings committed by school children given widespread media attention in both domestic and international circles.⁹⁶

These incidents have contributed to rising anxiety levels about children's safety in educational settings. The 2001 Osaka incident, in particular, provoked changes in the way educational institutions deal with security issues. In response to advice from the Ministry of Education, fences have become more prevalent especially in densely populated urban areas. Urban Japanese teachers interviewed during the focus group sessions explained that fences are now necessary to keep dangerous elements from entering the kindergarten. This is in contrast to New Zealand centres where teachers indicated that the primary reason for physical barriers is to prevent children from wandering off the grounds. In Japan, the barrier is to prevent potential danger from the outside entering the internal and safe world of the kindergarten. In New Zealand, the barrier works to prevent children from entering a potentially dangerous outside world. Both contexts reflect Douglas' (1992:14) view of society as in the midst of a new cultural phase in which risk is linked to blame and accountability. It has become necessary for someone to take responsibility for children's mobile bodies, and to enforce the boundaries which serve to minimise physical risk.

⁹⁵ In September 1998, a group of boys wielding swords and sticks injured a junior high school student in Chiba and in the same year a man used an axe and a sickle to attack and injure eight students after he broke into a junior high school in Hiratsuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. In December 1999, a pupil was stabbed to death at a primary school in Kyoto after the assailant attacked him in the playground.

⁹⁶ For example, Seito Sakakibara was the alias of a 14 year old Kobe boy who murdered an 11 year old boy and a 10 year old girl in 1997. Particularly shocking was the fact that Sakakibara left the head of one of his victims at his primary school gate for other students to discover when they arrived in the morning ("Kobe killer set free", 2004). In 2004, an 11 year old girl used a stanley knife to slit the throat of her 12 year old classmate at a primary school in Sasebo, Nagasaki prefecture ("Sixth grader kills her classmate, 12", 2004). In 2005, a 17 year old boy returned to his old primary school in Neyagawa, Osaka prefecture, to attack his former teacher leaving one dead and two injured ("Teen in fatal school stabbing bent on attacking teachers", 2005).



Figure 19: An unfenced early childhood centre in Hokkaido contrasts with a bounded outdoor area at the New Zealand centre

Boundaries are not just marked by barriers between the centre and the external world. Walsh (2002) describes the Japanese preschool itself as a separate space for children marked by boundaries such as the *genkan* which defines the “outside” and “parent” world and the “inside” and “child” world. Walsh observed that once morning greeting rituals are over, children are free to roam and be boisterous, in contrast to American centres where running inside is not permitted and voices must be lowered. Walsh noted that much of the playground equipment available to Japanese children is considered dangerous to Americans, such as high metal climbing structures and old cable spools. These reactions were very similar to those of New Zealand audiences upon seeing the slides and ground surfaces, yet much of the Japanese equipment was also once common on New Zealand kindergarten playgrounds. Walsh also discovered that correct supervision of children is culturally defined as the Japanese teachers were comfortable just knowing where, and what, children were doing, whereas American teachers felt they needed to watch over activities to be considered doing the job properly. For the New Zealand teachers viewing the Japanese video it also appeared that the children were left to their own devices far too often, which seemed both risky and rather negligent.

Cultural definitions of safe supervision

Just as the American teachers Walsh (2002) interviewed felt that they needed to be close by to feel they were fulfilling their job responsibilities, the New Zealand teachers indicated that they would not be comfortable with the level of staff supervision in the Japanese kindergarten. At one point in the Japanese video, the teacher runs across

the playground with her class of thirty three children straggling behind in her in a haphazard line. While eventually all of the children catch up, she does not look back to check if they are coming, neither does she cease jogging. She stops at a concrete tunnel submerged under a grass bank, and instructs the leader of the pack to crawl through the tunnel and once he is out the other side, she moves off in the direction of the slide. One by one, the other children follow suit even though, for those at the back, their teacher and classmates have already moved on to the next piece of equipment. Throughout this exercise no explanation had been given, the teacher had simply blown her whistle once following the end of assembly and jogged slowly off.

In lieu of direct verbal communication, musical cues such as songs, clapping or whistles are used extensively in Japanese early childhood settings, to signify both the beginning and end of activities, and to change the pace or mood of the classroom (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:56). Through repetitive socialisation processes (Burke 2007, Hendry 1986, Lewis 1995, Peak 1991) the children understand that the whistle signifies an instruction to form their class line and follow the teacher. Teachers at Kaimai Kindergarten were surprised at the lack of verbal instruction given to the children about the activity, but also at the apparent disregard for children's whereabouts and safety. They immediately linked the situation to their own circumstances with potentially devastating results:

If a child ran off into the tunnel, how would the teacher know? How would she get that child back again?

For instance, there was that centre in Wellington that went for a walk and they climbed over the barriers and through the tunnel and it was on national news. People would have lost their jobs for that sort of thing.

Foucault (1995:173) argues that the perfect disciplinary institution is that in which constant surveillance is possible. In the New Zealand context, it is not only important that the whereabouts of the children is always known, but also that the teachers themselves are the object of the disciplinary gaze. The supervision concerns continue for the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers as the thirty three Japanese children each take a turn on the slide and are sent back to the classroom. Before leaving, the teacher tells them all to go to the toilet, wash their hands, have a drink of water and sit down and wait for her to return. The teacher then remains on the playground until the last child has slid down the slide twenty minutes later. Back in the classroom, the camera

follows the four year old children chatting, washing their hands, blowing bubbles and in some cases, fighting. The Kaimai Kindergarten teachers indicated that they felt the directives issued prior to this scene were not only complicated but superfluous. Many of their concerns were phrased as questions they needed answering from within their own cultural framework. As the comments below reveal, the New Zealanders continued to return to the matter of supervision and the missing teacher, which links back to wider issues of safety and accountability.

Where's the teacher here? The children are unsupervised.

If someone fell off that slide out there with that one teacher and forty⁹⁷ children who would look after that child?

And who would look after the other children?

And do their parents get called at home?

So what happens then? Is there a recall? Are parents generally just accepting that that's what happens with children, like mostly our parents do or are there grumpy, stropy parents?

But here it's that whole legislation and red tape issue of ACC and OSH.⁹⁸

Although constant supervision is accepted as normal, safe practice in New Zealand early childhood contexts, Foucault (1995:201) argues that this kind of constant supervision and surveillance of children and teachers instead works to assure "the automatic functioning of power".

The low profile of Japanese teachers

The low profile of Japanese teachers has been raised before by researchers conducting cross-cultural fieldwork in early childhood settings. American Catherine Lewis (1995:114) was surprised to see just how rarely teachers appeared to exercise authority or supervise children. During spot observations of free play, Lewis noted that only 53 percent of teachers could see all of their students, while in 13 percent of the cases they could not see any of the children. When questioned about this, the teachers reiterated that children were expected to seek an adult if a problem occurred. Lewis

⁹⁷ In fact, there are thirty three children in the class being discussed but in previous years there have been as many as forty children under the supervision of this one teacher.

⁹⁸ ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) is a New Zealand Crown entity responsible for administering the Accident Compensation Act (2001) by supporting those who have suffered accidental injuries. It is also the only compulsory provider of insurance for accidental work place injuries. OSH stands for Occupational Safety and Health which is regulated in the workplace by the Department of Labour. See www.osh.govt.nz for more information.

observed that teachers often left their classrooms unsupervised while they attended to other matters. This practice was also common at Oka Kindergarten as teachers might be called away to deal with an administrative matter, a visiting parent, to watch part of another class as part of ongoing training or to cope with an ill child. To Lewis's "Western eye, the low profile of adult authority occasionally made Japanese preschools look dangerous" (Lewis 1995:114). She was also uncomfortable with the way resources such as oversized blocks were used to create precarious structures which could come crashing down on children. She concluded that Americans would prefer children's freedom to be curtailed rather than risk injury or blame.

Douglas (1992:50-53) observes that in the Japanese language there are words for danger, damage and harm as well as for predicting probability, but there is no word for risk. She speculates that there may be links between systemic and collective thinking that typifies the Japanese culture and the systemic implications of probability theory in the West but she fails to find concrete evidence to support her ideas. While the term risk may never arise in a Japanese early childhood setting, or indeed in wider Japanese society, potential hazards and dangers are carefully considered by kindergarten staff and parents.

For the Japanese teachers at the centre of the video, the safety of the children in the scene described earlier was never in doubt. The Oka Kindergarten teachers acknowledge that higher ratios mean that children are often not in close proximity to staff, but insist that their classmates are encouraged to give support and comfort in the case of altercations or minor injuries. Learning to become self-reliant and independent at kindergarten is a fundamental aim which cannot be achieved if children are over-reliant on the teacher (Peak 1989:115). Although classes of forty children are no longer legally allowed, the video of one teacher to thirty three children was still considered to be critically unbalanced by the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers. In a Japanese context however, Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989:38) suggest that large classes specifically serve to prevent the teacher from spending inordinate amounts of time with one child and instead encourage individuals to undertake tasks themselves or consult with their peers for help.

"What happens if there is an accident?"

The expectation that children need to learn to cooperate and depend on each other was evident in a scene in the video where the class is preparing to go on an outing

to the local planetarium. The teacher asks the class to put on their uniform smocks and matching class caps, then to line up according to gender. The children busy themselves finding their clothing before gathering into a line of boys on one side of the room and girls on the other. The lines are also assembled according to height with the tallest child at the front gradually moving down to the shortest at the back. This order was sorted out at the beginning of the kindergarten year, and after many opportunities to practice it, all the children now know exactly where everyone should be standing.

On the teacher's command the children put their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them and move off single file in the direction of the main entrance where the kindergarten bus is waiting. There is a flurry of activity as they all change out of their inside shoes and into their outside footwear and one by one climb the steps of the bus. Last to climb on to the bus is the teacher, with a small yellow first aid kit slung over her shoulders. Already helping children find seats in the cramped, muggy bus is the teacher aide who helps out wherever she is needed in the kindergarten. The children squirm in their seats and complain about the sticky, squashed conditions but the teachers gently tease them in reply as they count the bobbing heads and the bus roars off up the road. Upon viewing this scene, the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers wondered where the other adult support was. Were extra teachers and parent helpers going to meet the class at the planetarium? How could two teachers possibly manage thirty three children in a safe way? As one teacher noted:

We didn't talk about what if something goes wrong on those trips with the adult supervision. What happens if there is an accident?

Another teacher from a Wellington centre saw the scenes of unsupervised students as a challenge to New Zealand notions about the capability of children and expectation levels.

Supervision ... I must admit, I was quite amazed, I put a big "wow" that the children they weren't supervised but they did know what they were doing and I would never expect that here from a group of children. If they had wandered into the toilet, into the bathroom to wash their hands, you have to have someone follow them because they are not expected to know the rules and to know not to splash and not to push. So we make sure we have an adult with them but it sort of seems silly after seeing how capable the children in that video are just with a little bit of maybe coaching initially and some encouragement. It seems silly to follow a group of five children into the bathroom to wash their hands when a big group of 30 has gone in and done it on their own. When really you are just outside the bathroom, it's not even like you are all the way outside, you're just there and if you heard anything you would go in but you still go in anyway just

in case. So I wonder if by doing that if we are just not giving children the opportunity to develop those sorts of social skills and abilities to cope with things on their own.

The Japanese teachers were intrigued by the New Zealanders' concerns over supervision. In their minds, the teacher/child ratios at the Hokkaido kindergarten were not particularly unusual and the self-monitoring behaviour of the children was to be expected. Walsh (2004:105) has written about visiting a zoo in Tokyo where he encountered a single teacher responsible for thirty young children on a class trip. As the teacher led the group the children followed behind him in a long line, chattering and jostling. According to Walsh, the teacher never once looked back to check on his students, instead the children were expected to take responsibility for themselves and for any of their peers that might inadvertently wander from the fold.

It appears that implicit in New Zealand teachers understanding of adequate supervision is physical proximity to children's bodies, regular visual and/or verbal checking and a relatively short time to attend to altercations or minor injuries. The Japanese teachers I spoke with often referred to a "wait and see" attitude (*mimamoru*) before intervening in children's affairs. This was an approach they had learned informally from more experienced teachers rather than a method that had been explicitly taught at training college. They felt comfortable giving children time and space to resolve issues themselves, although they stressed that they would take action if events were becoming dangerous. This attitude will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight. There is also the reality that in the two centres observed there are far more teachers in a smaller physical space in New Zealand, compared to larger numbers of children in a vast area in Japan. This naturally impacts on the level of supervision teachers are able to achieve in each setting.

Although cultural constructions of adequate supervision clearly vary between New Zealand and Japan, the 'blame culture' discussed by Douglas (1992) is evident in both countries. For the Japanese teachers, one of the most surprising scenes in the video of the New Zealand centre involved two young boys at the carpentry table. Just as images of unsupervised children disappearing in tunnels evoked fears of litigious ramifications for the New Zealanders, the carpentry scene unearthed nervous feelings on the part of the Japanese viewers relating to teacher responsibility and parental pressure.

The use of real tools

Smith (1998:15) argues that in an educational context what constitutes a risk or risk-taking behaviour is an adult-constructed concept. The ability of a child to evaluate the riskiness of a situation depends on that child's experience of the world, as they move towards an adult interpretation of risk. As Smith points out, risk also has many positive connotations linked to characteristics such as independence and maturity. But how do adults in different cultures define which risks can lead to beneficial learning experiences for children, and which are just plain dangerous? An examination of the use of tools in New Zealand early childhood settings reveals that these interpretations are culturally constructed but that these viewpoints may be changed if the cultural context is also altered.

At Kaimai Kindergarten two four year old boys are standing at an outdoor wooden carpentry table which has a steel vice attached to one end (Video sequence 5). Behind them a selection of saws and hammers hang from pegs on the wall. One of the boys is hammering a nail vigorously into two pieces of wood that he has arranged into a cross shape. The sound echoes across the playground. The other little boy has been thoughtfully studying his wooden construction in the vice and decides to select a saw from the tool wall. As he returns he and his friend share a smile before they both get down to work. The boy hammering gives one final, loud bang before shouting jubilantly across to the teacher, "Look, I did it!" She asks him if he has nailed the wood to the table like last time, whereupon he quizzically picks up the construction, looks underneath and declares happily, "Nope, I did it". To his left, the other boy continues to saw at his creation despite the tool bending and twisting in his hands.

The Oka Kindergarten teachers were extremely surprised to see that children in New Zealand not only had free access to adults' tools but that the teacher did not appear to be paying attention to how they were being used. Several of the teachers asked if the equipment was real, and wondered if the centre had considered replacing the tools with replicas that had unsharpened saw teeth or blunted hammer prongs. Others had more ambivalent feelings:

Those saws and hammers look really dangerous, but I like the fact the children can use them. It used to be that way in Japan once too.

Tools as iconic symbols

Indeed, in the past, foreign researchers carrying out fieldwork in Japanese early childhood settings have reported being equally shocked by similar scenes of Japanese



Video sequence 5: Boys engaged in carpentry at Kaimai Kindergarten

children using hammers and nails or razor knives (Lewis 1995:115, Walsh 2002).

However, during a Christchurch focus group session, a young Japanese early childhood teacher, who is now living and working in New Zealand, identified the carpentry corner as a distinctly New Zealand phenomenon. She was also able to trace her changing attitude towards the tools as a metaphor for her assimilation into New Zealand culture and as a means of reassessing culturally based assumptions about risk and the competency of children.

You can see that you trust children with lots of things which wouldn't be happening in certain other countries. I mean, I'm from an Asian country and I wouldn't be expecting to see things like the carpentry table. When I first saw it in New Zealand, I was shocked because I couldn't believe children were using that [kind of equipment]. So it's amazing! I can see that now I'm working in a New Zealand setting. The more trust you give the children, the more capable they become. That's something I quite like.

As part of other focus group sessions around the country, teachers in several different regions mentioned the carpentry table as one of the long-standing symbols of early childhood education.

I think it was very much the sandpit, the outdoors, the water, you know, the carpentry were all very much traditional New Zealand early childhood things.

The carpentry, the real tools for the carpentry. I don't think you see that in many other places. It is an iconic [part of New Zealand kindergartens].

Nevertheless, it seems somewhat contradictory that New Zealand early childhood teachers trust children to handle saws, hammers and vices, all of which could result in a nasty injury if misused, yet they are not comfortable leaving children to discover how to negotiate high climbing equipment or to spend periods alone without adult supervision. What is it about these tools that lead them to be defended as such integral parts of the early childhood experience?

There is very little written about the appearance of the carpentry table in the New Zealand early childhood centre although the benefits of using tools to work with wood has been discussed in terms of improving motor skills, creating problem solving opportunities, promoting autonomy, increasing understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts, allowing creative expression and exploration, providing chances for dramatic play and promoting language skills (Sutherland 1998, McLeod 2005). A clue to the enduring value of the carpentry area may possibly lie in a comment made by a teacher in Dunedin who noted "The carpentry does appear to be rather gender specific

though”. Indeed while the area was used regularly by the girls at the centre, it was most often dominated by small boys during the time of my fieldwork. It was as one teacher put it “an incredibly traditional, Kiwi early childhood centre”.

Is it possible that the hammers and saws have maintained some kind of cultural value because they seem to link back to New Zealand’s pioneering, colonial past and an image of men as carving out a living from the untamed bush frontier? In his study of the Pākeha male, Phillips (1996:282) has discussed how the myth of the physically powerful male wielding a saw or hammer has persisted well into modern times. But, in reality by the 1950s this male stereotype was woefully inaccurate as most men were not engaged in this kind of work and no longer even had the capability or knowledge to carry it out. However when I asked a group of young children why they thought the carpentry area was important they told me that “those tools are the kinds of things Dads use every day” and “we need those tools to do our work”.

Several kindergarten teachers identified the carpentry area as “iconic”. When a Napier teacher was asked to explain why she felt it was important to have such a space available her response not only considered her perspective as a New Zealand participant in an early childhood setting but pondered how the scene would appear to Japanese viewers:

It is important to our kindergarten philosophy because it’s the notion of real tools and real work and trusting children to be able to manage it and clearly they did. I was thinking about Japanese observers, that they would probably be horrified.

Assessing the risks and the rewards of real tools

Under the strand and goal of exploration, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, makes the value of real tools explicit. Objects such as hammers, brooms, saucepans and calculators are seen as providing meaningful learning opportunities in a genuine context of play and work (Ministry of Education 1996:84-85). Considered within the framework of risk to the body, this notion of carrying out “real work” with “real tools” is not just unique to New Zealand. Gladwin (2008:69) gives the example of British early childhood workers visiting an early years setting in Denmark where they were amazed to see four year old children using saws and axes to chop wood. The Danish teachers saw nothing unusual at all in this activity. Lancy (2008:195) has pointed out that objects designed solely for the purpose for play, in other words toys, do not feature in traditional societies. Instead children are free to explore their village and

pick up objects which may possibly be dangerous. As societies became more complex toys began to be designed specifically for young children and with safety in mind.

In developing societies, children still continue to play with objects that they have found, including real tools. Anthropologists give the examples of young children playing with machetes (Howard 1970:35) and bush knives (Lepowsky 1987:79, Whiting 1941:25). Common also are the observations of children messing with fire (Gorer 1967) and deadly insects (Marshall 1972). On a recent trip to Niue⁹⁹ my three young sons, then aged nine, seven and four, were delighted to be handed machetes by the neighbours and asked to go and trim any low hanging palm fronds off the trees in the garden. The inference was obviously that they were quite capable of managing this task without causing any injury to themselves, which indeed they did. At the time, I couldn't help but think that this scenario would be highly unlikely in a New Zealand context despite a supposedly liberal approach to the use of real tools. Ethnographic accounts of village children running around with knives or burning sticks are in stark contrast to developed nations such as New Zealand and Japan where children are encouraged to collect benign play objects from nature and choose from stores packed full of safety-proofed toys.

In Japan, the need to protect children's bodies from physical harm has been tempered with the view that it is important for youngsters to handle objects such as knives in order to become self-reliant. But as the teachers viewing the video pointed out, such opportunities are becoming more and more infrequent in the early childhood environment because modern parents are increasingly anxious about exposing their children to any perceived risk.

A good example of this issue is given by Nakano (2005:70) who discusses the generation gap that became clear during a children's association (*kodomokai*) event. A dispute arose during a curry making session when a woman, who had missed the preliminary instructional meetings, gave a potato peeler to a child to use. This was in direct contrast to the instructions given by the head of the association who wanted children to have the chance to use knives and prepare the meal without interference from adults. The discussion which followed marked the younger mothers as overly protective of their offspring, while the older members lamented the loss of controlled risks for children. The Japanese teachers viewing the New Zealand video had similar lines of thinking to the older volunteers, but were open about the pressures they faced

⁹⁹ Niue is an island nation in the South Pacific situated approximately 2,400 kilometres northeast of New Zealand.

from parents to protect children from danger. They were incredulous that New Zealand parents had not complained to the centre about the carpentry table and that kindergarten management had not put a stop to the practice.

In contrast, the New Zealanders viewers did not see the practice as dangerous at all but rather as a good example of children being given the opportunity to be challenged and then to master a cognitive skill that had value and worth in the 'real' world:

I just wanted to say something about the carpentry. It was just great to see. You can tell that those boys have been doing carpentry for some time. They had developed a lot of skills and that was really good. They knew someone was keeping an eye out and they just got on with it and they got the hammer and they were very confident and that was good to see, although he expected praise for doing well. He sought it and he got it.

Only one New Zealand teacher from a childcare care centre commented that her workplace would insist on having a teacher present at the table if the children were using saws. If the area was not being used the equipment would be packed up as that particular centre had a policy of constant supervision at the carpentry table. She attributed this to the fact that children were often at the centre all day long as opposed to Kaimai Kindergarten which has sessions of only three hours each. In contrast to the strict policies of this teacher's childcare centre, Kaimai Kindergarten staff left the equipment out for the entire session and during which time the children were free to access it with or without a teacher being present. The general attitude to the carpentry table was neatly summed up by the teacher whose centre interestingly insisted on adult supervision throughout: "Kids don't hurt themselves generally and if they do it's a learning process".

"We don't encourage using weapons"

Many teachers and academics are calling for children's play environments to be more physically challenging and natural (Baxter 2008, Gill 2007). This section looks at how objects foraged from the environment come to be designated either safe or risky in children's play. As Douglas (1992) argues classifying objects or acts as risky depends on cultural context. The discussion stems from a scene in the New Zealand video involving seemingly innocuous content: boys, girls, a stick and a barrel. While such outdoor experiences provide children with an opportunity to interact with nature, their peers, as well as foraged and supplied objects, could they also be considered in the

context of risk? As the scene was screened to teachers in New Zealand and Japan, it became clear the content was the subject of interest and reflection on what constitutes safe play.

