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*The Process of Knowledge Acquisition
through Interpersonal Communication in
the "Parents As First Teachers" Programme*

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of
Master of Management
in Communication Management, at
Massey University*

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ABSTRACT

Communication researchers interested in the role played by knowledge in social terms have produced a variety of explorations in recent times of “knowledge gaps” and informational inequities between various groups in society. More broadly, studies of the significance of issues of relative access to information and thus ability to participate in civil society have been described as the sociology of knowledge.

Arising out of an interest in documenting successful strategies in bridging knowledge gaps, the present study aimed to explore an information programme called Parents As First Teachers (PAFT), which operates on the basis of a one-to-one relationship between informationally needy individuals (parents of newborn infants) and trained experts in parenting matters. This arrangement continues monthly for three years. It seemed likely that this information programme could present an example of an effective receiver-focused model of bridging knowledge gaps.

A series of 22 in-depth interviews was conducted with parent and educator participants in the PAFT programme in Auckland, New Zealand. In addition, observation was carried out of the hour-long monthly home visits so that a detailed picture could be obtained of the significance of the interpersonal relationship between parent and educator for effective learning. Transcripts of interviews were analysed using a coding protocol developed on the basis of the research objectives.

The study found limited support for the contentions of extant information poverty literature in regard to self-imposed isolation and avoiding disclosing problems. Interviewees preferred to isolate themselves within their neighbourhoods, but they did seek information via family and social networks. They were also highly motivated in regard to seeking the best for their children, and it is possible that motivation in this instance has been a more powerful factor in knowledge acquisition than education, often used as a predictor of response to informational need.

The significance of this study is in its detailed presentation of the information world of the insider, and the support the data give for a situational approach to knowledge gaps. It signals that there is a definite role for a close and trusting

interpersonal relationship between source and receiver in the knowledge acquisition process. Two key areas for follow-up studies are the role played by interpersonal communication networks in disseminating knowledge beyond the original knowledge exchange context, and whether the strong motivation observed in the parents interviewed for this research was attributable to the PAFT programme itself or was a characteristic already present in participants.

*For my parents
Charles Lawrence 1917 - 2000
Thelma Lawrence 1913 - 1999*

*and for my long-ago mother
Jessie Lawrence 1923 - 1958,
my own first teacher.*

*I am learning that having had the gift of something very precious, you
can never really lose it.*

ere

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*Te manu kai te miro, nona te ngahere
Te manu kai te matauranga, nona te ao*

The bird that feeds on the miro, theirs is the forest
The bird that feeds on knowledge, theirs is the world

(Devito, O'Rourke & O'Neill, 2000, p. 1)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Context of the Research

Communication researchers have, since the 1960s, sought to explain the reasons why “the power of communication campaigns [is] vastly over-rated” (Dervin, 1980, p.76). Where once it was assumed that the injection of information into a social system would result in its uptake and use, studies have increasingly challenged the hypodermic model and begun to examine information as a user construct, and as having a situational more than an absolute meaning (Dervin, 1980). Furthermore, studies show that the challenge posed to organisations by groups of individuals who lack sufficient information with which to make informed choices cannot necessarily be solved by simply exposing those groups to informative material (Williams & Sligo, 1999). In addition, such a strategy implies that informational benefits for the receiver can be defined by the source (Dervin & Nilan, 1986, cited in Kuhlthau, 1991).

In the past, it has been common for institutions, especially governmental agencies, to use mass mail-outs of brochures, booklets or pamphlets as important components in information campaigns. These written channels are now more likely to be used in combination with other interactive communication activities such as group-based activities and telephone hotlines (Gadon, 2000, <http>), because it is recognised that communication is not a passive process in which units of meaning are simply transmitted from source to receiver. While this linear approach, deriving from information theory first developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in the 1940s

(Griffin, 1997) might be a useful model for organisations because it is convenient, efficient, and at least the communicative gesture is seen to have been made, there is now little doubt that just making the information available is unlikely to bring about change in an audience. In some way, other conscious processes of interaction and cognition need to be engaged, so that information can become internalised by individuals as knowledge that can then be made relevant to their own needs.

The present study has been developed from a basis of literature on knowledge gaps and the related concept of information poverty. Studies of these communication phenomena have come to varying conclusions, but they have often drawn links between the likelihood of people acquiring knowledge and their educational and socioeconomic status. People's ability to access the information they need in order to give sense to their lives, it has been thought, is likely to be influenced by the level of education they have attained and thus their information seeking skills.

These studies have since been complemented by, if not superseded by, studies that are favouring close consideration of the individual as an agent or actor within his or her context of need. This study aims to assess the extent to which this contextual focus is useful in understanding knowledge acquisition as a process defined through a user construct. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 leads one to consider the possibility that an understanding of situational variables is likely to be very important, and that attention needs to be paid to the role of trust if client receptivity is to be established and retained in an effective information programme. Researchers are suggesting that the places to look for effective methods of

overcoming information deficits are those innovative programmes that involve sources in directly engaging with targeted users, and initiating an interactive process through which individuals' information needs may be met more effectively by involving them in the process of defining those needs (Gadon, 2000, [http](http://); Kuhlthau, 1991).

The present study began with contacts made by the researcher with a private social services provider that has adopted this interactive model of bridging knowledge gaps. It appeared to the uninvolved observer at the outset of this study that the organisation's practice reflected a belief that information users can be encouraged to develop information seeking behaviours that will take them beyond a passive receiving role. In order to achieve this, the organisation made information available in such a way that the individuals were drawn wholly into the process of defining the need for change, and were supported by a long-term relationship with a trained professional so that the individuals themselves became the agents of change. From a communication research point of view, it seemed likely that this approach would be beneficial, in a lasting sense, in the lives of the organisation's informationally needy clients.

This study therefore started with a "grand tour question" (Werner and Schoepfle, 1987, cited in Hussey and Hussey, 1997, p. 127), or general overview of the research direction, which was:

How does an information programme used by the organisation facilitate knowledge acquisition through interpersonal communication?

This very general question helped to give the study direction without constraining it. A response to the research problem which is to a degree prepared to be responsive to the evolutionary nature of a phenomenological study is thought to be an appropriate starting point for naturalistic inquiry (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). In this case, the underlying question implied a hypothesis that interpersonal communication increases the effectiveness of an information campaign being targeted to a particular group. In order for the