At Kaimai Kindergarten the camera zooms slowly to focus on a red painted 44 gallon drum standing on its end in the playground. Three small heads pop out of the drum one by one, two girls and a boy (Video sequence 6). The children turn their faces toward the viewer and ask for their photographs to be taken. Suddenly a young boy runs into the shot brandishing a long, twisted stick. “Slow motion!” he calls out as he swings the stick towards the bobbing heads and jabs it back and forwards just centimetres from the drum. The children inside shriek and yell before disappearing back inside the drum. The little boy crouches down beside the drum and when the children pop their heads back up again he leaps up waving the stick above, yelling “Boo!” The children inside the drum again squeal and giggle before scurrying back down. This scene is repeated until the boy marches off swinging the stick like a baton, but the children call him back using his name in a long melodious taunt. He comes back over and again crouches down and pokes the stick, at which point a teacher standing near the swings makes an inaudible comment to him. She does not come over to him, or stop what she is doing, or take the stick off him. The children in the drum continue to shout excitedly from deep inside their metal shelter while the boy with the stick looks unperturbed as he moves about the playground.

This scene provoked a great deal of dialogue on both the part of the Japanese audience and the New Zealand viewers from other centres. The Japanese teachers were surprised to see such a large stick lying around in the kindergarten environment which they had assumed had been “tidied” before the children arrived. But they were more astonished by the little boy’s ability to resist hitting the other children with the stick.

I was very surprised to see that the children in the drum didn’t get hit by the boy with the stick. In Japan he would have ended up hitting the others. It’s too dangerous so that’s why sticks like that have to be taken off them here. We’re currently having a lot of issues with fighting play (*tatakaugokko*) creating problems in primary schools and so we don’t encourage using weapons.

Douglas (1966) claims that concerns about risk are often projected onto particular social groups that are seen to require control or intervention. Portrayed as completely different from “self” this dangerous “other” can confuse boundaries, leading to fear and anxiety. For the Japanese viewers, a boy waving a stick can represent a blurring of the boundaries of the body and society, as the following section explains.



Video sequence 6: At Kaimai Kindergarten a boy brandishes a large stick at children inside a drum

Defining objects in play as safe or risky

For the Japanese viewers the stick represented a perceived threat even if it was not acted upon. One of the aims of socialisation at kindergarten level is to turn children into fully-functioning members of adult society later in life to avoid them becoming what Allison has termed “millennial monsters”. These youth criminals are notable for their “monstrous disruption of the normal” (Allison 2006:76) and in the past two decades Japan has been rocked by domestic terrorism and violence of the kind which was unheard of in the past. Modern Japanese society is facing rising levels of bullying, crime, and new social phenomena such as refusal to attend school (*tōkōkyōhi*), classroom collapse (*gakkyū hōkai*), high school girls dating older men for money (*enjo kōsai*) and teens who never leave their rooms (*hikikomori*). In many cases, these were young people identified by parents and teachers as “good kids” (*iiko*) but, for reasons unknown, they strayed from the expected path. While some have suggested this is a result of Japan’s pressurised academic system, many have remained bewildered at this new internal threat.

In the eyes of the Japanese viewers allowing a small child to run around the playground unchecked with a large stick and in the full view of a teacher and his peers represented risky practice (Douglas 1966). It also seemed to encourage and fuel a child’s latent potential for violence which could possibly be unleashed given the right conditions. In the United States, Louv (2005:27-29) has discussed how children’s attempts to interact with nature by building forts, playing with sticks and damming streams have been criminalised due to the perceived risks involved.

Viewers from the New Zealand focus groups saw the scene somewhat differently. Although several groups recognised the potential for danger, they ultimately felt that the positive learning and interactive experiences for the children outweighed any risks that might be present, as indicated by the following discussion by a group of Nelson teachers:

When we are talking about that stick, we are too quick to take things like that from children that can represent something really important in their play because we think it’s too dangerous. That was quite a good example of that. We might have whisked it away because of the danger, but they knew their children and they probably knew what was going on with that child involved.

There was an over-riding sense of playfulness rather than fear.

I mean you could get carried away. You could feel the excitement, “Come on, come on” ... the squealing, you could just feel it!

That’s right, and you could see how excited he was!

And if you had taken that stick away what would have happened to that sort of lovely play, and playfulness?

And obviously, that stick kind of belongs there doesn’t it? Sticks that we would find would be ones that fell off the tree, and it would end up in the rubbish bin which is more dangerous. It’s nice to have that sort of environment.

These positive views are supported by research such as that conducted in Australia by Malone and Tranter (2003) who found that natural school grounds encouraged dramatic and creative play which led to more egalitarian interactions between girls and boys. Gladwin (2008:71) has suggested three reasons why children need to experience risk during play. First of all, children are likely to become practically and emotionally disadvantaged if they are not challenged by risks. Secondly, experiencing risk exposes children to their own mortality. Finally, risk taking is valuable for creating and maintaining social networks and group solidarity. From the New Zealand teachers’ point of the view, the drum scene is a good example of children using risk to achieve positive outcomes in the three areas mentioned above. Their play also incorporated philosophies encouraged by the curriculum Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education 1996) such as belonging (knowing the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour), contribution (cooperative dramatic play), communication (using chants and language skills for amusement) and exploration (making sense of the natural world).

Risk as meaningful

The scene also brought up issues about the risks teachers are prepared to take in order to allow children to have a meaningful experience at kindergarten. For some of the New Zealand focus groups the nonchalant attitude of the teacher symbolised both a liberal approach to control and an obvious depth of knowledge regarding the children’s personalities and subsequent actions. Not all of the viewers were comfortable with that level of risk within their own teaching practice, but there was general admiration of the cohesive staff attitude in the video. A group of early childhood teachers in Nelson analysed the scene in this way:

I was just surprised that that boy was allowed to run around with that big stick. That stick was pretty big!

With the teacher being so close, she wasn't checking, she just watched him.

Yeah, I wondered where that was headed.

I thought it was quite good in way, because it showed that they really knew their children and they probably knew it was part of the game and maybe sometimes we just step in too quickly and stop it.

At a focus group session with kindergarten teachers in Napier, a similar approach to deconstructing the video clip could be seen. Ultimately the group did not view the little boy's actions as risky due to its identifiable pattern and the response of the teacher:

That boy with the stick terrorising the girls in the barrel, well, that was uniquely a Kiwi sort of a scene, I think.

The girls were teasing the boys!

You could recognise that behaviour. It was very recognisable: small boys terrorising girls with sticks. It was very recognisable and that little interplay of "Oh, I'm so scared, oh, oh" and then he was coming back terrorising them again. It was dramatic play wasn't it as well as quite aggressive and I was watching at what point the teacher would intervene and that's why I would say [that kindergarten has] a very liberal approach. She didn't really intervene really at all whereas probably I would have.

She may have known that child though and been watching from a distance and known him because he didn't actually do anything too bad with the stick, did he? I was wondering if it was going to [hit someone] but it didn't.

He didn't hit the drum. He was playing!

We didn't ever see him hit the side of the barrel or try and poke them or anything like that.

Exactly! It was four year old flirting!

While these teachers acknowledged that the boy's actions had the potential to be dangerous, the situation instead became a good example of supervision through the way that the game was skillfully monitored and watched by the teacher in charge. The New Zealand viewers of the video articulated that a case-by-case strategy of risk assessment in the outdoor area seemed to operate at the centre in the video. This was dependent on individual children's temperaments and actions as well the teacher's knowledge of

previous interactions between the various members of the group. It was seen as positive that the children had the freedom to explore and experiment with natural objects without fear of being reprimanded due to safety concerns.

Perceptions of risk and the body

This chapter has discussed five issues as a means of illuminating differing perceptions of risk in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood sector: the playground, creation of boundaries, teacher supervision, the use of real tools, and definitions of safe objects for play. The idea that risk is culturally constructed is not a new one (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982, Rayner 1992) but there has been little application of this paradigm to cross-national early childhood settings. In wider terms, studies of risk perception carried out in New Zealand and Japan have found that concerns vary. These perceptions ultimately inform health and safety policy in the nation's early childhood centres.

Studies show that modern Japanese are more likely to be concerned by the kinds of manufactured risks identified by Giddens (2003) than the external natural risks which preoccupied previous generations.¹⁰⁰ A study of risk perceptions in Japan and the United States found that out of 30 activities, substances and technologies, respondents in both countries rated the fear of nuclear waste disposal, nuclear accidents and nuclear war the highest (Hinman et al. 1993).¹⁰¹ Yet research has also shown that the Japanese appear more fatalistic about risk and the amount of control they might be able to exert (Kitayama et al. 1996). New Zealanders seem more preoccupied with internal risk over which they believe to have a level of control. A study of New Zealand and German perception of risks found that New Zealanders rated smoking and overeating highest in terms of personal risk exposure, but saw the benefits of taking part in extreme sports as outweighing the dangers (Rohrmann 1996).

These perceptions of risk are to some extent reflected in the early childhood curriculum as well as the health and safety policies of each country. The Japanese curriculum notes that in order to enhance their understanding of safety, children should acquire the ability to move their bodies in an agile manner through vigorous play, and learn about dangerous places and things. Kindergartens should also develop in children the convention of traffic safety, while conducting drills which promote appropriate

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that contemporary life has become more perilous.

¹⁰¹ In the case of Japan, this is a salient fear which, sadly, has been realised in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear tragedy in 2011.

action during catastrophe (Ministry of Education Science Sports Culture and Technology 2008).

This emphasis on children experiencing a certain degree of risk themselves, and taking a somewhat fatalistic attitude to the outcome, can be seen in the high slides and metal jungle gyms, as well as the freedom given to explore without structural boundaries or teacher supervision. Peer support and control also work to ensure children's physical and emotional safety (Lewis 1995:114). There is also an emphasis on safely negotiating traffic which is especially relevant to Japan's high-density urban areas and on responses to disasters which are a legitimate concern in a highly developed, natural disaster-prone nation such as Japan. Early childhood centres across Japan carry out regular drills to familiarise children with the appropriate response to earthquakes and fire.

In the New Zealand context the emphasis is somewhat different. In a detailed examination of health and safety issues requiring attention at New Zealand kindergartens, ERO¹⁰² "identified inadequate fencing, inadequate fall surfaces, excessive fall distances from some play equipment, lack of appropriate facilities for cleaning and changing soiled or sick children, storage that posed an earthquake hazard and areas which were difficult to supervise with the number of adults present" (ERO 2000:37). It is interesting to note that the first three are not addressed at all as safety issues in the Japanese early childhood sector. In fact, Lewis (1995:115) recalls an anecdote about Japanese friends who rejected a childcare centre precisely on the grounds that it had safety gates which they saw as confining children like animals. An in-home carer for my young son in rural Hokkaido refused to use a fire guard for the constantly burning kerosene stove for similar reasons despite having a house full of toddlers. "Young children will naturally learn to stay away from dangerous things" she told me at the time.

Being free to roam uneven, natural grounds and the experience of dealing with falls from play equipment are normal occurrences in the Japanese early childhood environment. Areas are not designated difficult to supervise as Japanese children are expected to take greater responsibility for their own well-being than New Zealand

¹⁰² ERO (Education Review Office) reviews schools and early childhood education services, and publishes national reports on current education practice. See www.ero.govt.nz for more information.

children who generally play under the watchful eye of a teacher. The earthquake hazard may be the only safety issue which is common to both countries.

As Douglas and Wildavsky (1982:14) have pointed out, every culture has a unique set of shared values and social institutions that support and maintain it. These values and institutions are inherently biased towards accentuating particular risks and minimising others. In the case of New Zealand and Japanese attitudes towards risk embodiment, the entanglement of the cultural and the political can be clearly seen in the expression of some of those values in documents issued by the state. In other instances, what constitutes risky or dangerous practice is more implicit. Cross-cultural viewing of the video revealed that Japanese scenes of child nudity and tactile interactions between teachers and children provoked strong reactions in New Zealand while Japanese viewers were puzzled by New Zealand teachers' reluctance to interact with children in a more physical manner. With links to the risk discourse, but worthy of a discussion in its own right, the following chapter examines the challenges to order posed by children's bodies in the early childhood environment.



Figure 20: Boys at Kaimai Kindergarten challenge themselves on a beam atop safety surfacing

Chapter 8: The Body as a Site of Discipline

*[Japanese children are] expected to be loud and wild – their spirit is not to be quashed.
(Walsh 2004:105)*

Excessive noise of the type found in [New Zealand] early childhood education centres is now well recognized as having major consequences on the health and learning of young children. (McLaren 2005:9)

The previous chapters have discussed the ways in which children's bodies reflect the structures of the centres and the communities in which they are based. In the same way, how teachers try to maintain order, and the ways in which children subvert or submit to these measures, provides an interesting lens through which to gain an insight into implicit practices in the early childhood arena. From birth, the bodies of children are subject to the civilising controls of adults (Elias 2000). Foucault (1995) has focussed on the body as a site of discipline, exposing the civilising power of modern institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools. According to Foucault, the foundations for change in society were laid during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. During this period, new mechanisms of power began to emerge "whose operation [was] not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that [were] employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus" (Foucault 1981:89). The body is rendered docile through the micro-physics of bio-power and the normalisation of rational control. Through a process of assessment, coordination and ultimately, surveillance, emerges the "disciplinary individual" who has been created by these techniques of power (Foucault 1995:227).

This chapter argues that the ways in which these techniques of power operate to control and regulate children's bodies is culturally mediated. The chapter is divided into three points for discussion. The first section looks at how noisy environments are not only regarded as disorderly, they are seen as detrimental to children's learning in New Zealand. This view contrasts with both research and teacher opinion in Japan which does not regard noise as impinging on a positive early childhood experience for children. The second section discusses notions of conflict and confrontation through an analysis of the kinds of behaviour deemed inappropriate in each context and the approaches used to manage it. Finally, an examination is made of the ways time and space are managed

to create the kind of environment favoured by the early childhood sector in New Zealand and Japan.

Deconstructing noise

Holliday and Hassard (2001:9) argue that the Foucauldian disciplined and docile body is accorded high status in Western culture. The idea of the mind as symbolically significant, rather than the body, stems from the writings of Descartes which have strongly influenced Western philosophy. Connected intimately with the mind, the disciplined body can therefore subdue bodily excesses. Within this framework, strong minds are manifest in disciplined bodies. The following discussion on the aversion to noise, noted in the New Zealand context, appears to normalise the Cartesian aspirations for a disciplined body under the control of the mind. In contrast to the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy, Japanese philosophy is regarded as constructing the whole being as a holistic entity (Picone 1989:469). The Japanese approach to children's noise can be understood through the terms *genki* (lively) and *kodomo-rashi* (childlike) which do not carry a pejorative meaning. Rather, noise is intrinsically linked to childhood. The presence or absence of noise can, therefore, be seen as symptomatic of the normalising process at work (Foucault 1995). In New Zealand, the absence of noise becomes a tool for reproducing the social order. In Japan, the presence of noise serves the same purpose.

As the video of the Japanese kindergarten wound to a close following its screening to Kaimai Kindergarten teachers, the viewers commented excitedly about the riotous scenes interspersed with periods of controlled calm. Putting themselves in the position of the Japanese staff, the New Zealanders found it hard to believe that either the teachers could be effective or that the children would be able to learn. At the crux of their discussions was the constant noise that reverberated across the centre during periods of free play, singing and group activities:

It's the noise that got me!

It's not just little voices. It's the fact that I didn't realise until I watched the video that it's like a huge great hall and it's got classrooms off this hallway and the noise must be just be [incredible]! I was watching something else in this class and you can hear this other class down the hall. God, I would go mad!

For example, it is quiet here but it's the next door classrooms making noise. If I was a teacher here I'd be wanting to go "Can you just be quiet!"

The New Zealand teachers felt that the Japanese kindergarten's environment obviously contributed to excessive noise levels with its wooden floors and open plan classrooms, in contrast with their own centre's thick carpet and sound proofed walls. They also noted that the Japanese teacher seemed to be encouraging the children to raise their voices even further through her praise of the class's exuberant singing. They felt this act to be completely counter to achieving a harmonious result:

It's like they are being promoted to yell throughout the song. They're not singing.

That's the other thing. She tells them, if I remember rightly, to do it loud and we tell the children here to sing. We actually tell them that they all need to sing but she almost encourages them to shout it and we would stop the song if they were shouting. There's a difference between singing and putting a bit of effort into the song and screaming which is what I saw some of the children do.

Noise as counterproductive

But why were these teachers so disturbed by noise levels that Japanese viewers described as unexceptional? It would seem that noise in Japanese centres is counter to New Zealand expectations that children's bodies be civilised (Elias 2000) or made docile (Foucault 1995). Research supports the view that excessive noise is inappropriate in New Zealand settings such as the home and the classroom (McLaren 2008, Ministry of Education 2011, Ritchie and Ritchie 1997). In their portrait of an "ordinary mother" in the 1960s, Ritchie and Ritchie (1970:95) found there was little tolerance for spiritedness in the house. Speaking with a woman they call Sheila they asked "How about making noise in the house – how much of that do you allow?" Sheila replies, "Less than most people, believe me. You get three children of two stone¹⁰³ each flinging themselves around, it's too much". Although the authors note that "noise and 'charging about' is curbed in the house", Sheila is described by the Ritchies (1970:107) as "a little more relaxed" than most of the mothers they spoke with. When interviewing New Zealand mothers of four-year olds, Ritchie and Ritchie (1997) found that noisy behaviour was treated with disapproval. "High spirits, excited squeals, verbal expressions of anger or injustice, loud laughter frequently earned parental rebuke" (Ritchie and Ritchie 1997:37). This concern with noise and general disorder has become

¹⁰³ At the time of the Ritchie's research, New Zealand was still using the imperial measurement system. Two stone in weight equates to approximately twelve and a half kilos.

more pronounced in recent decades as expectations for groomed homes have risen (Eyles-Bennett and Baker-Shreeve 2007, Ritchie and Ritchie 1997:86).

The detrimental effects of noisy surroundings on the health and development of young children in New Zealand has been the focus of research by McLaren (2005) who cites a number of studies linking children's poor performance to noisy learning environments (Bronzaft and McCarthy 1975, Bronzaft 1981, Hambrick-Dixon 1985, Maxwell and Evans 2000). While McLaren suggests that all children are at risk of impaired learning in a noisy environment, he argues that most affected are children with sensory integration dysfunction. McLaren (2005:40) found that many of the centres in his study lacked quiet spaces, making it an issue of frustration and inadequate planning for teachers.¹⁰⁴ A combination of revisions to the NZ Education (Early Childhood) Regulations 1998 and McLaren's study, has resulted in a new clause being added to the draft criteria which specifically refers to the potential damage of noise and seeks to minimise it (McLaren 2008:13). To assist with this aim, a new piece of equipment known as the Safe Sound Indicator has begun to be marketed to early childhood professionals. The purpose of the Indicator is to monitor noise levels in settings such as the early childhood centre. Designed to look like a traffic light, the monitor flashes from green to yellow and finally to red as noise escalates above acceptable thresholds.

New Zealand teachers interviewed as part of this study overwhelmingly supported the view that noise is not only an obstacle to children's learning, it has the potential to do great damage to young ears. They also acknowledged that the issue has recently gained greater attention in the early childhood sector. However, teachers seemed to be less united on exactly why noise is so undesirable. In Napier, teachers commented that:

There was a bit of squealing outside, you know, and we stop the squealing.

We are constantly trying to limit noise. *Why?*

Because it damages their ears and it is just ... it increases. You know, noise makes more noise, doesn't it?

And there are children that don't like the noise in their environment. The quiet, little ones deserve just as much right to play as those who like the noisy, boisterous play.

¹⁰⁴ 18% of children in sessional centres, and 43% in all day centres are being exposed to sound levels higher than the maximum specified for adults in the workplace (McLaren 2008:13).

At Kaimai Kindergarten, teachers were less concerned with the rights of children's access to a quiet play area, but instead directed their attention to the negative impression noisy spaces conveyed and its potential to impede learning:

Noise is a measure of lack of control here.

I think noise goes with size, group size and where is the learning when there's a whole lot of noise? How does a child relax?"

So what do these comments tell us about the unacceptable nature of noisy early childhood environments in New Zealand? In the first instance, noise links to discourses which depict the child in need of protection from damaging forces. High levels of noise are viewed as damaging to the body and a source of stress for both children and adults. In fact, government criteria for early childhood centres describe noise as a potential health and safety hazard (Ministry of Education 2011).

In the minds of the teachers, noise also symbolises a lack of control. Children are not seen to be respecting the authority of teaching staff if they are running about the centre, shrieking and yelling. This kind of behaviour also does not display respect to other children at the centre. Then there is the issue of children's rights which call for all members of the centre to have equal access to play and learning opportunities (Te One 2005). Teachers admitted that it was challenging to balance the rights of the individual with those of others. However, most expressed the belief that children who wished to play in a quiet space needed to be supported. In centres which are mainly of open plan design this is difficult unless high noise levels are curbed. Children are often encouraged to conduct noisy activities outside which leaves the indoor area available for quieter activities. But as teachers in both this study and McLaren's (2008) pointed out, this is not necessarily an option when the weather turns nasty. Teachers also linked large class sizes with noisy settings and a subsequent lack of learning opportunities.¹⁰⁵

Noise as organic

The views expressed by the New Zealand teachers resemble those of American teachers interviewed as part of Fujita and Sano's (1988) comparative study of early

¹⁰⁵ While in the New Zealand early childhood context, scholars such as Smith (et al. 1989, 1999) suggest that small groups of around fourteen children are ideal in order to meet quality standards, Tobin (1992:32) has argued that Japan's large class sizes are a deliberate strategy to promote a group ethos and peer interactions. Research for my Masters (Burke 2007) found that most Japanese teachers believe one teacher to twenty children to be the optimal size group.

childhood settings in the United States and Japan. The American teachers found the Japanese centre noisy and chaotic, which they attributed to lack of teacher control within the structure of large classrooms. However, New Zealand and American opinions surrounding noise and disorder contrast with the reality of the Japanese early childhood context which is punctuated by high levels of noise and boisterous classes. In fact, many anthropologists (Hendry 1986, Lewis 1995, Peak 1991, Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989) look at a schedule dominated by free play, little apparent disciplinary action by teachers, and consequently deafening noise levels as a defining feature of Japanese early childhood centres. But rather than seeing disorder and noise as detrimental to children's development and learning as New Zealand teachers might, Japanese teachers can see the benefits of periods of unstructured, noisy chaos. A kindergarten teacher in Tokyo explained that while it is not desirable for children to interact in a constant state of white noise, during times such as the lengthy free play periods lively verbal or physical exchanges are not curtailed by the staff.

Of course, play-time is very noisy. But in the classroom with 54 children, 60 children, if they use loud voices with each other they may start to develop hearing problems. So we point this out to them so they can understand. But during play-time it's fine. During play-time nobody says "ssh" in Japan. So you can be very, very noisy, and that's fine.

Tobin (1987:547) has specifically identified lower expectations for children's noise levels and rowdy behaviour as one of several pedagogical strategies that teachers use to socialise children towards the goal of *shūdan seikatsu*. Ben-Ari (2008:256) has stated that children's "vibrancy and liveliness often ends up in noisy, messy, and frenzied activity". Like others before him he suggests that the chaotic, disordered nature of Japanese centres actually contributes to children's development. He argues that the "mischief" such as name-calling, obscenity and irony which is common in Japanese centres actually serves to conceptualise how the socialisation of self occurs. Through critical play children learn to develop "role distance" or an ability to distance oneself from structured social situations. Ben-Ari suggests that this capacity for detachment is necessary for children, and later adults, to interact successfully in group-oriented Japanese society. LeVine and White (2003:18) note that primary school classrooms are just as chaotic as kindergartens, which might lead visitors to wonder who is in control of the room. They point out that teachers are not concerned by the noise which is often indicative of children excitedly debating over the content of the lessons. They even suggest that a noisy classroom may be seen as a measure of success. Walsh (2004:99)

discovered that teachers saw the raucous scenes as encouraging children to be *genki*, the highly valued quality which denotes strength, physicality, health and vitality.

In my study too, the word *genki* often came up during the course of the day at Oka Kindergarten, and especially during morning greetings and singing such as the exuberant episode that was so roundly criticised by the New Zealand teachers at the beginning of this chapter. Yet most of the Japanese viewers at focus groups felt the noise levels were appropriate, even admirable, as this comment from Hokkaido suggests:

The children all used really, loud clear voices throughout that whole session. They were really using their voices.

However, a kindergarten teacher in Tokyo reflected that although the Japanese teacher in the video often called on children to use their *genki* (lively) voice, she personally encouraged children to use their beautiful voices (*kirei na koe*) instead which produced more gentle results. While individual teachers may take steps to reduce their contribution to the noise levels, children who run about the Japanese centre shrieking and yelling are not regarded as problematic but seen as expressing energy and enthusiasm conducive with being a child. Japanese teachers at both the centre where fieldwork took place and at the focus groups regularly used the word *kodomo-rashi* (childlike) to describe this kind of behaviour. Scholars have also mentioned the positive connotations of this term when linked to the noisy behaviour of children (Peak 1991:78).

Active, boisterous behaviour is even believed to contribute to strength of character in later years. Japanese teachers cheerfully tolerate high levels of noise and activity, and avoid direct use of their authority to discipline individual children, preferring instead to ignore inappropriate behaviour or to encourage the class to govern their own actions. This is in contrast to views expressed in New Zealand which supported adult intervention as part of conflict resolution, especially during disputes of a physical nature. Teacher intervention in disputes is not only seen as a feature of a quality programme, it is held up as an opportunity to scaffold children's learning and social development. The following section discusses how the video screenings and focus groups in each country revealed differing perceptions of what constitutes social disorder in the early childhood setting, as well as the accepted means of dealing with children's inappropriate behaviour.

Conflict and confrontation

Conflict and confrontation are a normal part of the interactions between children in early childhood settings, just as they are regular features in the lives of adults. This section discusses how teachers react to disturbances to routine and touches on the different methods of social control and conflict resolution normalised in each setting. It is this normalising gaze which informs how individuals are classified, judged and punished (Foucault 1995:184). At the New Zealand centre there are several conflicts which occur during the course of the video. In one of them, the beginnings of a dispute can be heard in the distance with first one child, then a group, chanting for another child to go away. Out of shot, the teacher states “Stop! What’s going on here?” The camera fixes on Ben who is sitting on the couch clutching a toy. Other children begin to drift over towards the couch where the teacher has established that Ben has taken a toy off another child whom she believes to be Jake. Although the teacher speaks calmly to Ben to relinquish the toy, he refuses to cooperate and as she reaches in to take it, Ben lashes out and kicks her. The teacher moves swiftly to contain the flailing limbs and awkwardly lifts Ben off the couch to the floor. She wraps her arms around him and says firmly “Stop. I want you to stop”. Ben wriggles free from her grasp and throws the toy across the room, shouting “I’m giving it to Jake”. The teacher asks him, “Are you going to give it to Jake? Listen, this is what I want you to do. When Jake is around, you use your words”. Another little girl, Anna, comes over and retrieves the toy off the floor. The teacher looks up and asks, “Oh, is it yours, Anna?” When Anna replies in the affirmative the teacher turns her attention back to Ben, saying “You need to calm down. Do you want some time out by yourself? OK?” Ben pushes free and climbs defiantly back on the couch.

At an American centre, Tobin et al. (1989:166) have described a similar scene where the teacher intervenes in a dispute in order to identify the innocent and guilty parties, and to administer appropriate punishment. Tobin et al. see this approach as linked to American views of fairness and justice. Just as adults in the society regularly deal with litigation and arbitration, American children are learning to resolve conflict in the same way. In New Zealand too, there is a strong sense of fairness but also a desire for equity. Throughout the fieldwork early childhood staff regularly discussed egalitarian beliefs about children’s access to resources and play opportunities. These discussions were framed within the wider historical context of New Zealand society which scholars have claimed to be almost “classless” in comparison to the stratified

British society that many immigrants left from during the colonial period (Sinclair 2000). Although class issues in New Zealand have come under closer scrutiny in recent decades, there remains an underlying idealism about living in an egalitarian society despite the reality that suggests otherwise (Black 2005, Howland 2002:11).

Rights discourses in New Zealand

New Zealand teachers have also been influenced by rights-based discourses which lead them to believe that all children are entitled to a relatively harmonious play and learning space. This contrasts with the Japanese context where children are unfamiliar with the notion of rights, and take few opportunities to exercise them (Goodman 1996, Kita 2008). In New Zealand support for rights-based discourses can be seen in the words of the early childhood curriculum which states that children's "rights to personal dignity, to equitable opportunities for participation, to protection from physical, mental, or emotional abuse and injury, and to opportunities for rest and leisure must be safeguarded" (Ministry of Education 1996:40). A strong belief in children's rights was also evident in comments made by focus group participants:

There was that girl walking over the plank and the boys just pushed her off and then she was just gone. She wasn't encouraged to talk to them about how she didn't like that because she has a right to play. Even if she gets hurt, she still has a right to play and it was like no one was helping her to say "you have a right to play, so play".

Fighting is not encouraged at Kaimai Kindergarten, and when conflict does occur, resolution is most often achieved through verbal exchanges between the children or with the teacher acting as a mediator. Children are encouraged to verbally negotiate resolutions to disputes and teachers are regarded as important role models through the provision of appropriate language. They are also expected to offer help if children appear to need assistance. Elias (2005) argues that intervention in conflict is a mark of civilisation. Within this framework, "every form of physical violence not licenced by the state calls for an intervention of state authorities" (Elias 2005:97). Elias's argument is challenged by the Japanese early childhood context, where teachers frequently elect not to intervene in conflict, but to take a more organic approach to violence, as discussed later in this chapter.

Teachers at the New Zealand centre were specific about the ways in which verbal communication was vital to the development of young children in their care. Not only did they see their roles as modeling appropriate communicative behaviour, but as

providing positive examples for children to practically implement during their interactions within the centre:

It's helping children articulate and there are certain times when they can't articulate those deep feelings of conflict, if you like. So if a child is just working with paint, or playdough or paper and glue they know what they are doing. You don't need to extend or sit next to them, you can just leave them alone but in a situation where [children are fighting] that's where they need to learn that conflict stuff.

I think it's also to reinforce, to make sure they are being heard, as in to acknowledge that they have something important to say and it's important that the other person listens to them and to give them that confidence and to clarify it for the other person.

Teachers did not just see themselves as providing a model for children's communicative competency, but also felt responsible for predicting and minimising conflict in the early childhood setting, as this Wellington teacher explains:

I think pre-empting issues is a big part of a teacher's role. If you see something is going to be a problem, you don't have just one bike because you know it's going to cause conflict unless it's there for a purpose like learning to take turns. I think a big part of the whole conflict thing is minimising reasons the children will have conflict and then from there figuring out how to deal with it. I think because children are developing their social skills it is important in early childhood to give them the opportunities to learn how to express themselves and that's generally done verbally. That's how you communicate.

The curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education 1996:63) recommends that "the environment and routines are planned to minimise confrontation and conflict, for instance, from crowding and queuing". It also asks teachers to reflect on how much importance should be placed on sharing as opposed to ensuring there are enough resources to prevent conflict. Te Whāriki advises that all children have an opportunity to access the equipment and if there are discrepancies teachers should mediate in those conflicts (Ministry of Education 1996:70-71). McLaren (2005:40) has argued that an inability to communicate effectively verbally due to impediments such as a noisy environment often leads children to resort to physical force or other non-verbal means of communication to resolve conflicts. Through these texts it becomes implicitly clear that physical conflict is seen as undesirable behaviour which is not supported in the New Zealand early childhood arena.

The notion that conflict between young children is to be avoided has gained currency in a world consumed by risk analysis as discussed in the previous chapter.

Guldberg (2009:93-99) argues that as modern Western society has increasingly moved to protect children within a safety-first culture, young people have become unable to place minor altercations in perspective or to resolve their own conflicts. Rather than being encouraged to address problems within their peer groups, contemporary children are taught to seek assistance from teachers and adults. In New Zealand, there is a hesitancy to allow conflicts to escalate, especially if they are of a physical nature. But in Japan, it seems that disorder can provide the chance for children to learn important social lessons without the intervention of adults.



Figure 21: At Kaimai Kindergarten a teacher mediates in a conflict in the sandpit

The lessons of conflict

At Oka Kindergarten, there were also regular skirmishes that broke out during the course of my fieldwork. However, they were of quite a different nature to the New Zealand conflict, and resolved in another manner. In one of these episodes, Joji, a four year old boy, is milling about the washbasin near a group of children when Kota suddenly comes across and starts to push him. Joji pushes back, then as Kota begins to twist his opponent's shirt up around his neck, Joji kicks Kota hard in the shins. Throughout the altercation they don't appear to exchange words. After receiving another firm kick from Joji, Kota turns abruptly and rushes back to his desk where he sits with his head in his hands. Joji walks across and places his hand on Kota's arm,

saying “I’m sorry” (*gomen ne*). Kota glances up to give Joji a disdainful look and puts his head back down again. Joji tries one more time then drifts off back to where the other children are playing. Eventually, Kota also rejoins the group without expressing any residual malice. At the locus of this confrontation is the child’s body.

The first thing that struck Kaimai Kindergarten teachers about this scene was the absence of the Japanese teacher during the conflict. With a large class of thirty three children to manage, the teacher was still outside finishing a post-assembly ritual which involved quizzing each child individually. She had instructed the children to independently return to the classroom as each one completed the task. The New Zealand viewers were also perturbed by the sudden and seemingly unprovoked nature of the attack and the way that hitting seemed to be the first course of action rather than a last resort. However, upon viewing the video the Japanese teacher was relaxed about the images before her, commenting that those two boys seemed to have a particular aversion to each other that would take time to resolve. She was concerned neither about the physical contact between the boys nor her supposedly neglectful supervision as identified by the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers.

In the original PS3C study, Tobin et al. (1989) also found that similar scenes of violence and unruly behaviour between Japanese children were shocking to American and Chinese viewers. However, a Japanese principal explained that fighting, especially among boys, served an important developmental purpose. He commented that: “If there were no fights among four-year-old children, that would be a real problem. We don’t encourage children to fight, but children need to fight when they are young if they are to develop into complete human beings. When children are preschool age they naturally fight if given the chance, and it is by fighting and experiencing what it feels like to hit someone and hurt them and to be hit and be hurt that they learn to control this urge to fight, that they learn the dangers of fighting and get it out of their system” (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:33). Children who provoke fights are seen by Japanese teachers as giving other children a valuable opportunity to practice resolving conflicts themselves, and to assist in mediating disagreements between their classmates. Teachers may even employ more direct strategies in order to provoke conflict, such as putting out fewer toys or crayons than there are children, forcing them to learn to cooperate and share the limited resources (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ While this strategy may still be employed in relatively traditional centres, such as the kindergarten where my fieldwork took place, there are signs that approaches to conflict are changing as Japanese

Learning communicative competency

Viewing the New Zealand video, the Oka Kindergarten teachers identified verbal communication as a skill that appeared to them to be both encouraged and developed within the New Zealand early childhood setting. A number of scholars have discussed the Western propensity to prioritise verbal communication over non-verbal methods as well as the problems that may occur when diverse cultural groups encounter this expectation (Lancy 2008:186, Rogoff et al. 1988, Tough 1977:7). Farquhar and Flear (2007:38) point out that New Zealand teachers not only expect children to be competent in communicating when entering the early childhood education environment, they place stress on verbal interactions.

Informal sources support the notion that language and verbal communication are given prominence in New Zealand. A website dedicated to informing parents about raising children in New Zealand had this to say about what to expect at kindergarten: “Children are encouraged to use language to communicate. They are taught to let others know how they are feeling and what their needs are by talking to them. The expression “Use your words” will be commonly heard – especially when encouraging youngsters not to hit or get frustrated. Your child will also be taught to stand up for themselves verbally, by learning phrases such as “Stop it, I don’t like it” (“Kindergarten” 2007). Indeed, during the New Zealand video the phrase “use your words” occurred several times as teachers dealt with conflict situations or tried to encourage children to express how they were feeling. The very fact that “use your words” cannot be easily translated into Japanese speaks volumes about the preferred style of communication in each country.

Rather than seeing their role as modelling oral competency and appropriate responses, Japanese parents and teachers work on children’s ability to implicitly interpret what is going on. Clancy (2008:165) notes that verbal expression, and those who rely on it, are seen negatively in Japanese culture to the extent that verbosity is linked to insincerity and shallowness of character. When verbal communication does occur, it is often ambiguous and indirect. Clancy identifies the way in which Japanese communicate as a point of difference compared to other cultures. In Japan, the emphasis is on the listener to correctly interpret the nuances of speech, rather than on the speaker

parents become more anxious about their shrinking numbers of offspring. At an elite private Japanese childcare centre in Hokkaido, the principal did not condone the way the teacher handled the boys’ squabble, noting that she preferred to reconstruct the event so that children could understand the feelings of all involved.

to make clear his or her point. This contrasts with Western patterns of expression where speakers are urged to effectively clarify their thoughts (Reddy 1979). Upwardly mobile parents recognise that oral fluency is linked to future success in school where children will be expected to analyse, explain, discuss, report and respond to testing (Martini 1995). With this aim in mind, Western parents are not only tolerant of children's interruptions to adult conversations, they expect even very young children to form opinions and express them (Portes et al. 1988).

Developing empathy

Clancy (2008:177) found that Japanese mothers spend a great deal of time and effort ensuring that their children develop the skill of empathy. In the same way, Japanese teachers appeal to children's emotions by highlighting the feelings of all involved in the conflict, rather than assuming an authoritarian role or identifying a perpetrator. Teachers make more use of peer-group approval and condemnation and less of their own positive or negative opinions to influence children's behaviour (Tobin 1987:547). Fujita and Sano (1988:84) also found that Japanese teachers preferred to demonstrate appropriate behaviour or activities rather than explain it as American teachers were prone to do. This thinking extended to disciplining children for fighting. While the American teachers liked to discuss the issue and suggest rules prior to disputes breaking out, the Japanese teachers were inclined to wait for a fight to occur to take action.

During my fieldwork, the Oka teachers also indicated that they dealt with fighting by taking a "wait and see" approach or *mimamoru* in Japanese. Instead of intervening immediately in children's disputes, they preferred to allow the conflict to play out unless children were in danger of becoming physically injured. Tobin et al. (2009:133) have identified this as a common strategy which is part of a larger pedagogical approach known as *machi no hoiku* or "caring for children by waiting". Although this strategy does not feature in either the curriculum or as part of teacher training programmes, it is accepted by early childhood teachers as valuable for children's social development. Teachers also recognise that it is not an easy strategy to implement which is why it takes several years of practical experience before teachers can become comfortable with the levels of self-control required to allow children's fights to continue uninterrupted. As Tobin et al. have pointed out, this can look like neglect or passivity to the outsider but is in fact a deliberate strategy.

In Japan, hitting is treated as relatively inconsequential by teachers who will generally ignore fights and intervene only if the incident has gone on for a protracted length of time. As Peak (1989:108) explains, “Japanese teachers do not consider hitting a ‘crime’ or a demonstration of anti-social tendencies. Rather, it indicates social immaturity and frustration at an inability to verbalize one’s feelings”. Play fighting or *tatakau-gokko* is one of the most popular games for children at kindergarten, especially boys. While it may sound harmless enough the Japanese word comes from the verb *tataku* which actually means to strike, hit or knock and encounters can be very rough. While hitting in a New Zealand context is tantamount to disorderly behaviour, in a Japanese context this is not necessarily so. As Walsh (2002:237) and Tobin (1992:35) have discussed, the early childhood centre is made up of structured periods followed by almost chaotic frenzy. Children learn to tolerate the organised formality of their day as they know it won’t be long before they will be free to be spontaneous. In the same way, teachers are not disturbed by disorder as they know the class will soon resume a sense of orderliness.

The use of time and space

In both the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts, time and space are used to create a sense of order, and to discipline children’s bodies. Foucault (1995) sees the control of time and space as central to his theory of a disciplinary society because they are at the crux of all human interaction. He links the regulation of time and space to monastic and military life, arguing that “disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed” (Foucault 1995:143). This idea can be seen most clearly in the Japanese context where children at Oka Kindergarten are divided into classes, then again into timetabled sessions, and are constantly required to line up in a pre-determined order during assemblies, medical inspections and events. Members of different classes are instantly identifiable by their matching coloured class caps. Within the highly literate Japanese society, documents pertaining to early childhood education are generally produced by ‘experts’ in Tokyo, and present parameters of ‘normal’ childhood development which both inform and construct children’s behaviour (Goodman 2002a:18). As the majority of teachers are constantly referring to these texts, they come to structure their day around official definitions of what is desirable or necessary for becoming a ‘good’ Japanese child (White and LeVine 1986).

In New Zealand, Kaimai Kindergarten's practices reflect more fluid structures of time and space. With the exception of the fencing around the grounds (as discussed in the previous chapter), the physical structure of the centre resembles a home in many ways. Whereas in Japan, the entry into early childhood education represents a break with the family environment, in New Zealand the emphasis is more on continuity. Planning and routines stem from "observations of the children's interests, strengths, needs, and behaviours" (Ministry of Education 1996:28). Although the doors of the centre open at 8.30 am, children are not required to arrive exactly on time, and will not be disadvantaged if they miss all or part of a session. Unlike Oka Kindergarten, where children are not only arranged by class and then again by small groups, there are few overt classifying structures in place at Kaimai Kindergarten. On a macro level, however, the centre still works to regulate children's bodies to routine daily patterns, but this is challenged by rights-based discourses that increasingly form an integral part of New Zealand's early childhood landscape.

Time and space as disciplinary techniques in the Japanese kindergarten

Tobin (1992:33) has discussed how spaces in Japanese centres contribute to children's understanding of inside (*uchi*) and outside (*soto*) contexts. Unlike in New Zealand, where parents are encouraged to enter the centre and spend time settling their children, Japanese centres are notable for the formal spaces that mark *uchi* and *soto* worlds. Teachers ask parents to remain in the foyer (*genkan*) while saying good-bye. This is a unique space which incorporates both the *uchi* and *soto* worlds. Just as the family home represents an *uchi* (inside) context, so does the kindergarten or childcare centre. Once children cross alone into the centre they have again entered the *uchi* world which is marked by acts such as placing their shoes in their cubby hole and stowing their bag. While New Zealand parents may frequently be present at the centre conducting parent help or observing their children, Japanese parents' time past the threshold of the *genkan* is limited to special events or open days. In observing this division of space, Japanese teachers maintain that they can most effectively keep control of their classrooms and facilitate children's socialisation.

In the same way, time is assigned a more formal meaning in the Japanese centre as "children learn to punctuate their lives and record their development less according to their birthdays ... than according to their year in school" (Tobin 1992:34). Hendry (1993:140) has shown how the use of time in the Japanese context acts as a form of

temporal wrapping. She points out that early childhood settings are spaces where beginnings and endings become both more pronounced and more complex. This can be seen in how the day is divided into ritual events such as opening sequences before the daily activities begin. At Oka Kindergarten, an example of this kind of ritual event is the assembly which takes place every morning following the free play session. Children are alerted to the impending gathering by music pumped out over the loudspeaker following the ritualised clean-up time. Teachers impress upon children to make their way hastily to the designated meeting spot, as if the assembly is an eagerly awaited event. From the beginning of the academic year, children learn to line up quickly and efficiently according to height, all the while clapping or stamping in time to the duty teacher's actions at the front of the stage. At Oka Kindergarten, assemblies are held in the hall in winter and outside during the summer months, but despite the venue the routine does not vary.



Figure 22: Oka Kindergarten children listen to the morning talk at assembly

For some of the Japanese focus groups, this attention to protracted embodied rituals is associated with a traditional style of early childhood education which is less popular in today's more liberal centres. Despite this difference, the temporal structures obvious in the video are familiar, as academics from Hiroshima explain:

For example, now it's time to arrive at kindergarten, for free play, assembly, group activity, lunchtime, then free play again, then leave, that's a typical [kindergarten] schedule. So everything is structured one after the other.

Hendry (1993:140) has discussed the routines which punctuate activity sequences, break times, meals and leaving times. She gives the example of a principal formally greeting each child as they arrive in the morning as evidence of yet more temporal wrapping, as well as individual class greeting rituals which are regular features of Japanese early childhood settings. Oka Kindergarten again strongly resembled the descriptions given by Hendry. Each morning, the principal awaits the arrival of the brightly painted kindergarten buses, and as he assists each child down the steps he offers a hearty "*ohayo gozaimasu*" and expects the same in return. Meal times at the kindergarten are not just marked by spoken greetings, children are expected to stand and sing a dedicated song for each event including lunch, arrival and departure as well as during the roll and English class. Observations by the Japanese focus groups suggest that while this is familiar territory there is a move away from such defined and lengthy rituals, towards a shorter, streamlined version of these temporal wrappings. But still at the crux of these rituals are the familiar "body techniques" (Mauss 1973) that serve to internalise Japanese values.

Signifiers of temporal change

One feature that does not appear to have changed is the use of music to signify temporal change in the Japanese early childhood centre. Just as music is used to alert children to the upcoming assembly, Japanese teachers often use musical cues rather than words to prompt children to move from one activity to another or to change behaviour (Fujita and Sano 1988:84). The use of music as a transitional cue can also be seen in Māori immersion centres and Samoan A'oga Amata in New Zealand. White et al. (2009: 37) note that songs (*waiata*) are used to invite children to take part in group activities and *karanga*¹⁰⁷ are used to signal changes in the routines. However, this approach is less extensively employed than in Japan where all early childhood teachers are required to be able to play the piano, and each classroom contains a piano, or at the very least, a portable keyboard for this purpose (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989:56).

¹⁰⁷*Karanga* is the call traditionally used to welcome visitors on to the *marae* or meeting house (White et al. 2009: 48).

Research by Fujita and Sano (1988:84) found that Japanese early childhood teachers regard demonstration as the best way to teach children, and that children respond more favourably to music than to words. They contrasted this with their observations of American teachers who felt that children needed to understand the meaning behind their actions. To avoid simply copying the teacher, the American approach favoured verbal explanations before children began an activity. To the researchers, it seemed that the American teachers felt it necessary to explain every aspect of the schedule (and accompanying appropriate behaviour) in minute detail. Fujita and Sano (1988:90) point out these concerns reveal a difference: the American teachers focused on “individualism and issues of power and control over the children” whereas the Japanese teachers were focused on “time – for example, time for disciplining, and time of childhood in the life cycle”.

When comparing activities, Fujita and Sano found that “time out” was often used to discipline children at the American centre. If a group activity was taking place, all the children were expected to participate in this activity. If a child’s behaviour disrupted others in the class, disciplinary measures would be taken by the teacher. This might include the child’s body being removed from the group to reflect alone on the behaviour, or the child being asked to explain the misdemeanor. In contrast, the Japanese children were not reprimanded by their teacher for engaging in alternative activities to the rest of the group. The teacher accepted that some children preferred to do their own thing. If a child distracted others, the teachers would use a technique called *kibun-tenkan* to try and focus the child’s attention elsewhere. This approach was often used at Oka Kindergarten to diffuse potentially disruptive situations.

While I never saw the time out technique applied in a Japanese context, it was a regular means of restoring order at Kaimai Kindergarten in New Zealand. In the scenario described earlier in this chapter, the teacher asks Ben if he needs some time out by himself. The underlying message is that the time spent alone will allow him to calm down and to reflect on his actions. In recent years, the use of time out has gained popularity both in New Zealand educational settings as well as in the home. Yet, it is not a new idea as Rayner (2008:108) found that time out was first discussed in New Zealand in the late 1800s, but largely dismissed as crueller than physical punishment. Modern critics such as Gartrell (2001) argue that time out is a discipline technique that relies on blame and shame to control children’s behaviour, therefore the outcomes are largely negative. He maintains that this kind of external control method actually inhibits

children's ability to internalise self-control and leads to feelings of ineffectiveness and isolation.

Children's bodies as objects of the medical gaze

Yet, the way in which time is given, or withheld, to both the individual and the group in the early childhood setting can reveal deeper cultural assumptions. This idea is illustrated by a scene from the Japanese video where the children are visited by the local doctor. Foucault (1973a) has traced the development of the medical gaze which places the body as an object to be observed, and then compared to a norm of corporeality. This process of observation and normalisation of the body is a common feature of Japanese centres where importance is given to children's health checks and visits by health professionals (Duncan 2006). All Japanese children are expected to undergo routine medical examinations during their time at the kindergarten and as the doctor is afforded an elevated social status, it is expected that everyone is ready to greet him once he arrives.

Half an hour before the check, the children are instructed to remove all their clothing except for their underpants and to ensure that everything is folded neatly in their bags. The teacher then instructs them to line up according to gender and, finally, to sit down and wait for the doctor to arrive. She reminds all the children that they need to be quiet during the visit and show the doctor the respect he deserves. The bare-chested children squirm a little on the wooden floor but most peer silently down the corridor as they wait for the doctor to arrive from the previous classes. Once he comes in, the teacher and the class greet him formally and he begins examining each child one by one by pressing his stethoscope to their chests and checking their ears and throats. As the children are individually dismissed by the doctor they are allowed to move back to their desks and begin getting dressed. Those who finish before the others are required to wait quietly until the all the children have completed their check and a farewell greeting has been issued to the doctor. Kaimai Kindergarten teachers were critical of this scene due to the Japanese teachers' inefficient use of time and unfair approach:

You know how here all the children are sitting in one place, lined up, waiting to be seen by the doctor, well, we wouldn't do that. We would individually call them up. You know, the children would be free playing and we would just go and grab them, or you know, we might get a couple.

So they don't have to wait.

That's right. This is a lot of waiting for some of these children. Especially the last person. We just wouldn't expect that children would do that. The most that we would do, sometimes with the Hearing and Vision lady she comes here and we call a few. So we might have two or three children just so she doesn't have to wait all the time, and there's a nice flow going. But we certainly wouldn't make the whole lot of them sit there with their clothes off all ready to go!

See that's not fair on the child.

The New Zealand teachers felt it was important that children did not give up their valuable play and learning time to wait unproductively for others. This idea is supported by the curriculum which encourages teachers to minimise unnecessary wait times for children (Ministry of Education 1996:63). However, a Japanese analysis of the same situation would not necessarily see the time spent waiting as unproductive or unfair. Benedict (1946) has argued that self-discipline, such as that displayed by the Japanese children while waiting for the doctor, is linked to individual sacrifice in the West. For the Japanese, however, self-discipline may require practice but also makes one's life more enjoyable through the social system of reciprocity. Benedict identifies a two pronged concept of Japanese selfhood, one which emphasises both interdependence but also individual accountability and self-reliance. While waiting for others might be seen as giving up one's time in a New Zealand context, in Japan the waiting is merely a way of working with the group which ultimately leads to greater rewards than serving the purposes of the individual. Reflecting on these texts, it becomes clear that temporal structures can be manipulated in the same way, but have different outcomes depending on the cultural lens they are viewed through.

Reflecting on the body as a site of discipline

According to Foucault (1981), the "normal" body can be seen as a site of bio-power. Bio-power can be defined as a technology of power which works to manage people as a group through regulation and subjugation of their bodies. In a disciplinary society, the mechanical body is supplanted by the "natural body" created by training and the control of activity, time and space. The body is rendered docile through the micro-physics of bio-power and the normalisation of rational control (Foucault 1995:141-155). This chapter has discussed some of the ways in which New Zealand and Japanese early childhood settings reflect concepts of the "normal" child's body and those whose bodies present a challenge to these constructs.

While McLaren's (2008) study is fairly recent, it is clear from research such as the Ritchies' (1997) that many New Zealanders have found the noise of small children bothersome for quite some time. While no longer fashionable, the expression "children should be seen and not heard" was often uttered in post-war homes in an attempt to subdue unruly children who were noisy and disruptive. The perception that noise corrupts order was also common to other European societies and continues today (Cohen 2004, Hastings 2008, Levarie 1977, Majumdar 2010). In the New Zealand early childhood context, the issue of noise brings together the "three bodies" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). For the individual, physical body, noise is seen as damaging to hearing, and indicative of loss of control when considering the social body. For the body politic, noise is regulated by health and safety requirements.

It does however appear to be a particularly European influenced viewpoint. Within New Zealand, Rameka (2009) has drawn on the characteristics of mythological hero, Maui, to create an assessment framework for Māori early childhood groups. Maui displayed both positive and less desirable traits, all of which were equally essential to his success. For example, the trait of *whakatoi* or spiritedness may be seen as undesirable in a New Zealand European context, but is considered favourably according to a Māori world view. The positive view of this characteristic bears many similarities to the Japanese notion of *genki* which also can be translated as lively or spirited. Rather than interpreting noise as a manifestation of disorder, Japanese early childhood settings reflect the view that children are naturally active, boisterous and above all, noisy. With this view accepted, there is no conflict between learning and noise – the two quite easily go hand and hand.

This point leads on to the next issue which is that of inappropriate conduct. Just as boisterous behaviour may be not be indulged in the New Zealand early childhood setting, hitting is judged inappropriate by the New Zealand teachers that took part in this study. It is notable that while less hitting actually took place in the New Zealand centre compared to the Japanese kindergarten, it was tolerated less and regarded more seriously. At Oka Kindergarten, regular physical contact occurred between the children but hitting was not seen as a threat to social stability. Children are left to resolve conflicts themselves as part of a pedagogical approach practised by teachers across the country. In most cases, this means that Japanese children will eventually exchange verbal apologies and move on with their play without the intervention of an adult. New Zealand teachers were compelled not only to find the perpetrator but to assist in meting

out justice so that children would feel that they had been listened to, and that justice had been served.

In both the Japanese and New Zealand contexts, order is restored through implicit expectations shared by children and teachers but by contrasting means. In the New Zealand early childhood context, children's individual bodies have rights and boundaries that need to be respected and protected. When a child transgresses the rights of another, teachers seek to remove the offending body. The isolation of the individual body, in the form of disciplinary techniques such as "time out", differs from the Japanese approach where teachers look for ways to incorporate the individual body back into the fold of the collective body. Strategies such as *mimamoru* (wait and see) allow a degree of physicality not sanctioned in the New Zealand context.

In the same way, concepts of appropriate behaviour are shaped as the children and teachers negotiate each day at their respective centres. Foucault (1995:139) claims that "discipline is a political anatomy of detail". For children at Oka Kindergarten, there is a certain amount of inevitability to the way each day is divided into ritualised periods such as organised class sessions, lunch time, assembly and greeting routines. This contrasts with time spent in free play which is striking for its complete lack of structure. Peak (1991:78) provides a good observation of this:

Many times each day, the tempo and tenor of activity fluctuates between a tight and a loose structure. Chaotic periods of free play are followed by silent, formal ritual. In Japanese preschools the measure of good discipline is not an overall low level of noise and controlled activity but a quick and precise maintenance between two radically different levels of order.

She adds that an uninformed visitor could mistakenly categorise the very same centre as either extremely rigid in structure or totally chaotic. In fact, Japanese children learn to change their behaviour quickly according to the changing context in preparation for adulthood where it is essential to understand the appropriate conduct for various social situations (Hendry 1990:33).

At Kaimai Kindergarten in New Zealand, order was much less defined by periods of structure. For the Japanese viewers, without any familiar ritualised activities, there seemed little that marked the New Zealand centre as recognisable to them. As one Oka teacher remarked, "There's so much free play going on. It's difficult to see where the curriculum comes in". In fact, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, does not follow a traditional, content or activities based structure or prescribe subject-based learning areas which are the basis of the school system. It takes a

sociocultural approach to curriculum based on the desire to foster children's natural dispositions to learn (Carr 2001). Both the way time is managed, and the way the centre space is arranged, supports this aim. While children may be restrained from fighting or excessively yelling, they are given ample opportunities to explore, create and discover with minimal interruptions from adults unless they ask for assistance. New Zealand children are also required to learn appropriate social conduct, but there is less stress placed on this than in the Japanese environment. More important is the hope that children will grow up confident in their own abilities, be prepared to tackle new challenges and be a contributing member of society (Ministry of Education 1996:9). Despite differences in approach, both the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts reflect the ways in which children's bodies are subject to diffuse uses of disciplinary power to render them docile (Foucault 1981:140).



Figure 23: New Zealand children are encouraged to become confident, competent learners through exploration of their own working theories

Chapter 9: Constructing Dirt, Pollution and Purity

Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. (Douglas 1966:16)

The previous chapter discussed the ways in which teachers seek to maintain order in the early childhood setting in New Zealand and Japan. While at first glance it may seem that concepts of order and pollution are not closely connected, Douglas (1966:12) has argued that dirt is essentially symbolic of disorder, in that its existence offends against order. Therefore, the removal of dirt cannot be a negative act, but rather a positive means of restoring order. Douglas goes on to show that rituals of purity and impurity actually service to create unity through their experience. She writes that “dirt ... is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (Douglas 1966:48). Douglas perceives dirt as an ambiguity positioned at the boundary of categories, which then becomes the source of anomaly. Anomalies may be managed by ignoring the ambiguity, destroying the cause, by avoidance or by being labelled dangerous.

In this chapter, differing instances of dirt and pollution are discussed using Douglas’s framework to inform the analysis. The first section, dirt and the body, looks at the body as a site which inevitably becomes polluted, but may be purified both in a physical and ritual sense through cultural practices. The second section delves into the issue of polluted spaces and the ways in which the anomaly of dirt can be mitigated. The final section focuses on prohibitions and rituals around food which, in reference to Douglas, centre on notions of the ordered versus that which is out of place.

Dirt and the body

As discussed in earlier chapters, the body can be seen as a site where cultural constructions meet, a place where curricula may be reflected and a tangible example of children’s physicality. The body is also regarded as major site for rituals and practices which pertain to beliefs relating to pollution and purity (Douglas 1966, Namihira 1987, Norbeck 1952). The same can be said of the organs of the body, as well as the body’s excreta and fluids (Turner 2003). This section looks at the meanings that New Zealand and Japanese teachers bring to dirt, concepts of pollution and purity, and how these might intersect with the body. This is undertaken through an analysis of a scene from

the New Zealand video which provoked comment and discussion from teachers in both countries.

In the New Zealand video, Peter, a four year old boy comes crying to the teacher, Jody (Video sequence 7). He is upset about a cut on his knee which is the result of chasing some bigger boys around the playground and then tripping during the exhilarating chase. Jody is sympathetic to his plight and after looking at all the “lovely blood” trickling out of the wound, she suggests that they head inside to put a sticking plaster on it. Once inside, another teacher takes over. She seats Peter in a chair and kneels down to take a look at the scraped knees. She asks him which knee he would like dealt with first, then tucking her hair back from her face, she peels the backing from a sticking plaster and presses it firmly over the cut. This scene elicited a great deal of surprise from the Japanese viewers at Oka Kindergarten. Comments such as this one were typical:

When the little boy falls over and gets a bleeding knee, I was very surprised to see that the teacher didn't put any disinfectant (*shōdoku*) on his wound. What about bacteria or infection? Are the teachers not worried about that?

At first impression, it seems that the Japanese teachers, like early childhood professionals all over the world, are concerned that the New Zealand teachers did not follow well-known policies relating to cleaning the body after injury. However, I would suggest that the major difference in the reading of the scene is the cultural meanings New Zealand and Japanese teachers bring to it. For the Japanese teachers, the scene revealed the strong association Japanese have with the outside and dirt (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Simply placing a sticking plaster over an unsterilised wound seemed abhorrent on a personal level rather than just a professional one. Several of the New Zealand focus group participants also reacted in surprise to the teacher's failure to clean the wound. Unlike the Japanese viewers, their reaction did not come from notions of bodily pollution or from a deep, internalised belief that lack of sterilisation would lead to an unfortunate result such as infection. Instead, they were motivated more by centre policy and rules which require them to respond appropriately to children's injuries. The following section discusses these two approaches in greater detail through an analysis of teachers' comments and examples from the literature.



Video sequence 7: Peter's bleeding knee

The physical body as a microcosm of society

Foucault's (1973a) theories about bio-medicine show how practices are deemed appropriate according to new forms of knowledge. In the New Zealand early childhood context, there are clear procedures that must be followed in the case of children getting injured, especially those involving blood or bodily fluids being spilled or exchanged. Many of these changes occurred as a result of the 1980s HIV global epidemic which culminated in centres becoming more aware of potential infection through blood or saliva. Current policies instruct teachers to minimise risks and exposure to disease by using standard infection control precautions such as disposable latex gloves, hand washing and disinfectant (Frith, Kambouris and O'Grady 2003). While these policies have been put in place to protect children's bodies from bacteria and infection, they are also equally informed by a need to safeguard the bodies of teachers. McGrath and Huntington (2007) suggest that those working with young children are particularly at risk from infectious diseases.

This risk is recognised by teachers in Napier who pointed out that they, like the Japanese teachers, would have chosen to clean the wound before applying a bandage. This approach was not only related to policy but reflected an awareness that the fluid seen on the child's knee could, in fact, have been a mixture of dirt, blood or even some other foreign substance. In any case, it required cleaning before a barrier was placed over it:

We would wash the wound. The sticking plaster was just put on top of the "beautiful blood". It may not have been blood.

It looked like blood. I took it she was trying to put a positive spin on "Yes, you've hurt yourself but it's really quite fascinating isn't it because that's your blood and there's nothing to be worried about. It's all perfectly natural, just a flesh wound. Let me come inside and fix it for you".

If you go running around saying, "Oh, get the plaster" it can go a bit over the top really.

Teachers in Wellington expressed the same sentiments:

It wasn't all dramatic. I like the example of the teacher looking at the wonderful blood!

I think that was her attitude too, you know, "Oh well, you'll be alright, it's just a bit of blood".

These comments show that the teachers felt it was important not to overly dramatise incidents which involved injuries by downplaying cuts and grazes as a regular part of childhood. Scholars suggest that New Zealand national identity is strongly linked to key stoic values (Wevers 1980:244) which are manifested in characteristics shown by the first pioneers such as flexibility, resilience and self-reliance. Phillips (1996:102-103) has shown how the denial of pain is one of the most admired traits in rugby players who themselves symbolise the pinnacle of New Zealand masculine identity. Studies also indicate that New Zealanders have a tendency to take risks (Adams 2011) and to endeavour to cope with pain without complaining (Madjar 1991). The belief that one should stoically endure pain as well as a “laidback” attitude to dealing with injuries appears common.

In contrast to the low key New Zealand reaction to the scraped knee, injuries were dealt with very seriously in the Japanese kindergarten. Children would often come to the staffroom complaining of cuts and grazes and yet the actual site of the wound could not be found. Nonetheless, the staff would take time to thoroughly examine each child and detergent would be administered, as well as a sticking plaster. For those cuts where blood was actually visible, the teachers would rush about with a great sense of urgency, applying pressure and dabbing on lotions. For a skinned knee, there was a procedure that was assiduously followed: the site would be gently washed with warm water, then detergent wiped over, followed by an antiseptic cream and finally some form of bandage or sticking plaster would be applied. The whole process gave the impression of an important kind of ritual. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) has argued that Japanese notions of germs (*baikin*) and hygiene have less to do with actual risks to one’s health but rather are cultural concepts located within a framework of pollution and purity.

While the New Zealand teachers tended to dismiss minor injuries as relatively insignificant and encouraged children to continue with their activities, the Japanese teachers were more likely to make a quite a fuss of children. On a personal level, I can recall several times during my time working at a Japanese kindergarten when I had sent children with minor scratches back outside to play, only to have them called back by the Japanese teacher to undergo the procedure described above. On their return to New Zealand, my own children were very put out to discover that a scraped knee garnered concern in Japan but received little attention back home. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:215) suggests that illness, and I would add injuries such as those described above, are

legitimised in the Japanese culture. Rather than equating pain and illness with deviant behaviour as described in other countries such as the United States (Jackson 2011:378), the Japanese take an opposing view and believe that indulgent pampering of the sick facilitates recovery. Responses to injury and views of illness are factors which have contributed to scholars labelling the Japanese as tending towards hypochondria (Haring 1949:829, La Barre 1945: 338). Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:52) has said that the Japanese characteristically like to portray themselves as somewhat sickly.¹⁰⁸ While in a New Zealand context, men especially, may be reluctant to portray themselves as physically weak, Ohnuki-Tierney argues that there is no conflict between a masculine image and illness in Japan. In fact, a sickly body is often regarded as a sign of intellectual ability and sensitivity therefore it can become a source of pride.

The symbolism of protective barriers

Another difference in the readings of the scene concerns the issue of wearing gloves. While the Japanese teachers were concerned that the New Zealand teacher in the video did not use disinfectant to clean the wound, they did not enquire about the absence of gloves. In the New Zealand early childhood context, gloves are now an essential part of every centre's first aid kit and teachers are expected to don them when dealing with bodily fluids such as blood, faeces and vomit. In reality, however, this is not always practical and teachers seem to take a haphazard approach to this policy. Focus group participants indicated that they would only use gloves if the injury was serious enough to warrant it. However, the way teachers evaluated the severity of the wound depended on how they viewed the body on a social, medical and political level, as these comments from Napier teachers indicate:

They looked to be fairly significant grazes, didn't they? From the distance that it was videoed you could see the little round circles [of blood] and I would probably put a glove on.

If we knew that there was a video camera there we would certainly put a glove on! (Everyone laughs)

I would regardless [of the camera] and it's certainly what is advised, but in practice I don't think it always happens 100 percent of the time.

¹⁰⁸ While Ohnuki-Tierney's views may seem to contradict earlier descriptions of feverish children attending kindergarten, Benedict (1946) argues that such paradoxes are a feature of Japanese psychology.

These statements point to Foucault's (1995) notions of surveillance at work. As in the section on the protected body in Chapter Five, it seems that the teachers do not really believe that neglecting to wear gloves will negatively affect either their own or the child's health. The motivation behind wearing gloves seems to be more a measure of compliance and a way of fulfilling expectations around appropriate practice. Foucault (1995:201) has argued that the principles of Panopticism can only be effective if those being watched believe that they could be being observed at any time by a central, unseen observer. As one of the teachers points out, if a video camera was fulfilling the role of the Panopticon the staff would feel compelled to comply with the rules regarding gloves. In reality, without the threat of a constant observer, donning gloves is not regarded as medically or culturally necessary enough for staff to regulate their own behaviour.

Piper and Stronach (2008:81-82) have argued that in British early childhood settings rubber gloves act more like a moral contraceptive than a practical means of preventing the spread of disease. In other words, the gloves inhibit any form of intimacy between the teacher and child in situations where touch is expected as a sign of caring. However, in the cases observed by the authors, trying to administer plasters or change children wearing gloves often resulted in the teacher ripping gaping holes in the rubber barrier. In contrast, doctors and nurses games which involved children poking spatulas in each other's mouths were not seen as unhygienic. Piper and Stronach see this as evidence of a staff protection agenda rather than concerns over guarding children from infection. Tobin (1997b:127) found that American teachers tended to view children's play that involved intimate touch, such as kissing games, through the lens of medical and psychological symptomology. This kind of play was seen as endangering children through its association with germ transmission, contagious illnesses and even sexual disease.

At this point it is worth thinking about the symbolism of the rubber glove in the New Zealand early childhood setting. What is its underlying role or purpose? Does it function to protect the injured child from becoming infected, to prevent the spread of disease to the teachers or to act as a moral contraceptive as suggested by Piper and Stronach (2008)? Although the rubber glove is touted as a way of keeping children safe, New Zealand teachers' comments indicate that it is predominantly for the protection of staff rather than for the children's benefit. Inconsistent use of the glove implies that teachers take a personal view of the risks involved when dealing with bodily fluids.

These fluids represent potential danger both in a microbiological sense and metaphorically through their symbolic link to disorder (Douglas 1966, Turner 2003). To neglect to use a glove is then, both to subvert state policies regarding hygiene and to allow an anomaly to remain. But it is clear that these fluids are not enough of a cultural anomaly for all New Zealand teachers to regard them as a potent source of danger.

Although the rubber glove is not a regular feature of the Japanese early childhood context, it is common to see children and staff wearing face masks. Like the glove, the mask can be culturally revealing. In the West, masks are generally worn by surgeons or patients in hospital settings whereas Japanese people wear masks outside in public. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:26) suggests that the difference lies in the purpose of the mask. In Western contexts, the mask is used to prevent a person spreading their germs to someone else in situations such as the operating theatre. In Japan, the mask serves to prevent one from inhaling the germs of others. It can also signify a person's polluted state. In this case, the mask functions as a boundary between the polluted and unpolluted, but allows a person to remain in society through this clear demarcation (Lock 1980:91).

Bodily fluids as metaphors of disorder

In the same way, the rubber glove can serve as a metaphor for opposing agendas in the early childhood centre. For the New Zealand teachers, it is a tangible reminder that centres have become places where physical touch is discouraged and bodily fluids represent a threat (Turner 2003). MacLure (2010) has gone further and argued that such fluids are often given symbolic meaning by both teachers and researchers. She gives the example of a child whose repeated vomiting at perceived inopportune moments was interpreted by staff at the centre as signifying something. She writes that, "the vomiting is not, therefore, seen just as a bodily process, but as representational – that is, as *a sign of something else*. But notice also that *we*, as researchers, were trying to do the same thing: that is, asking what the vomiting *means*" (MacLure 2010:10). MacLure notes that the child who vomits, along with those who "poo and pee in the 'wrong' place" generates strong feelings of disgust in adults. MacLure's ideas resonate with Ohnuki-Tierney's (1984:215) belief that illness in Western contexts is somehow deviant, as well as symbolic of an underlying cause that needs to be exposed. This view can influence the way in which teachers respond to children who disrupt the order of the classroom through the "irruption" (MacLure 2010:10) of the body into the early childhood setting.

In their study of moral panics in British early childhood settings, Piper and Stronach (2008:69) have discussed inconsistencies in teacher responses to injured children. In many of the cases that they observed, teachers were unwilling to assist the children directly. Instead children were encouraged to deal with the injury themselves by following teachers' instructions regarding cleaning the wound and plaster application. Piper and Stronach suggest this policy is not motivated by issues of possible infection or a desire to instil independence but fear of being accused of inappropriate touching. At Kaimai Kindergarten, it did not appear that teachers allowed these concerns to completely overwhelm them when dealing with children who had suffered an injury or an accident. Yet, comforting hugs and kisses still appear to be fraught with potential implications as one Wellington teacher succinctly acknowledged:

I'm all for ECE being professional but I also believe that early childhood has a large element of care and, for lack of a better word, love, involved in it. I think that's a difficult dilemma because emotional well-being, a sense of belonging, all of those sorts of things are part of our curriculum and something we value but in some ways we are restricted to develop those sorts of relationships and feelings.

However, in Japan, the large amount of attention directed towards children who were sick or injured seemed to indicate a deliberate desire to show love and concern. These kinds of interactions were typified by a lot of touching and hugging which created the feeling of pampering described by Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:215). The personalised attention given by teachers to sick children is at odds with the regular practice of group socialisation which emphasises children's self-reliance over teacher involvement. Illness or injury appears to permit the suspension of the usual kindergarten routine to delve into the *amae* based practices of the home (Lock 1980:78-79). In this way, illness in the Japanese early childhood setting fits with Douglas's (1966) notion of disorder. In the New Zealand setting too, the "irruption" of bodily fluids such as blood, vomit and urine represent something out of place.

Purification of the body

It is useful again to return to Douglas's (1966) theories when considering another scene from the New Zealand video. In this case, a group of children are preparing to take part in a baking session. The teacher asks if they have washed their hands and while all the children claim that they have, there is no evidence to suggest

that this is true. Later in the day, children are seen sitting down to lunch, again, without having obviously washed their hands before eating. The Japanese teachers considered the attitude to hand washing to be very lax in the New Zealand centre and were concerned about the dirt that might be present on some fingers, but not others. They were also shocked by barefoot children running freely from the outside, which they perceived as very dirty, to the inside area which in their minds represented an unpolluted space. As Douglas (1966) has shown, rituals of purity and impurity are less about eliminating all bacteria but more about creating unity through their experience.

The body is a site of both pollution and purification and therefore appropriate action needs to be taken to ensure cleansing has occurred. In the Japanese early childhood setting, the purity of the body is maintained by washing of the hands and feet, and gargling. While these acts are certainly linked to hygienic practice their real value lies in the belief that washing and gargling removes perceived impurities from the body (Lock 1980:89). Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:28) argues that while washing may exist in most cultures, the Japanese are unusual in their emphasis on cleansing certain body parts. These parts, the hands, the feet and the throat, are given particular attention as they are where the body comes into contact with the outside. The hands are used to touch things, the feet touch the ground and air enters the body through the throat. Even after washing, the hands are still seen as vulnerable to dirt. Ohnuki-Tierney gives a number of examples to illustrate this belief such as the absence of Japanese finger food, the ubiquitous hot towel (*oshibori*) used to wipe one's hands before a meal, chopstick etiquette which prevents the exchange of saliva and the pristine white gloves worn by employees like taxi drivers, door attendants and elevator operators who primarily work with their hands. As Kawano (2005:43) notes, "dirty things are not purely "mental" phenomena. They are embodied and emplaced – and are therefore deeply experiential".

At Oka Kindergarten, gargling was also a regular part of a daily ritual which the principal explained would prevent ill health. At the time, I was skeptical that gargling could be effective as a cold prevention strategy, but the teachers around me insisted on its validity. Other foreigners living in Japan have expressed the same doubts and while it appears there is little medical evidence to support the idea that gargling with water prevents infection, using tea may show some results due to its anti-microbial properties (Gordenker 2003). Yet the claim of gargling for antibacterial purposes appears particularly tenuous when one considers that the cups used are hung above the basins to be communally shared and just given a quick rinse with cold water in between users.

Clearly, the real value of gargling lies in its symbolic value which sees water remove the impurities that may have been inadvertently inhaled from the outside.

This same interpretation can answer an issue raised by the New Zealand viewers who noted the absence of soap in the wash basins at the Japanese kindergarten. While the New Zealanders saw this as contrary to providing sufficient resources for hygienic practices, the Japanese teachers felt washing with just water to be perfectly appropriate. As Clark (1994) has described, the Japanese do not see soap as essential when washing their hands as the purpose of the act is to symbolically purify by splashing water over the area rather than to thoroughly clean it. This is also why there is often no soap in public toilets which may come as a surprise to foreign visitors. While advocating that hand washing should be carried out prior to eating and activities involving food, New Zealand teachers were relatively relaxed about enforcing this policy and certainly avoided the type of lengthy speeches on the topic favoured by the Japanese principal.

As the section on the body explored, New Zealand attitudes to dirt appear to be more nonchalant than those of the Japanese. While cleanliness was once next to godliness in colonial New Zealand (Wood 1997), in recent years dirt has come to be associated positively with nature, freedom and physical strength rather than a symbol of impurity. For example, Mulgan's (1999) article explores the belief that modern society's obsession with cleanliness has negatively affected children's immunity systems by reducing their capacity to fight germs. In the early childhood setting, this ideology is reflected in the provision of messy play activities, sandpits and natural outdoor areas. In the media, it can be seen in advertisements such as the one with the by-line "dirt is good" which is naturally sponsored by a washing powder company ("Why dirt is good" 2011). In my local community, one of the most popular summer events for children is a mudslide built by the Scouts group. A Japanese visitor staying with us during this time was both horrified and confused as to why New Zealanders would consider this activity to be enjoyable. While Chapter Six describes Japanese teachers who similarly encouraged children to get dirty as a counterpoint to sanitised modern lifestyles, in Japan the outdoors is widely regarded as an inherently dirty place which explains children's reluctance to engage with it. The following section looks at those spaces which are deemed impure or pure in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood settings.

Polluted spaces

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:26) notes that the way that Japanese children are socialised reveals the strong association Japanese have with the outside and dirt.¹⁰⁹ One of the first words children learn is *bacchi* or dirty which is taught by adults repeatedly identifying objects that are unclean and therefore should not be touched. The concept of polluted objects and spaces become so ingrained by early childhood, that children sometimes exploit this fear of “cultural germs” or “people dirt” by starting to sit down on a dirty surface so adults will carry them. The belief that the outdoors is a dirty space is also reflected in objects that mothers are expected to purchase as part of their children’s essential kindergarten equipment. For example, every child is required to own a colourful square of plastic sheeting that compactly folds away. This *re-ja sheeto* (leisure sheet) is used to spread over the ground and sit upon when the children go on trips to the local park or gardens. One Japanese mother I met, who was living in Auckland, became quite distraught when she realised that the New Zealand version of a spontaneous picnic meant that she and the children were going to have to sit directly on the grass. After riffling desperately through her handbag, she finally retrieved some handkerchiefs and spread them over the ground so that everyone could safely perch atop the cloth.

These views of the outdoors as an impure space can be seen in a vignette from the Japanese video which depicts the children preparing to go outside for a water play session. The teacher stands at the front of the class and gives detailed instructions related to the removal of clothing. When she instructs the children to remove their shoes and socks a notable cry of resistance erupts from the class. The children begin to chatter among themselves about the implications of the teacher’s words. Their voices convey both excitement and some anxiety about traversing the bare ground without the protection of footwear. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:27) claims that in regards to hygiene, Japanese daily behaviour is connected to spatial classifications that regard the outside and below as dirty. One of the most potent symbols of dirt from below is footwear, along with the feet, the floor and the ground. In order to prevent the dirt from both outside and below from entering the clean space of the early childhood setting, children are required to make a number of changes to their footwear during the course of the day. At Oka Kindergarten, children exchange their outside shoes for an inside pair as soon as

¹⁰⁹ The notion that the outside is associated with dirt and fear has been rejected by some radical sectors of Japanese society such as supporters of the ‘back-to-nature’ movement studied by Knight (1997).

they arrive in the morning. If children go back outside to play or take part in class activities, they must again exchange their shoes. This ritual occurs many times a day and most children are so adept at it that they barely pause while conducting it. When children need to use the toilet, they slip off their inside shoes at the entrance to the ablutions area, and put on a pair of slippers used exclusively in this space. If children decide to select a book from the carpeted library corner, they must remove their indoor shoes and step into the area in socked feet. The same action is required if children tread on tatami mats which have been laid either outside or inside the kindergarten.

The only time the children are permitted to alter these rituals around footwear are during the regular evacuation drills when the emphasis is on hastily exiting the building. During these moments, the teachers often have to remind children not to pause to change their shoes even it makes them feel strange and uncomfortable. Just as the drills prepare for a rare event such as an earthquake or fire, forgoing the regular rituals around footwear reflect a unique, irregular break with order. It is only during these moments of disorder, these ruptures in the regular structure, that feet are permitted to come into contact with the dirt of the ground.

For the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers, the Japanese children's reaction to going barefoot prior to water play was quite incomprehensible. Without the same absolutist views governing the realm of outside as dirty and the inside as clean, the meaning attached to a bare foot was lost on them:

They're all worried about taking their shoes off, they're not sure if they want to go. I mean our kids in the middle of winter stand outside barefoot.

[In regards to shoes] it's all about comfort and choice here.

Others recognised that while the wearing of shoes might not be an issue in their own centre, there were early childhood contexts in New Zealand where cultural rituals around footwear were also a feature of the setting, such as a *kōhanga reo*.¹¹⁰

A quick scan of postings on the internet reveals that going barefoot in public is recognised as a unique feature of New Zealand society by new arrivals to the country. At all levels of schooling, but especially in the early years at kindergarten and primary school, children are not required to wear shoes to school. At my sons' school in Rata, it is routine to see a number of children arriving barefoot even in the depths of winter. During sporting events such as the cross-country race or the sports day, children are

¹¹⁰ At *kōhanga reo*, which literally translates as Māori language nest, appropriate cultural protocol is followed including removing footwear inside.

specifically told to participate barefoot. If children are going on a school trip where there may be hazards, notices are sent home reminding parents to “please send children to school in shoes”. Some children invariably forget so spare sets of shoes are available from the office in this situation. The implications of going barefoot have been the subject of public discussion (Johnston 2008), but especially in smaller North Island towns, the practice is extremely common.



Figure 24: It is quite common to see New Zealand children playing barefoot both inside and outside

From the Japanese point of view, scenes of barefoot New Zealand children freely wandering between the outside, the inside, and the toilet at the centre were shocking on multiple levels. Several teachers commented that while the New Zealand centre looked attractive and clean on a superficial level, in reality there was an invisible layer of impurities lingering around the space due to the constant cross-contamination occurring by both children and staff. The sandpit was another area labelled as potentially polluting by Japanese viewers who admired the pit as a resource but had many questions about adequate cleaning of the space:

The sandpit in the New Zealand video looks wonderful, especially being right next to the class like that. We would also love to have a sandpit like that but you're not allowed in Japan because cat and dog poo might get into it. It might get all dirty, it's not allowed due to the germs. You're only allowed one if you have a lid and you spray disinfectant on it every single day. But sandpits are so wonderful for children's imagination.

In the Japanese video, Oka Kindergarten did feature a small sand and mud area but it was covered every evening and doused with disinfectant each morning, along with the toys used in it. In a reflection of the hand washing practices, cleaning the sandpit with disinfectant in Japan seems to serve the purpose of ritual purification rather than effective sterilisation. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Health (1997) advises that the sand and soil of the sandpit serves to neutralise disinfectant, rendering it ineffective. They recommend alternative strategies such as raking, exposing the space to heavy rainfall, hosing it down and periodically replacing the sand. The sandpit at Kaimai Kindergarten was one of the most popular spaces for children's play and teachers seemed quite unconcerned about its capacity to harbour dangerous bacteria. They were far more interested in the way that the Japanese teacher allowed children's hands to delve into a communal jar of candy as well as the free exchange of foodstuffs that occurred during lunchtime. In their minds, this appeared to be much more of a violation of the rules relating to dirt and hygiene. The following section explores the prohibitions and rituals around food and its consumption as articulated by the teachers.

Food in and out of place

Near the end of the day at Oka Kindergarten, the children are preparing to go home. After they pack their bags and stack their chairs, they sing the farewell song in loud voices before filing up to the front of the room where the teacher has put out three glass jars that appear to contain candy. As the teacher explains that each jar contains a different flavor, she tips a few of the jelly-like drops on to each of the three lids. She then asks for a show of hands to choose the most popular flavor of the day before allowing children to come forward, a group at a time, to take a drop of their choice. Some children pause over their selection, putting their chosen drop back and choose another flavor. The small quantity on the lids is soon exhausted so some children need to put their hands inside the jar and scrabble round to reach the object of their desire. The teacher tells the children to hold the drop in their hand until all their classmates are ready, then to proceed as a group to pop the drops into their mouths after uttering the greeting of *itadakimasu*.

This scene was surprising to the New Zealand viewers for the way in which it appeared to violate implicit rules relating to both external hygiene, in the form of the hands, and internal, in the form of the mouth. Allowing a large group of children to

touch the displayed drops while they made their choice seemed the antithesis of clean handling practices concerning food. The viewers also felt the teacher's role modelling of suitable food choices to be inappropriate. This is because the Kaimai Kindergarten teachers identified the drops as sugar-laden "lollies"¹¹¹ which are not permitted in their centre. Then there was the further question of why the teacher would choose a food product with such strong connotations to reward systems:

The lolly thing!

The children put all their hands in. That's dirty.

I don't think there's any law against it but it's just one of those things we don't do.

It would be served so they could perhaps take something without touching anything else but not in that sort of format.

We wouldn't give it out to them in the way she's doing it anyway. What's that for? I don't know what that's for. A reward?

We wouldn't do that. Not for no reason. Also it would be against our food and nutrition policy.

As these Kaimai teachers articulated, there is no specific policy which prevents children from retrieving food with their hands from a communal vessel yet it is inherently abhorrent to them. The consumption of sugary foods is, however, actively discouraged through state guidelines for early childhood education services. These guidelines have been designed to help centres develop food and nutrition policies and practices which tacitly deem certain foodstuffs as either acceptable or unacceptable (Ministry of Education 2009). Lollies fall squarely into the category of a food which is out of place (Douglas 1966) in the New Zealand early childhood setting.

In reality, the drops that the Japanese children were consuming were not lollies but *kanyu*, fruit-flavoured jelly vitamins made from cod liver oil. *Kanyu* were first produced in Japan in 1911 and remain a popular dietary supplement for children due to their pleasant taste. Adults are attracted by the claims that regular consumption of *kanyu* can increase children's bone density, promote physical growth and boost immunity.

¹¹¹ Lolly, or its plural form, lollies, is the New Zealand expression for sweets (England) or candy (United States). In Japan, the word *kyandii* (candy) is also often used in place of the original Japanese word *ame*.

Japanese viewers in the focus groups took a nostalgic view of the *kanyu* distribution, as these comments from Kutchan teachers suggest:

When I was a child at kindergarten I also received *kanyu* just before going home.

Well, it's really only meant to be if you're not receiving enough nutrients from your regular food and the children are all eating packed lunches these days so I'm a little surprised.

I noticed she put it out on lids rather than leaving the jar open for everyone.

That's because *kanyu* is very expensive.

Although the *kanyu* is not fact regarded as a sweet, Japanese teachers in the focus group sessions indicated that the occasional dispensing of candy was not a problem in their centres. Lock (1980:72) has described how candy is frequently given to Japanese children in order to restore balance. At Oka Kindergarten, lollies were given to children following periods of intense physical exertion such as the sports day practice or the swimming lesson. These same teachers dismissed the notion that candy might lead to concerned mothers complaining about cavities in their children's teeth. In New Zealand, however, the teacher who regularly dishes out lollies is seen as contravening "healthy food" policies which ban such food products from the early childhood setting. These kinds of teachers are implicitly regarded as somewhat neglectful in the same way that mothers who frequently include sugary foods in their children's lunchboxes or diets are labelled by other mothers as inferior (Albon and Mukherji 2008:108).

For Japanese viewers, the scene of the *kanyu* distribution could be read quite differently. Rather than a violation of physical and oral hygiene, it was interpreted as continuing a traditional practice that was common in the post-war years but has become less prevalent with rising standards of living and nutrition. Placing the *kanyu* on lids was seen as a means of elevating the drops from simple candy, which could be taken straight from the container, to a food product that deserved its own ritual in the form of a simple serving platter, the lid. More surprising for these viewers, was the fact that the children in the video did not show enough respect for the *kanyu* that they were about to consume:

I was most surprised about the fact that the children just grabbed the *kanyu*, put it in their mouths and were chewing away right before they said their farewell greetings. I thought they would sit down first and then eat before leaving for home.

Rituals around food

The display of good table manners is an integral part of Japanese culture (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993:104). To neglect to observe the rituals around food is regarded as a major break with expected behaviour in the Japanese early childhood setting. Hendry (1993:139) describes the routines that surround mealtimes at kindergartens as examples of temporal wrapping. They are a way of dividing up time to make an event clear by separating it from others around it through an obvious beginning and ending. Mealtimes follow a structured routine in homes, kindergartens, schools and organisations over all Japan. The beginning of the meal consumption must always be preceded by *itadakimasu*, to express receipt of food, and end with the phrase *gochisōsama deshita* which indicates thanks. As Hendry points out, this routine is so familiar to children by the time they start kindergarten that they will wait patiently for everyone to be ready and the greeting to be given before touching their food. Likewise, children learn to remain seated at the table until the end of the meal has been formally announced. This routine is even more elaborate in many early childhood settings as children, acting in the role of duty monitors, run through a series of questions before giving the call to begin. Rituals around meal times serve an important socialising role, as a kindergarten teacher from Yokohama explains:

It's important for the children to become sincere, good members of society and we try and teach that here at our kindergarten. We learn to do that all together. Maybe when foreigners see us learning that kind of thing together (*go issho ni*) it might look a bit strange, but those words such as *itadakimasu* are the same all over the country and its comforting for us to have that solidarity and familiarity. Also, once children are interacting in society they need to know how to act appropriately and use the correct greeting and actions. Our kindergarten equips them with that knowledge.

In the Japanese setting, emphasis is placed not only on children participating fully in rituals at mealtimes but attention is given to how the food is served, its aesthetic presentation and the creation of a positive atmosphere in which to enjoy it. Teachers are responsible for providing positive role models for children and in order to fulfil this role they are required to consume their lunch together with their class. This contrasts with the New Zealand centre where one staff member is responsible for the small group of children who eat lunch outdoors at the centre. The other staff members are free to prepare a meal in the staffroom or consume food there that they have brought from home. Lunchtime at Kaimai Kindergarten is seen as time for staff to take a break from the demanding job of working with young children, and an opportunity to converse with

the other adults. Although the children are theoretically supposed to give thanks for their food before they eat, the whole process has quite a haphazard manner about it and the video depicts a group of boys ripping wrappings off cheese and sandwiches before the teacher approaches to sit with them. Although she gently chides them with, “You’re supposed to say thanks for your food”, the group does not pause eating and her manner is joking rather than authoritarian. As the children finish, one by one, they pack up their lunchboxes and wander off to play for the rest of the break time.

This contrasts with lunchtime at the Japanese kindergarten where preparations and consumption of the midday meal take over an hour. The children are required to first lay out their equipment for lunch: napkin, chopsticks, cup, lunch box (*bentō*). Each object has a specific place and must be neatly arranged a certain distance along the table from one’s neighbour. The duty monitors help the teacher bring in the large teapot full of barley tea and pour a little into the upturned cups. Then the duty monitors lead the class in the lunch time greeting rituals which consist of a special song sung each day, as well as a prayer which is chanted as a group. Only when all of these rituals have been completed are the children allowed to begin eating. However, as the focus groups pointed out, the class at the centre of the video was a particularly large and boisterous group which did not always conform to expectations. This is regarded as a serious breach of etiquette as a kindergarten teacher from Kutchan, Hokkaido explained:

In the case of my classroom, greetings such as “good morning” are very important. Straight after the water play finished the children went inside to eat lunch and even though the duty monitors respectfully commenced the lunchtime greeting rituals there were still some children who were getting their lunches out, while others were standing up and others were still getting ready. However the teacher still carried on. She didn’t stop the children or show the food or the lunch rituals the respect that it deserves. I thought it was really a shame. It’s so important to correctly demonstrate to children how important food is and what the proper behaviour should be when we are about to eat it.

These comments reflect Japanese assumptions that food habits are intrinsically linked to national character as well as a reflection of social and cultural values (Cwiertka 2008:417). However, it is not just the routines which link to deeper social meanings. At the Japanese kindergarten, notions of purity and pollution are externalised in the form of the lunchbox or *bentō*. As Bestor (1999:166) writes “concerns about seasonality – and hence, freshness and purity – are normal parts of any food culture. In the Japanese case, however, purity and pollution both have multiple meanings, and the ideal of perfect external form – *kata* – adds an extra dimension to assessing foodstuffs”. In his analysis

of the Tsukiji fish market, Bestor notes that the Japanese consumer is apprehensive about purchasing products with any perceptible flaws. Suppliers must therefore be careful to select products which are perfect as external blemishes may be a sign of internal imperfection. Bestor links these concerns both with folk wisdom and with the very real health threats from famous pollution cases in the 1970s. More recently, the Japanese government has failed to act promptly following cases of “mad cow disease” (Kingston 2004), and the country has been rocked by a series of food scares involving products imported from China (“Fears of made in China” 2007) as well as internal corruption scandals (Pulvers 2008). These fears are reflected in a preference for domestically produced food products but also show the desire for the perfect form, *kata*, which foreign producers often cannot satisfy (Bestor 1999:169).¹¹²

The lunch box as a reflection of cultural ideology

The result of this ideology can be seen in the production of the Japanese child’s lunch box which also plays a role in ensuring mothers are socialised into “good wives and wise mothers” (Uno 1993) . Teachers at the kindergarten often noted poorly assembled lunchboxes, and attributed them to inadequate mothers. This did not go unnoticed by mothers and there was keen competition to produce the most admired lunchbox which would be judged, photographed and pinned to the wall each week by the staff. For those mothers who are unsure of how to perfect their craft, help is at hand in the form of child-rearing and food magazines which carry articles on the topic of the lunch box. These are accompanied by glossy photographs of beautiful, nutritious *bentō*, such as rice balls adorned with seaweed or sesame patterns, delicate vegetable flowers, and sausages cut into the shape of an octopus. Not only is the mother judged on her ability to produce an aesthetically-pleasing, wholesome *bentō*, the child is expected to consume it in its entirety during the ritualised lunch time. At times, teachers would resort to spoon-feeding children the remains of their lunch. For just as it is the mother’s responsibility to make a delicious lunch, and the child’s job to consume it completely and cheerfully, it is up to the teacher to ensure that this operation is correctly carried

¹¹² In the wake of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear tragedy in Northern Japan, this ideology may well be under threat. With domestic food products facing repeated safety scares (“Stop claiming food is safe” 2011) Japanese consumers may be forced to look to other countries to satisfy their needs.

out.¹¹³ Allison (1997:302) argues that *bentō* not only serves to keep Japanese children culturally and ideologically attached, it is “a representation of what the mother is and what the child should become”.



Figure 25: A Japanese kindergarten teacher spoon feeds a reluctant child the remains of his lunch

In the New Zealand context, the Japanese teachers were surprised by children’s decisions not to eat some foods despite the fact that their mothers had prepared it for them. It was immediately clear, however, that the same level of preparation had not gone into the New Zealand lunchboxes. At one point, a child tips all of his yoghurt into the rubbish bin, and the teacher asks him, “Aren’t you going to eat that? That’s a waste” but does not try to prevent the child’s act. While the children do sit down as a group, consumption of the food is marked more as an individual act rather than linked explicitly to that of others around them. This contrasts with Japanese cultural approaches which see meal times as governed by rituals which identify children as part of a group.

James et al. (2009:45) have suggested that parents link their child’s willingness to eat the same food as others in the family with a “commitment and identification with the family”. Viewed through this lens, family food thus takes on a symbolic importance that can reveal the depth of a child’s engagement and obligation to the family group.

¹¹³ In their cross-cultural study, Fujita and Sano (1998) showed how approaches to food consumption in early childhood settings can differ. While Japanese teachers were happy to help slow eaters, American teachers felt it was important that young children learn to feed themselves in order to become independent.

The child who rejects this symbolic offering, that is the fussy child, can therefore also be seen as refusing to identify as a member of that group. James et al. point to the practice of mothers persevering to make reluctant children eat, even if it is just a tiny amount, as a sign of “the importance of demonstrating family membership through food sharing”. In contrast, children who have consistently consumed home-cooked food without a fuss are revered as dutiful members of the family unit. These practices seek to teach children the value of “family” through sharing and consumption of family food. In the Japanese early childhood setting, the same can be said for rituals around food which teach children to become members of a group through the sharing of food. That is why it is important that everyone consumes their meal, and why the teacher will persevere in feeding those children who resist this ideology.

During the lunch scenes at the New Zealand centre, another contrast becomes apparent when a child in the group offers a piece of cheese to his friend who quickly swallows it, just as the teacher tries to intervene with, “Oh no! We don’t share our food because you might not be allowed to eat that. That’s why we only eat our only food”. At a policy level, the sharing of food is prohibited at Kaimai Kindergarten due to fears that children with allergies might inadvertently swallow something that could make them ill, or worse, be fatal. The strong reaction of the teacher in the video clip also gives the sense that food shared is somehow food that has become polluted or unfit for consumption. Again, this is food that is out of place (Douglas 1966). As Murcott (1988:12) has pointed out, “Food is used to signify not just people’s relation to objects, but also to their own bodies. It displays something of our ideas about what is acceptable and safe to take into the body – it betrays the meanings we attach to our bodies in their objective aspect. And our use of food reveals into the bargain concepts of closeness and acceptability in our relationships with one another”. Yet, sharing food is a large part of Māori culture and practices as Ritchie (2001) points out in her description of “fruit time” in early childhood settings. Inspired by Māori values, fruit time involves children gathering as a group to listen to a story while consuming a variety of fruits brought from home. However, government policies relating to food now require children to bring their own individual piece of fruit rather than a selection to share with others.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ In other areas of the New Zealand curriculum Māori values around food have been retained such as respect for the cultural belief that it is inappropriate to use food in play (Dudding 2011). In Japan, there are no cultural prohibitions of this kind and it is common to use cut potatoes to make prints, to scatter and glue rice to create textual paintings and to use onion skins for dyeing.

Douglas (1972) has argued that food occupies a symbolic order which is reflected in its preparation, cooking and consumption. She believes that the pattern of meal times, and the way in which each meal is consumed, conceals deeper cultural meanings. With this in mind, consider meal times at the Japanese kindergarten replete with lunch box contents which are designed to be shared. Each day the children would delight in presenting their lunch to others around them, and often asked their peers, the teacher or visitors like myself to taste the food. This expectation is equally apparent at kindergarten events such as the excursion (*ensoku*). Hendry (1999:58) has described her embarrassment at arriving at one of these events with some bread and packets of meat only to be greeted by mats loaded with elaborate creations prepared by the other mothers. As Hendry points out, these foodstuffs, such as sushi, could be shared amongst the other families present unlike her own meal. I made the same mistake when my family went on our first picnic with members of my son's Japanese childcare centre. As our food also could not be easily shared amongst the group, we were consigned to sitting alone while others mingled over the exchange of their home-cooked food.

Reflecting on constructions of dirt, pollution and purity

This chapter has looked at the ways in which constructions of dirt, pollution and purity are expressed in the early childhood settings of New Zealand and Japan. As a site of rituals and practices of purification, the body appears a logical place to begin despite its earlier neglect by scholars (Lock 1987, Turner 2008). Douglas (1999:111) claims that the "idea of dirt implies system" therefore the avoidance of dirt can be seen as a means of ensuring order is restored. Pollution rules are an extension of this process in the way they impose order on experience, support clarification of forms and minimise dissonance. Pollution rules are most often applied to functions or products of the human body. Contact with blood, vomit, excreta and food are commonly regulated through these rules, but the actual rules themselves vary according to cultural context. An analysis of New Zealand and Japanese teachers' reactions to treatment of a child's bleeding knee shows these constructions in evidence. The scene concludes with the New Zealand teacher placing a plaster over a child's wound without administering disinfectant. Reactions by both Japanese viewers and New Zealand focus groups participants show the clear links between dirt as mediated through conceptions of the individual and the social body.

Foucault's (1973a) theories about bio-medicine show how health practices evolve according to new forms of knowledge. In the New Zealand early childhood setting approaches to the body are framed by pervasive health and safety discourses which dictate the level of physical and microbiological contact between teachers and children's bodies. This ideology is symbolised by the rubber glove which is supposed to be worn, yet teachers regularly subvert this regulation as there is little which culturally resonates with its relevance. I believe that a large part of teachers' reticence to slavishly conform to wearing gloves and disinfecting all wounds is informed by the belief that dirt is not always polluting. In the New Zealand context, dirt has been repositioned as an expression of freedom and this is realised in children's outdoor play which frequently results in minor scrapes and soiled bodies. Injuries, even those which involve the spilling of blood, are dealt with in a matter of fact way that minimises drama or individual attention. This kind of reaction serves to reinforce characteristics of New Zealand identity that are viewed favourably such as stoicism and humility. New Zealanders prefer to distance themselves from characteristics such as flamboyance and pride which they perceive to be traits of more confident cultures such the United States (MacDonald 2004).

In the Japanese setting, disinfectant is seen as an essential means of purifying wounds or bloody scrapes. Yet, unlike the New Zealand context, gloves are neither required nor worn. The emphasis is firmly on preventing dirt from entering the body of the child rather than preventing bacteria emanating from the child's wound to penetrate the skin of the adult. This approach links to the Japanese fear of inhaling or absorbing dirt from the outside which is perceived as an inherently polluted space. It also shows why gloves may be commonly used in occupations or activities which call for contact with "people dirt" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984:26) in the outside, but why gloves are not deemed necessary in the sanctity of the unpolluted inside of the kindergarten. While New Zealand approaches to the body and dirt may be symbolised by the rubber glove, in Japan it is the mask which provides the most useful metaphor. The mask is used to protect the body when it is necessary to traverse from the context of the (dirty) outside world to a (clean) inside space and back again. That is why it is not common to see Japanese wearing masks inside their homes as they believe there is little or no threat of inhaling germs in this space. In the same way, it would be unusual to see a New Zealand parent pulling on a rubber glove to deal with a cut knee in the backyard, as the glove is linked to institutional health and safety discourses in the New Zealand context.

There are also differences in the way that early childhood teachers New Zealand and Japanese treat cases of illness and injury. While New Zealand children may be implicitly admired for enduring pain with a minimum of fuss, Japanese children are expected to call attention to their plight. In contrast to the regular approach of benign neglect usually taken by Japanese teachers, illness represents an accepted opportunity to disrupt the order of socialisation processes. Sick children are pampered and indulged in a reflection of adult society which views illness as a legitimate chance to enjoy the care and concern (*amae*) of others beyond the family group.

Concepts of polluted spaces seem straightforward as most people, for example, would classify the toilet area as dirty. However, in the Japanese kindergarten the division of potentially polluting and clean spaces is more clearly defined by ritual and practice than in the New Zealand centre. It is very important that Japanese children follow the correct rituals around appropriate footwear in the corresponding spaces. To fail to do so is not only socially inexcusable, it puts others at risk of contamination. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:26) has described a child who played with hospital slippers as an extremely disturbing anecdote because the act concerned three potent symbols of dirt and pollution: footwear, the floor and the hospital. In my first year of living in Japan, a British friend recounted an incident which had left him shocked by the Japanese people's unsympathetic response to injury. During a health check at the hospital, he had been asked to take a urine sample and was told to change out of the slippers he had donned (after previously leaving his shoes in the foyer) and put on toilet slippers at the toilet door. Once inside the toilet area, however, he found the generic slippers far too small and he tripped and fell, dislocating his jaw and badly gashing his head. As he lurched out of the toilet bleeding profusely, the nurses rushed over, only to try and pull his toilet slippers off his feet and exchange them for hospital slippers. What my friend had mistaken for unkindness was in fact a genuine horror that he was about to pollute the whole ward.

For New Zealand children there is less to internalise when it comes to rituals concerning the feet as or polluted spaces. In New Zealand early childhood settings, concepts of pollution centre more on hygiene practices which require children to wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet, or health and safety guidelines which prevent the sharing of food or drinking vessels. Policy has increasingly required food to be individually consumed in light of rising allergy cases and as a result food that is shared has become undesirable in the eyes of teachers, but quite possibly more coveted

in the minds of children. For the children at the Japanese kindergarten, the sharing of food does not break with any rituals or prohibitions therefore it does not warrant any special attention, much in the same way that going barefoot is unexceptional in the New Zealand context. Instead, the focus is on the food itself which must conform to exacting aesthetic and nutritional standards in order to banish any thoughts of imperfection. Labour intensively prepared food is complemented by structured meal-time rituals which Japanese children are expected to perfect during their time at kindergarten.

This chapter has used the theories of Douglas (1999) and Foucault (1973a) to discuss the differing ways dirt and pollution are dealt with in the early childhood context. Children's bodies inevitably become polluted, but can be physically and ritually purified through cultural acts. Polluted spaces can be addressed in the same way. Finally, the way food is approached in each of the two centres reflects cultural prohibitions related to the anomaly of dirt out of place. The next, and final, chapter condenses and reflects on the themes of this study.



Figure 26: Meal times are the focus of protracted rituals at Oka Kindergarten

Chapter 10: Conclusion

In both New Zealand and Japan, the policies and structures of early childhood education are the focus of ongoing state attention (Aoki 2010, Davison and Mitchell 2008, May 2009, Takahara 2010) resulting in a climate of uncertainty and change. However, many of the cultural assumptions underpinning the early childhood sector in each context have changed very little. Using the body as a focal point, this thesis has argued that implicit cultural understandings not only shape most of the interactions taking place in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts, but many of these practices often go unnoticed or unrecognised as culturally informed. This study used the video-cued *Preschool in Three Cultures* methods, developed by Tobin et al. (1989, 2009) to expedite the fieldwork process through the use of film and poly-vocal interviews. While film may be a subjective medium involving issues of power and agency (Pauly 2006), it also offers a relatively cheap and effective means of stimulating dialogue to reveal deeper cultural assumptions. A great strength in this method also lies in its potential to be used in an applied sense.

Although the body was once neglected as an object of scholarly study (Fraser and Greco 2005, Lock 1987, Turner 2008), it has now become a significant site for anthropological analysis. Inspired by Foucault (1995) scholars came to acknowledge that “the body is socially and culturally produced and historically situated, it is both a part of nature and society but, at the same time, a representation of the way that nature and society are conceived” (Lock 1987:8). While Foucault (1995) saw the body as a site of discipline, domestication, and training by the state, Douglas (1996) viewed the individual, physical body and the social body as reciprocally symbolic. Douglas (1996:74) builds on Mauss’s (1973) assertion that the human body be treated as an image of society. In other words, every natural symbol originating from the body contains and conveys a social meaning, and every culture selects its own meaning from the myriad of potential body symbolisms. This study calls on the theories of these scholars, resulting in an examination of what Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:7) term “the three bodies”.

Bodies from the beginning

To address New Zealand and Japanese notions of the body in early childhood education, it is necessary to start at the very beginning of a child’s life. In New Zealand, children’s bodies have been the object of political attention, most powerfully in the

form of the Plunket ideology which sought to regulate child-rearing through a pattern of limited physical contact and strict routine. In many families, discipline took the form of physical punishment, although this has now been outlawed and consideration has turned towards strong support of children's rights discourses (Te One 2005). In Japan too, the body has been the focus of state agendas such as pro-natal campaigns which have been revived in the current climate of the low birth rate (Suzuki 2006). Rather than taking a disciplinary approach in the home, Japanese mothers indulge their children to promote dependence. The cultural ideology of *skinship* prevails, which sees the bodies of mother and child linked through embodied practices such as co-sleeping and extensive physical contact.

For both the New Zealand and Japanese child, entry into the early childhood setting marks a period of transition. In order to facilitate this path smoothly, New Zealand centres strive to create and acknowledge links between the family and the wider community in order to create a shared sense of belonging (Ministry of Education 1996:42). However, in Japan the transition from home to kindergarten is marked by the separation of the bodies of mother and child. While Japanese centres seek to order and regulate children's bodies as a part of socialisation goals, New Zealand centres favour rituals which replicate the home environment. In reality, these ideals have to be tempered with the cultural, social and political realities of each country.

Constructing the body

Children's bodies have come to occupy a culturally contested space in the early childhood arena. A scene from the Japanese video which depicts naked children in the playground became a catalyst for teacher's discussions on how the bodies of children and early childhood teachers intersect. In Western contexts, the child's body has become a site for fear and anxiety in the light of political and scholarly debate over appropriate policy and practice (Tobin 1997a). Like other centres across New Zealand, children's bodies at Kaimai Kindergarten have come under increasing surveillance and regulation following high profile cases of child sexual abuse. In his exploration of power, Foucault (1995) suggests that observation is a key mechanism for achieving disciplinary control. The perfect disciplinary institution, therefore, is one in which everything, and everyone, can be simultaneously viewed. Foucault drew on the concept of the Panopticon to show how human behaviour can be modified through constant monitoring of actions, work habits, physical appearance, right through to moral beliefs.

Originally designed by Bentham for use in prisons, the goal of the Panopticon was never simply limited to organising the deprivation of liberty, but instead dedicated to transforming individuals. The concept of the Panopticon was extended to military garrisons, factories, hospitals and schools, although discipline could not be seen to originate from a central social authority or ruling class, since it permeated the entire social body, and manifested itself in innumerable structures.

Operating within an environment of constant surveillance renders all those within the gaze as permanently visible. Foucault (1995) argues that through this process human beings can be coerced to change their behaviour without the threat of physical violence to the body. This study found that teachers in the New Zealand early childhood context have internalised the idea that unclothed children's bodies deviate from the "norm" (Foucault 1995:199). Other sensory and physical interactions between teacher and child, that were once common two or three decades ago, have also been branded dangerous according to Foucault's binary divisions of power. Within this environment of surveillance, the bodies of children have also become more visible as doors are removed and mirrors installed, ostensibly to protect the children themselves. For many teachers interviewed as part of this study, diminished opportunities for sensory interactions between themselves and children have been met with regret, but also with relief. New Zealand teachers are extremely aware of the way young children's bodies politically intersect with sexuality, and they steer away from the precarious position intimate contact with children may put them in.

For teachers in the Japanese context, a group of naked children does not hold the same threat. Children's bodies continue to be viewed in terms of a nostalgic or remembered past (Robertson 1988) in spite of challenges to this (re)imagined ideal. Concepts of privacy are creeping into the early childhood environment, and the pleasures of communal nakedness are increasingly being replaced by modesty. In recent years, Japan has been rocked by a number of threats to children's safety, in the form of violence, abuse, natural disasters and viral diseases (Kita 2008). As a result of these events, Japanese teachers are increasingly aware of the potential for children's bodies to be harmed. While New Zealand early childhood centres may be tearing down the doors to ensure children are safe, Japanese centres are looking to build fences for the same reason. In many of the urban areas where focus group sessions were conducted, fences and security systems are already a reality. Despite fears that the child's body may be under threat, Japanese centres continue to offer opportunities for intimate bodily contact

in the form of communal bathing, naptime and sleepovers. The cultural ideology of *skinship* remains a pervasive influence in the lives of young children and the importance attached to these activities reflects that.

The body and its products

This study found that the Japanese context also reflects a more organic view of the body and its products. Japanese philosophy is regarded as constructing the whole being as a holistic entity (Picone 1989:469). This contrasts with Western philosophy where a dualism of mind and body, as articulated by Descartes, dominates critical thought (Grosz 2005). Within this dichotomy, consciousness is elevated above corporeality. Connected intimately with the mind, the disciplined body can therefore subdue bodily excesses. In the New Zealand early childhood setting, bodily functions are subject to European civilising processes (Elias 2000) that render them repugnant. However, Japanese early childhood education frames the body and its products as useful metaphors for educating children. This does not mean that these “social fluids” (Turner 2003) are not classified as dirty in Japan, but rather that these findings reflect Douglas’s (1996) claims that the extent to which bodily fluids and excretions are classified as polluting is culturally constructed. In other words, it is not a matter of considering objects or fluids themselves as dirty, but asking where they stand within a system of categories.

While approaches to the body as a site of excretion may vary in New Zealand and Japan, both contexts reflect a belief in the body as key means of extending children’s learning through physical and sensory opportunities. There are many similarities in the way that New Zealand and Japanese centres embrace dirt and totally embodied play as a means of compensating for the limits of modern society. For example, in New Zealand, messy play is seen as an iconic part of the early childhood scene. Children are encouraged to make sense of their world through tactile interactions with substances such as slime, mud, paint, and clay. Messy play makes links to the ideals of freedom and creativity which are seen as important components of New Zealand national identity. These experiences have become all the more valued as New Zealand children are increasingly forbidden to create mess in pristine homes. Japanese children also have fewer chances to experience an unsanitised play environment due to factors such as the shrinking family size and urbanisation. In an effort to mitigate these issues, Japanese teachers see the provision of vigorous, embodied play opportunities as

part of their role. However, a difference can be found in the way the dirty or wet body is treated in each context. At Kaimai Kindergarten, soiled clothing and bodies do not represent a breach of the purity rule (Douglas 1966), but at Oka Kindergarten, the body is unwrapped and rewrapped in line with Japanese concepts of cleanliness and pollution (Hendry 1993).

Internalising techniques of the body

Mauss (1973) has shown how each culture has its own special bodily habits, which he identifies as techniques. Children learn to master these techniques in order to become integrated into society. In the Japanese early childhood context, there is an emphasis on repetitive body techniques such as bowing, chanting, sitting and lining up. While these techniques were interpreted as regulating by New Zealanders, they are seen as an integral part of learning to embody being Japanese. The body plays a key part in internalising key Japanese characteristics, such as perseverance (*gambaru*) and liveliness (*genki*) through physically arduous training and challenging, risky play. At a macro-level, New Zealand, children's bodies are not subject to the same kinds of repetitive techniques, but they are still regulated by health and safety discourses in the early childhood environment.

In each context, culturally constructed approaches to bodily risk can be seen (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982), and this study has focussed on the playground as a means of locating a pedagogy of risk (Smith 1998). At Kaimai Kindergarten the play space is the focus of stringent regulations which dictate how fencing, fall surfaces, climbing apparatus and equipment should be used. High teacher to child ratios also serve to ensure all children are "permanently visible" (Foucault 1995:201) in order to meet with cultural expectations concerning adequate supervision. Yet, these risk-averse measures have been waived when it comes to the use of real tools in the carpentry area. Identified by teachers as an iconic part of New Zealand early childhood education, the hammers, saws and vices link back to New Zealand's pioneering past, seen as a vital piece in the construction of national identity (Phillips 1996, Wevers 1980). The meaningful learning opportunities children can gain from using real objects in a context of play and work are contrasted favourably against any risks they may pose.

Douglas and Wildavsky (1982:14) maintain that every culture has a unique set of shared values and social institutions that support and maintain it. These values and institutions are inherently biased towards accentuating particular risks and minimising

others. At Oka Kindergarten, the benefits of real tools are overwhelmed by the risks to the body that they present, making hammers, saws and nails unavailable for children's play. Yet, in the Japanese context there is a fatalistic attitude to children flirting with risk as reflected in the stony, hard grounds, towering slides and minimal fencing. Japanese children learn to challenge their bodies through vigorous play that would be deemed dangerous elsewhere (Walsh 2004). With less direct supervision by their teachers, peer support and control instead contribute towards keeping children physically and emotionally safe. In both the Japanese and New Zealand context, attitudes towards the embodiment of risk reflect the intersection of the cultural, social and the political.

Order and the body

In the same way, how children's bodies are disciplined and regulated in overt, and implicit, ways can reveal deeper cultural values. Foucault (1981, 1995) sees the body as a site of bio-power through a process of regulation and control. Through the micro-physics of bio-power the body is rendered docile in order to become "normal". The disciplined body is held in high esteem in Western culture (Holliday and Hassard 2001) where Descartes's ideas of mind-body dualism still prevail. A disciplined body can therefore be seen as a manifestation of a strong mind. In the New Zealand early childhood setting, noisy bodies are constructed as undisciplined through their challenge to notions of normal behaviour in this context. Children are discouraged from yelling, squealing or rushing boisterously about the centre as these acts are counter to Western concepts of civilised behaviour (Elias 2000).

In Japanese philosophy, the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy is disregarded in favour of a more holistic view of the body as a system of mutually interdependent parts (Lock 1980, Picone 1989). At Oka Kindergarten, the noisy acts of children are not seen as disorderly, but regarded as naturally childlike (*kodomo-rashi*) behaviour. Japanese constructions of boisterous play do not render it disorderly, but place it as a valuable expression of childhood within a holistic world view. For example, boisterous play is believed to contribute to strength of character and good health. Tobin (1992:27) has suggested that modern Japanese perceive the world of the child to be shrinking, and regardless of whether this belief is supported in reality, it has affected the evolution of early childhood education. This may be another reason why Japanese teachers are reluctant to impose order during the free play periods. There is a desire to allow children

to experience the kind of unconstrained, unmediated interactions they once would have enjoyed while roaming their local neighbourhoods, even if the chaotic results are quite surprising to outsiders (Smith 1995:43). The presence or absence of noise can, therefore, be seen as an expression of the normalising process at work (Foucault 1995). While in New Zealand, the absence of noise becomes a tool for reproducing the social order, in Japan, the presence of noise serves the same function.

In the same way, how inappropriate behaviour is constructed and conflict is resolved can be seen as reproducing cultural norms. In the New Zealand context, fighting is not condoned due to the importance placed on children's rights. Physical violence and verbal attacks are viewed as direct violations of those rights. When a child transgresses the rights of another, teachers seek to remove the offending body through methods such as "time out". Children are encouraged to solve disputes verbally, rather than with their bodies. While New Zealand teachers may look to isolate the individual body in the pursuit of calm, Japanese teachers seek ways to incorporate children back into the collective body. An organic approach to children's bodies can be seen in the way Japanese teachers allow children to resolve conflicts themselves, even if this sometimes results in a physical skirmish. Hitting is not seen as a threat to social stability, but rather an inevitable part of childhood. Although Japanese approaches to discipline may appear relaxed, it is part of a pedagogical approach practised by early childhood teachers throughout the country (Tobin et al. 2009).

Foucault (1995:139) claims that "discipline is a political anatomy of detail". The control of time and space are fundamental to the disciplinary society. Timetables, exercise routines, rows of desks and classrooms all serve to regulate the body through activity. At Oka Kindergarten, children's bodies are subject to disciplinary techniques in numerous ways. Daily classes are meticulously planned and events are entered up to a year in advance on an annual calendar. Classes are divided both spatially, through the groups of desks, and temporally, through the periods of quiet, formal ritual interspersed with chaotic free play. Routines for lunch time, assembly, arrival and departure are all internalised through repetitive practice. Children become adept at lining up at a moment's notice, and take part in group exercise drills each morning, ostensibly for the good of their health. However, Foucault (1995:155) would argue that rather than benefitting the individual, these acts actually serve to control and discipline the body.

At Kaimai Kindergarten, the kinds of disciplinary techniques described above are much less prevalent. The day is dominated by free play, with only a handful of

structured rituals in the form of “mat time”, morning and afternoon tea. Unlike in Japan where teachers plan their day according to standardised texts which present parameters of “normal” childhood behaviour (Goodman 2002a), the New Zealand early childhood curriculum does not follow a content or activities based structure. Children are not required to line up in rows, sit at desks or take part in morning callisthenics. While the children at Kaimai Kindergarten may be discouraged from fighting or screaming, there is little other structure explicitly imposed on them by adults. Implicitly, however, the centre is still the site of unseen power which governs much of children’s and teachers days at the centre. Rather than emanating from a person, Foucault (1995:202) sees power as “a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relations in which individuals are caught up”. Kaimai Kindergarten may lack many of the rituals of Oka Kindergarten, but children’s and teachers’ bodies are still subject to normalising forces as seen in the discussion above of unclothed bodies.

Approaches to dirt and pollution

In both New Zealand and Japan, health and safety discourses are located within this normalising framework. While it may seem that ideas about dirt, pollution and bodies are due to modern understandings of pathogenic organisms, Douglas (1999:109) points out that concepts of dirt predate contemporary medicine. Defined by Douglas as “matter out of place”, dirt can therefore only exist within a set of ordered relations. The presence of dirt contravenes that order. It is common to see pollution rules applied to functions or products of the human body, and early childhood settings are no exception to this. Contact with blood, vomit, excreta and food are regulated through these rules. While teachers at Oka Kindergarten were shocked by a New Zealand teacher not applying disinfectant to a bleeding knee, Douglas (1966) would see their concerns less as stemming from a fear of pathogens than as a rupture of pollution constructs. In Japan, spaces are symbolically defined as either “outside” and therefore dirty and possibly dangerous, and the sacred, clean “inside”. This idea is central to the way the body, social relationships and physical spaces are constructed (Lock 1980:88). The scene of the bleeding knee reveals the strong association Japanese have with the outside and dirt (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Failure to thoroughly clean the wound implies a confusion of these two constructs, potentially allowing the outside dirt to enter the inside of the body. The Japanese fear of absorbing or inhaling dirt from the outside (seen as an inherently

polluted space) is the reason that masks and gloves continue to be worn. It explains why children are stripped naked to be thoroughly washed off after a period of water and sand play, as described above. It can also be seen in the rituals around appropriate footwear in different spaces. This is not only a feature of early childhood settings, but the most ubiquitous example of Japanese pollution rules.

In the New Zealand early childhood setting, approaches to pollution and the body are increasingly being framed by pervasive health and safety discourses. This ideology is symbolised by the rubber glove which has become a standard fixture in kindergarten first aid sets. New Zealand analysis of the bleeding knee scenario focussed less on the issue of potential pollution, and more on the context of surveillance in which the injury occurred. As one teacher articulated, “if we knew that there was a video camera there we would certainly put a glove on”. Douglas (1999:114) defines pollution beliefs as cultural phenomena, “institutions that can keep their forms only by bringing pressure to bear on deviant individuals”. For the New Zealand teachers interviewed in this study, the symbolism of dirt is not wholly constructed according to notions of pollution. Dirt has been repositioned as an expression of freedom and creativity embodied through children’s soiled bodies and clothing. Aside from the fear of being caught subverting hygiene policies, there is little to compel teachers to religiously apply disinfectant and don gloves. Although the potential pathogenicity of dirt is well understood, dirt does not represent the same symbolic threat to children’s bodies that it does in Japan.

Just as an analysis of dirt may reflect notions of pollution, Douglas (1966, 1972) maintains that rituals around food and the sharing of meals express social relations. These rituals “work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body” (Douglas 1966:128). Treating food sharing as a code can reveal “hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries” (Douglas 1999:231). Food can also be constructed as polluting when the external boundaries of the society are under pressure. At Kaimai Kindergarten, policy dictates that children are to consume only their own food during the shared lunch time. This rule has arisen due to the growing number of children with food allergies. As a result, food that is shared has been reclassified as potentially polluting, both in a biological sense and symbolically. Like lollies, it has become food “out of place” in the New Zealand early childhood setting (Douglas 1966). At Oka Kindergarten, notions of purity and pollution are externalised in the form of the lunchbox or *bentō*. Lunches made by the children’s

mothers not only reflect the ideal of the perfect form (Bestor 1999) but serve to keep Japanese children culturally and ideologically attached (Allison 1997). Children are expected to consume the entire contents of their lunchbox both to show their understanding of this construct, and to demonstrate their commitment and identification with the group (James et al. 2009). Meal times and special events such as the annual picnic demonstrate how the identity of the wider kindergarten family (children, parents and teachers) are linked through the sharing of food. As Douglas (1966:126) shows, “one cannot share the food prepared by people without sharing in their nature”.

Future directions

Sharing of food, experiences, homes and conversation have also constituted a large part of the fieldwork for this study. These acts all place the body at the centre, and I argue in this thesis that the body’s place as an object for scholarly attention is well justified. However, there is always space for further research. As discussed in the introduction, I was initially keen to include another country in this study to avoid the criticism of dichotomy that this kind of comparative research can attract (Alexander 1999). Due to financial and time constraints, this was unfortunately not feasible. I believe a third perspective would not only add another dimension to this work, but offer a possible focus for further study. However, I have drawn extensively from literature in the fields of anthropology, education, Japanese and media studies in order to gain a thorough understanding of my subject. This has not only provided an additional perspective but added depth to the work.

At this point, it is important to restate that both the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts are far from homogeneous, but that this study has focussed on the experiences of four year old children at a New Zealand early childhood centre and a Japanese kindergarten. Reading through the text, I can see a number of similarities between the Japanese early childhood context, and that of Māori language nests (*kōhanga reo*). This study did not look specifically at the experience of Māori, due to the low numbers of Māori children attending Kaimai Kindergarten and the limited attention given there to Māori cultural practices and beliefs. Despite this, I acknowledge that Māori perspectives should take prominence in New Zealand early childhood research, and I can see the kernel of a valuable study emerging. Applying the video-cued research methods used in this study would, I am sure, produce some valuable insights into the way Māori notions of early childhood education are constructed. I also

welcome Japanese perspectives on this study. I would cherish the chance to work collaboratively with Japanese anthropologists, who could not only offer more “insider” perspectives, but make use of the vast anthropological literature available only in Japanese.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for this kind of research comes in the form of the videos themselves. Early childhood teachers have little chance to observe the practice of other teachers (Nuttall 2003), and while a tradition of self-reflection is common in Japan, it is not yet so prevalent in New Zealand circles. Tobin et al.’s (1989, 2009) video-cued method provides a valuable way for early childhood teachers to critically reflect on their own practice, to have their own work critiqued by their peers, and to conceptualise their role. While cross-cultural comparisons can provide another level of critique, I believe this method can be just as useful within one culture, or even one centre. It can also be effectively applied to other workplace contexts, such as factories and offices, or to provide perspective on environmental, political or social issues. The videos also have a practical application as a training resource at teacher training institutions. These days producing digital video is a relatively cost-effective, and manageable exercise. It is my greatest hope that the films produced for this study will have an applied use, and that this project will inspire others to look towards visual anthropology as a means of illuminating social and cultural issues.

A story to finish the journey

To conclude this thesis, I would like to turn to two vignettes from the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood settings which reflect many of the themes discussed in the body of the work. These scenes provide a nice way to draw all the threads of the chapters together. The first vignette takes place at Oka Kindergarten. As with all the other events structured on the Japanese kindergarten calendar, the day for potato planting (*imoue*) is clearly marked, to coincide with the arrival of spring after the long, snowy winter. The day before the planting the children are issued with an extensive list of items to bring along such as gumboots, cotton gloves, a hat, a trowel, a bucket, and a smock. On the actual day, the children are instructed by their teachers to gather up their equipment, don the appropriate clothing and footwear and to line up as a class outside the kindergarten. The morning timetable has been divided into half hour time slots which allows for each class of twenty five to thirty five children to file down to the garden without disrupting another group of children.

The garden itself is located a short walk from the kindergarten. In order to proceed there safely, the teacher instructs children to divide into pairs and hold hands with their partner for the duration of the walk. At the potato plot, the soil has been dug over earlier by staff, and sculpted into six neat, long rows. At the end of each row a sign depicts the name of each of the classes. The teacher asks the children to squat down at the edge of the plot while she explains the planting procedure, and issues each one with a seed potato to be placed in their buckets. Finally, the class is instructed to file down their designated row, being careful not to disturb the other rows, and again squat above the soil while they dig a small hole, place the potato in it and cover it over with more dirt. When all the children have completed this task, the class files back to the kindergarten to allow the next group of children to enter the plot.

In late summer, the children return again to the garden to harvest the potatoes. The same procedure is followed, allowing time for each class to dig up the vegetables from their own section of the plot. This time the children bring plastic bags with them and the teacher ensures that each child receives approximately the same number of potatoes to take home to their families. Once back at the kindergarten, all of the children are served a piping hot bowl of potato and meat stew (*niku jaga*), a traditional Japanese dish that is especially popular in Hokkaido where most of Japan's potatoes are grown. The inference is that the children and staff are consuming the potatoes that have been freshly dug from the garden and to this end the teachers ask that everybody gives thanks, both to nature for her bounty, and to show their appreciation for their peers who have worked so hard to provide a delicious, fresh meal. In reality, however, the potatoes are purchased from the supermarket the previous day so that the teachers have enough time to prepare the big vats of stew in the morning before the children arrive.

So what does this vignette tell us about how children's bodies reflect implicit cultural practice in the Japanese early childhood setting? It is important to remember that this vignette comes from a single Japanese kindergarten and the ritual will not be carried out exactly the same throughout the rest of the country. Despite some differences however, focus group sessions indicated that key features of the planting and harvesting rituals are replicated in some form in early childhood settings throughout Japan (see Figure 27). It is not hard here to see to see the work of Foucault (1995) in the orderly lines formed by the children and replicated in the vegetable garden. Douglas's (1966) notions of pollution and purity are also evident in the rituals surrounding planting. Specific clothing, such as gloves, hats and boots, all work to prevent

contamination through contact with outside dirt (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Not to mention, the theories of Mauss (1973) through the squat position perfected during the years of early childhood. Squatting for long periods of time is something that the bodies of Japanese children become very adept at yet it is rarely seen in a New Zealand context as the position is regarded as difficult to maintain. In fact, this is just one of many body techniques (Mauss 1973) Japanese children must master in order to function successfully in Japanese society.



Figure 27: Planting ritual at an Osaka Kindergarten

While the act of potato planting is ostensibly about natural life cycles, the point of the exercise is less about interacting with nature but more about reinforcing the omnipotence of the group experience and Japanese cultural identities and practice. In the early childhood setting, the Japanese child's body may be an individual organism but the self can only be understood as a fluid entity which exists in relation to others, and changes according to context (Bachnik and Quinn 1994, Rosenberger 1992). These skills must be learnt from childhood (Hendry 1986). This idea can be seen clearly at Oka Kindergarten where the child's body is constructed as both a single mechanism, and an interdependent part of a larger, corporate body. While the disciplining of the Japanese body may appear rigid at times to Western eyes, practising control is seen as a means of making children's life more enjoyable through social systems of reciprocity. At the centre of this journey towards becoming Japanese, is the body, as children internalise concepts of interdependence, self-management and perseverance.

The second vignette comes from Kaimai Kindergarten and also centres on gardening. Damon, a four year old boy has found some kowhai¹¹⁵ seeds on the ground that look to have come from a nearby tree. He approaches one of the teachers and announces that, as he would like to plant them, he will require some help from the staff. Together, he and the teacher look for a suitable container to use as a planter. They locate a terracotta pot that is half filled with dirt and top it up with more potting mix that is kept at the centre. Damon uses his bare hands to scoop out holes in the dirt and pushes each seed down into a cavity with a single finger. He then goes and gets a plastic watering can and begins to fill it with the water that is running from the hose into the sandpit. At this point, four year old Abby comes over to help with filling the watering can. She is interested in what Damon is doing and after finding out about his activities, she decides to locate a seed pod of her own to add to the planter. While Damon sprinkles water carefully over his newly planted seeds, Abby returns with her own foraged seeds which she plants in with Damon's. The teacher returns to check the children's progress and decides that she will write an explanation of the activity on a piece of card which is then dated, laminated and inserted into the pot. Over the next few weeks, Damon and Abby sporadically check their seeds and give them some more water. The seeds do not germinate however and eventually the children lose interest in them. Other miniature gardens in the centre are more successful though and little pots of lettuces, strawberries and herbs show the results of children's care.

At Kaimai Kindergarten, this scene reflects the child-centred, emergent curriculum which not only encourages curiosity about the natural environment, but supports children to come up with their own working theories. Once identified, individual children's interests are supported and scaffolded by teachers, and may also become the focus of sustained group or project work. The ideology that pervades the New Zealand setting is linked to rights-based discourses, individual freedom and liberty. Although not immediately evident in this example of child-centred learning, Foucault's notion of a disciplinary society can still be applied here. As power becomes more diffuse and anonymous, "those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts" (Foucault 1995:193). Stripped of the planting rituals evident in the Japanese context, Damon and the teachers around him are still the

¹¹⁵ Kowhai is a native New Zealand tree. The tree's Māori name refers to the yellow colour of its flowers.

subject of omnipresent surveillance which dictates how children's bodies should be constructed.



Figure 28: Planting in the New Zealand centre is often instigated by the interests of individual children

In the tradition of Douglas (1996) it has been argued that trees themselves, are natural symbols (Rival 1998:2). The symbolic power of a child planting a seed harks back to deeply held ideas about New Zealand's connections to nature and its pioneering past. Just as "real tools" are regarded as iconic, New Zealand identity is powerfully linked with images of a society carved out of the bush. In more recent years, New Zealand's clean green image has been used to market the country overseas. In the gardening scene, the child's body can therefore become a signifier for independence and individual freedom. In Japan too, child-rearing is likened to tree-growing, but given as a warning not to pamper children lest they fail to attain the maturity on which others around them are dependent (Knight 1998:203).

As insignificant as it may appear, even the body posture adopted by Damon can be interpreted as a cultural act. Mauss (1973) argues that every society has its own habits of the body, and to that end, children do not swim, walk, run or dig the same way in New Zealand as they do in Japan. It is just as foreign for the New Zealand child to squat in a row, as it is for the Japanese child to tend to a plant from the standing position. At every turn, even these simple vignettes show how addressing culture through the lens of the body can illuminate, clarify and produce further avenues for analysis. An

understanding of the corporeality of the self can provide a robust and compelling foundation from which to explore issues in early childhood education.

Coming full circle

This journey began in a very personal way, with my family's experience of early childhood education in Japan and New Zealand. As I explained in the introduction, our return to New Zealand from Japan had very different outcomes for my children. While my older son felt lost without the rituals that anchored him at his Japanese kindergarten, my middle son felt freed from structure and repetition. Early in this journey, many New Zealand teachers confessed to stereotypical views of the Japanese early childhood system as rigid, controlling, and repressive of children's creativity. Just as the New Zealand teachers held preconceived ideas about Japan, the Japanese teachers envisaged New Zealand centres as individualistic, ritual-poor, and lacking in structure. Knowing that I was conducting research in the two countries, and that my three children had experienced both settings, people often asked me, "but which system do *you* think is the best?" The reality is both settings (re)produce cultural practices which are valued in each country, and look to socialise children to become fully functioning members of their own society. But in the globalised world where cultural identity is not discrete within national boundaries, the relevance of this work lies in its ability to reveal implicit cultural practices, embrace and understand them. It opens the way for constructive reflections on old and embedded practices, as well as stereotypes, and for assumptions to be examined from a fresh perspective.

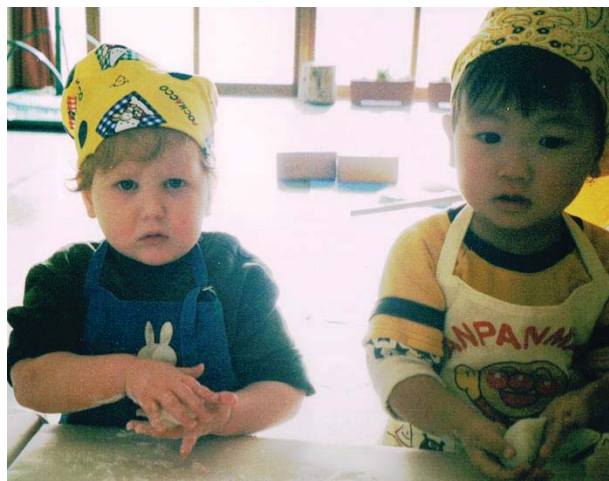


Figure 29: My middle son and his friend make *mochi* (glutinous rice cakes) as part of New Year celebrations at their kindergarten in Japan

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Appendices

Appendix A: Human Ethics approval letter



Massey University
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11 December 2008

Rachael Burke
c/- Dr G MacRae
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Massey University
Albany

Dear Rachael

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL APPLICATION – MUHECN 08/069
“Preschool in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of early childhood education”

Thank you for your application. It has been fully considered, and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, a 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

Dr Denise Wilson
Chair
Human Ethics Committee: Northern

cc: Dr G MacRae
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Appendix B: Information sheets and consent forms for participants

Information sheet for staff

(Massey University Departmental Letterhead)
School of Social and Cultural Studies
Massey University – Albany Campus
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore Mail Centre
Auckland 0745
NEW ZEALAND

Preschool in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of early childhood education INFORMATION SHEET FOR STAFF

Introduction

Hello. My name is Rachael Burke and I am a PhD student in Social Anthropology at Massey University in Auckland. I live here in [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and I have three sons. My two older boys attend [REDACTED] School and my youngest currently attends [REDACTED] Kindergarten. In 2007, I completed my Masters study into socialisation processes at kindergartens in Hokkaido, Japan, where my family lived for five and a half years.

Project Description

This year I have enrolled for a PhD in Social Anthropology at Massey University. The idea for this project developed during my experience as both a kindergarten teacher in Japan, and as a mother of preschoolers attending kindergarten in both New Zealand and Japan.

The aim of this research is to take a comparative approach to reveal how culture informs the way children and teachers interact at the kindergarten. To do this, I plan to participate in, observe and videotape a preschool classroom in one kindergarten in both New Zealand and Japan. The edited film of both ‘our own’ and ‘the other’ preschool will be screened to teachers in both countries, and their comments regarding issues of cultural or practical significance will be filmed. Finally, along with the written thesis, an edited film will be produced which combines teachers’ analysis with visual material from New Zealand and Japan.

Participation of Staff and Children

It is my intention to spend approximately one week at the kindergarten. The first two days will be in an observational role so that children can become familiar and comfortable with my presence and the camera. Filming and interviews will take place over the following three days. The emphasis will be on filming the children as a group, rather than focussing specifically on individuals. While I am not looking to interview children individually, I may write down any comments that I find pertinent to my research.

Prior to filming commencing, this information sheet will be distributed to staff, and another to parents/caregivers at the centre. If participants agree to themselves or their children participating in the study, they are asked to please sign and return the attached participant consent form. No observation or filming will begin before this has taken place.

I will take care not to film children whose parents have asked for them to be excluded. As the fieldwork takes place in a normal kindergarten setting, these children will be free to participate in the session as usual. They will not be removed from the kindergarten environment or asked to remain in a separate room. Any film which inadvertently includes these children will be cut out at the editing stage. The filming will not involve any change to children's usual schedule at the kindergarten.

The filming process is not intended to disrupt the regular kindergarten process, and the focus will not be on individual staff but follow children's interactions. As a group, staff will be invited to view, and analyse, the edited film of both their 'own' and the 'other' preschool. Previous studies of this kind have indicated this can take between one to four hours to complete. If necessary, I may follow up areas of interest with interviews with individual teaching staff. These interviews may take as long as 1-2 hours with an individual, or be as short as ten minutes of comments.

The filming aims to be as least disruptive as possible to children and staff during the kindergarten session. I am happy to discuss any concerns or questions you may have. I warmly invite staff at [REDACTED] Kindergarten to participate in this research project.

Data Management

At no point will the surnames of staff members, children or parents be used in either the film or the text. The names and characteristics of the preschools and the towns they are located in will not be specifically mentioned in either the film or the accompanying text. However, as this research involves filming, members of the centres involved may be able to be identified by the local community. Therefore, participants need to be aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Data (which includes digital film images) will be collected on a password-protected laptop computer, and backed up on disc, then stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Consent forms will be stored in a separate locked container. The researcher and her supervisors are the only people who will have access to the raw data and the consent forms. It is hoped that this film may also have value for training institutions, so there is a possibility that the final edited film may become available in the public arena in the future.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you consent to participate in this study, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study within one month of filming commencing
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give your permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

Project Timelines

I intend to begin filming at [REDACTED] Kindergarten in late March/early April, and in Japan during June/July. With this in mind, I would appreciate it if you could please return your consent forms as soon as possible. The final deadline for accepting consent forms is Monday 30 March 2009. Participant consent forms that have not been received by this date will be considered as having consented to participate in this project. Thank you in advance for your help in getting these filled out!

Contact Information

Researcher: Rachael Burke, Tel (07) 576-7377, E-mail: rachadrian@hotmail.com

Main Supervisor: Dr Graeme Macrae, Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Massey University Auckland, Tel (09) 414-0800 x9045

Secondary Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Rimoldi, Massey, Tel (09) 414-0800 x 9046
Dr Elena Kolesova, Senior Lecturer, Unitec, Auckland, Tel (09) 815-4321 x6110

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/069. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 9070, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Staff consent form

(Massey University Departmental Letterhead)
School of Social and Cultural Studies
Massey University – Albany Campus
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore Mail Centre
Auckland 0745
NEW ZEALAND

**Preschool in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of
early childhood education**

STAFF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

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 agree/do not agree to being video taped.

I agree/do not agree to keep confidential any information arising from the group film analysis sessions.

I agree/do not agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Full Name (printed):

Signature: _____ **Date:**

Information sheet for parents

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NEW ZEALAND

Preschool in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of early childhood education

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS

Introduction

Hello. My name is Rachael Burke and I am a PhD student in Social Anthropology at Massey University in Auckland. I live here in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I have three sons. My two older boys attend [REDACTED] School and my youngest currently attends [REDACTED] Kindergarten. In 2007, I completed my Masters study into socialisation processes at kindergartens in Hokkaido, Japan, where my family lived for five and a half years.

Project Description

This year I have enrolled for a PhD in Social Anthropology at Massey University. The idea for this project developed during my experience as both a kindergarten teacher in Japan, and as a mother of preschoolers attending kindergarten in both New Zealand and Japan.

The aim of this research is to compare the ways in which culture affects the way children and teachers interact at the kindergarten. To do this, I plan to participate in, observe and videotape a preschool classroom in one kindergarten in both New Zealand and Japan. The edited film of both ‘our own’ and ‘the other’ preschool will be screened to teachers, and their comments regarding issues of cultural or practical significance will be filmed. Finally, an edited film which combines visual material from both countries and teachers’ comments will be produced along with the written thesis.

Children’s Participation

It is my intention to spend approximately one week at the kindergarten. The first two days will be in an observational role so that children can become familiar and comfortable with my presence and the camera. Filming will take place over the following three days. The emphasis will be on filming the children as a group, rather than focussing specifically on individuals. While I am not looking to interview children individually, I may write down any comments that I find pertinent to my research.

Prior to filming commencing, this information sheet will be distributed to parents/caregivers and another to kindergarten staff. If staff and parents agree to themselves or their children participating in the study, they are asked to please sign and return the attached participant consent form. No observation or filming will begin before this has taken place. These forms can be handed in to the kindergarten office.

I will take care not to film children whose parents have asked for them to be excluded. As the fieldwork takes place in a normal kindergarten setting, these children will be free to participate in the session as usual. They will not be removed from the kindergarten environment or asked to remain in a separate room. Any film which inadvertently includes these children will be cut out at the editing stage. The filming will not involve any change to children's usual schedule at the kindergarten.

The filming aims to be as least disruptive as possible to children and staff during the kindergarten session. I warmly invite parents of [REDACTED] Kindergarten to consent to their children's participation in this research. I am happy to discuss any concerns or questions parents may have.

Data Management

At no point will the surnames of children be used in either the film or the text. Furthermore, the names and characteristics of the preschools and the towns they are located in will not be specifically mentioned in either the film or the accompanying text. However, as this research involves filming, members of the centres involved may be able to be identified by the local community. Therefore, participants need to be aware that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Parents who choose to remain with their children for all or part of the kindergarten session may be filmed as part of 'a typical day'. It is also likely that parents will be present during the filming of 'drop-off' and 'pick-up' time. By signing the consent form, parents agree to both themselves and their child's participation in this study.

Data (which includes digital film images) will be collected on a password-protected laptop computer, and backed up on disc, then stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Consent forms will be stored in a separate locked container. The researcher and her supervisors are the only people who will have access to the raw data and the consent forms. Parents will be given the opportunity to view the edited film and make comments or offer feedback. At this stage, the intention is for the film to be held at the office so that parents may borrow it, and watch it in the privacy of their own home.

The edited New Zealand film will be shown to approximately six teachers in one kindergarten in Japan, as well as staff at [REDACTED] Kindergarten. The teachers' analysis will be combined with scenes from both the New Zealand and Japanese centres to produce a final edited film. It is hoped that this film may also have value for training institutions, so there is a possibility that the final edited film may become available in the public arena in the future.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you consent to you and your child's participation, you or your child have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study within one month of filming commencing
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your or your child's name will not be used unless you give your permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

Project Timelines

I intend to begin filming at [REDACTED] Kindergarten in early April, edit the New Zealand footage and then screen it to Japanese teachers during fieldwork in Japan in June/July of this year. With this in mind, I would appreciate it if you could please return your consent forms as soon as possible. The final deadline for accepting consent forms is Monday 30 March 2009. Participant consent forms that have not been received by this date will be considered as having consented to participate in this project. Thank you in advance for your help in getting these filled out!

Contact Information

Researcher: Rachael Burke, Tel (07) 576-7377, E-mail: rachadrian@hotmail.com

Main Supervisor: Dr Graeme Macrae, Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Massey University Auckland, Tel (09) 414-0800 x9045

Secondary Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Rimoldi, Massey, Tel (09) 414-0800 x 9046
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Parent consent form

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NEW ZEALAND

**Preschool in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of
early childhood education**

**PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
ABOVE STUDY**

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

To the Parent/Legal Guardian/Caregiver

- Please read this page carefully and the attached information sheet which explains the aims and methods of this project.
- Please indicate your preference for you and your child’s participation by circling your chosen option.
- Please sign the form and return it to [redacted] Kindergarten

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 agree/do not agree to myself and my child being video taped.

I agree/do not agree to my and my child’s participation in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Child’s Name:

Name of Parent/Legal

Guardian/Caregiver: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:**

Information sheet for focus group participants

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NEW ZEALAND

Kindergarten in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of early childhood education

INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

Hello. My name is Rachael Burke and I am a PhD student in Social Anthropology at Massey University in Auckland. I live in [REDACTED] and I have three sons who currently attend primary school. In 2007, I completed my Masters study into socialisation processes at kindergartens in Hokkaido, Japan, where my family lived for five and a half years.

Project Description

In mid 2008, I enrolled for a PhD in Social Anthropology at Massey University. The idea for this project developed during my experience as both a kindergarten teacher in Japan, and as a mother of young children attending early childhood centres in both New Zealand and Japan.

In 2009, I carried out ethnographic research at one education and care centre in suburban New Zealand and one kindergarten in rural Japan, following anthropologist Joseph Tobin's *Preschool in three cultures*¹¹⁶ methodology which utilised film to present comparative views of early childhood education through the eyes of teachers.

Following observation of kindergarten sessions in New Zealand and Japan, a 'typical' day was filmed in each country, then edited and screened back to teachers to check the 'typicality' of the scenes. Members of each culture were then (re)filmed as they critically analysed both their own country's early childhood practice and made judgements about the other centre in the study. In order to address the issue of representation, the final layer of narrative comes from audiences associated with other centres in the same country. This method views film less as data but more as a means of exploring and stimulating discussion around how early childhood centres incorporate implicit cultural values into pedagogy and practice. This study aims to offer a view of culturally informed practice in both New Zealand and Japanese early childhood contexts, and to act as a stimulus for dialogue between members of the early childhood community in both countries.

¹¹⁶ Tobin, J.J., Wu, D.Y.H., & Davidson, D.H. (1989). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China and the United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

The Purpose of the Focus Groups

My research examines the ways culture influences implicit codes of practice at early childhood centres in New Zealand and Japan, and in the past year I have spent several weeks observing and filming in an education and care centre in [REDACTED] (NZ) and a kindergarten in [REDACTED] (Japan).

From this, I have produced an edited sixty minute video for each centre. While the educators of my New Zealand and Japanese centres have viewed and commented on both their own and the other video, the next step is to gain the opinions of other educators of the same culture, i.e., New Zealander's comments on the New Zealand video and Japanese comments on the Japanese video. This will enable me to see to what extent the centre might resemble or differ from other centres in terms of practice, ideology etc.

I would very much like to include the viewpoints of ECE academics and educators from a variety of early childhood education and care centres from around New Zealand. If the staff at your centre or department (it need not be all of them) would like to assist in this project it would be very much appreciated.

The Structure of the Focus Groups

The focus group meetings would entail watching the 60 minute video, and discussing anything participants felt significant (for example, practices you support, disagree with, were familiar with or unfamiliar with etc.) Some educators prefer to hold this discussion following the video, others prefer to pause the video and comment at the time of a particular scene. This can take between 30-90 minutes depending on the group.

Data Management

The focus group sessions are videotaped but the tapes will not be viewed by anyone but the researcher and possibly her supervisors. They are only for the purposes of accurate recording and analysis. Data (which includes digital film images) will be collected on a password-protected laptop computer, and backed up on disc, then stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Consent forms will be stored in a separate locked container. The researcher and her supervisors are the only people who will have access to the raw data and the consent forms.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you consent to participate in this study, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give your permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

Contact Information

Researcher: Rachael Burke, Tel (07) 576-7377, E-mail: rachadrian@hotmail.com

Main Supervisor: Dr Graeme MacRae, Lecturer in Social Anthropology, Massey University Auckland, Tel (09) 414-0800 x9045

Secondary Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Rimoldi, Massey, Tel (09) 414-0800 x 9046
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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/069. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 9070, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Focus group participant consent form

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NEW ZEALAND

**Kindergarten in New Zealand and Japan: A comparative study of
early childhood education**

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

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 agree/do not agree to being video taped.

I agree/do not agree to keep confidential any information arising from the group film analysis sessions.

I agree/do not agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Full Name (printed):

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Letters of introduction for the Japanese kindergarten

Japanese letter of introduction

私は、ニュージーランドのマーシ大学の大学院生で人類学を専攻しているパークレイチェルと申します。

2006年に私は北海道の幼稚園と保育園で人類学の研究を完成致しました。先生達と教育委員会の皆様にはいつもお世話になりました。

今年の9月にニュージーランドと北海道の幼稚園について博士論文を書き始めました。様々な人類学者が本州の幼稚園で研究しましたが、今の北海道について文献は少ないようです。ニュージーランドでも人類学者が書いた本は多くはありません。

現代の北海道のことをより理解する為に、来年、私は北海道の留辺蕊と北見に行って研究するつもりです。この研究の内容はニュージーランドと北海道の幼稚園での授業様子を、ビデオをに作り、先生たちと議論しながら、教育委員会で地方のデータを探求するつもりです。

私は五年間北海道に住んでいたことがあり、その間、幼稚園で働いていました。そして、私の三人の子供たちは町の幼稚園に行っていました。日本の文化を理解しており、日本語が話せるのでこの研究を完成できると思います。

ニュージーランドに帰国した際には、研究資料、ビデオと人類学の文献の分析に基づいて2011年までに博士論文を書き終えるつもりです。

お忙しいところで申し訳ございませんが、よろしくお願い致します。

パークレイチェル

2008年10月1日

English translation of Japanese letter of introduction

My name is Rachael Burke, and I am a graduate student of social anthropology at Massey University in New Zealand.

In 2006 I conducted fieldwork at kindergartens and day-care centres in Hokkaido, Japan. Thanks to kind assistance of teachers and staff at local Boards of Education, I was able to successfully complete my research and my Masters thesis.

In September of this year I commenced my PhD which focuses on kindergartens in two countries: New Zealand and Japan. Various studies have been conducted into kindergartens in Honshū but very little research has centred on contemporary Hokkaido. Likewise, there is limited literature available which looks at New Zealand kindergartens through an anthropological lens.

In order to gain greater understanding into contemporary Hokkaido kindergarten practice, I am seeking to conduct fieldwork next year in Rubeshibe and Kitami in Eastern Hokkaido. This research will consist of observing classrooms, filming a typical day, discussions with teachers and collection of statistical data from local sources.

While I am currently living in New Zealand, I have lived in Hokkaido for more than five years during which time I worked at a kindergarten and my three children attended the local preschool. I feel I have a good understanding of Japanese culture, and this combined with my Japanese language ability leads me to believe I can successfully complete this research.

On my return to New Zealand, I intend to draw on my notes, film footage and academic literature to complete my PhD by mid 2011.

I thank you for your consideration of this project, at this busy time. I ask for your help to successfully undertake this fieldwork, and I appreciate the efforts you are making to accommodate me.

Glossary of Key Terms Used in the Text

Terms from the Japanese context

While there are several ways of writing Japanese in its romanised form, this glossary employs the Hepburn method. The often used double vowels **oo** and **uu** are written with a macron, and become **ō** and **ū** respectively. The same rule applies to the double vowel **aa** which becomes **ā**, whereas as the long **ee** vowel is written as **ei**. Romanised place names commonly use a modified version of the Hepburn system in which long vowels are ignored, hence Tokyo or Hokkaido with no macrons.

Reference: Martin, S. (1997). *Martin's Concise Japanese dictionary: English-Japanese, Japanese-English, fully Romanized with complete kanji & kana*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle.

<i>Ainu</i>	The indigenous people of Hokkaido
<i>aisatsu</i>	daily greetings
<i>amae</i>	dependency
<i>bacchi</i>	child's word for dirty
<i>baikin</i>	germs
<i>anime</i>	Japanese style of motion-picture animation
<i>bentō</i>	packed (box) lunch
<i>chinchin</i>	penis (colloquial)
<i>enryo</i>	reserve, restraint
<i>furusato</i>	home village, home town or native place
<i>gaijin</i>	foreigner, literally "outside person"
<i>gambaru</i>	to do one's best, to persevere
<i>genki</i>	lively, energetic
<i>genkan</i>	entrance foyer where one takes off ones shoes
<i>hadashi kyōiku</i>	naked education
<i>hanseikai</i>	self-reflection meeting
<i>hoikuen</i>	early childcare centre
<i>Hokkaido</i>	Japan's northernmost major island
<i>Honshu</i>	Japan's main island where the capital, Tokyo, is situated
<i>irete</i>	shortened form of <i>nakami ni irete</i> , "can I join you?"
<i>itadakimasu</i>	greeting which precedes consumption of food
<i>kanji</i>	Chinese characters adapted into Japanese language
<i>kanyu</i>	fruit-flavoured jelly vitamins made from cod liver oil
<i>katakana</i>	phonetic alphabet used for foreign loan words
<i>kibun-tenkan</i>	technique used by teachers to focus children's attention elsewhere
<i>kodomokai</i>	children's association
<i>kodomo-rashi</i>	childlike
<i>Kōseisho</i>	Ministry of Health and Welfare
<i>kurō</i>	hardship
<i>kyōiku</i>	education

<i>kyōiku mama</i>	education mother
<i>machi no hoiku</i>	caring for children by waiting
<i>manga</i>	Japanese comic books
<i>mimamoru</i>	“wait and see” approach taken by teachers
<i>Mombukagakushō</i>	Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology
<i>nintei kodomoen</i>	child-accredited centre
<i>ohayō gozaimasu</i>	good morning
<i>ohirune</i>	naptime
<i>okāsan</i>	mother
<i>okāsan suwari</i>	sitting on one’s knees, literally “to sit like a mother”
<i>onara</i>	fart (colloquial)
<i>onsen</i>	hot spring
<i>oppai</i>	breasts (colloquial)
<i>Oka Yōchien</i>	fictitious name of the kindergarten where Japanese fieldwork took place
<i>ryōsai kenbo</i>	good wife/wise mother construct
<i>seishin kyōiku</i>	spiritual education
<i>sensei</i>	teacher
<i>shiritsu yōchien</i>	private kindergarten
<i>shūdan seikatsu</i>	literally “life in the group”, a socialisation technique
<i>skinship</i>	term used to describe intimacy, or physical closeness
<i>soto</i>	outside group or world
<i>suki-kirai</i>	likes and dislikes
<i>sunao</i>	cooperative, compliant
<i>uchi</i>	inside group or world
<i>unchi</i>	excrement (colloquial)
<i>undōkai</i>	sports day, athletics meeting
<i>yōchien</i>	kindergarten
<i>Yuri</i>	fictitious name of city where Japanese fieldwork took place
<i>yutori-kyōiku</i>	relaxed style of education

Terms from the New Zealand context

<i>early childhood care and education</i>	umbrella term for the early childhood sector
<i>Kaimai Kindergarten</i>	fictitious name of centre where New Zealand fieldwork took place
<i>karanga</i>	Māori call traditionally used to welcome visitors
<i>kindergarten</i>	centres that are funded by the state in the form of teacher’s salaries, land and buildings but that are owned and operated by community-based kindergarten associations

<i>kōhanga reo</i>	total immersion Māori language family programme for children
<i>Māori</i>	the indigenous people of New Zealand
<i>Playcentre</i>	a parent-led early childhood education service
<i>Rata</i>	fictitious name of city where New Zealand fieldwork took place
<i>Te Whāriki</i>	New Zealand early childhood curriculum
<i>waiata</i>	Māori word for song(s)
<i>whakatoī</i>	Māori word for spiritedness
<i>whānau (tangata)</i>	Māori word for extended family and community

Theoretical or methodological terms

<i>biopower</i>	term coined by Foucault, a way of managing people as a group through the subjugation of bodies
<i>body politic</i>	term which implies that power and control are embodied
<i>body techniques</i>	term coined by Mauss, actions that are effective and traditional
<i>docile bodies</i>	term coined by Foucault, bodies that have been rendered docile through a regiment of disciplinary acts
<i>ethnography</i>	both a qualitative research process conducted by anthropologists, and a product (the outcome of this process in the form of a book or thesis)
<i>fieldwork</i>	living among a group of people, or spending an extended period of time with them, for the purpose of learning about their culture
<i>habitus</i>	a set of dispositions and internalised possibilities which enable a person to socially function
<i>normalisation</i>	term used by Foucault, social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as “natural” or “normal” in everyday life
<i>participant observation</i>	key research method for anthropologists, involving becoming part of a community while observing people’s behaviour and activities within it
<i>Panopticon</i>	Jeremy Bentham’s circular prison, constructed so that an unseen observer could watch prisoners at all times
<i>PSC3C</i>	Preschool in Three Cultures
<i>social body</i>	term used by Douglas, whereby the body functions as a natural symbol with which to think about social relationships, culture and nature
<i>three bodies</i>	Scheper-Hughes and Lock’s framework, combining the individual (lived) body, the social body and the body politic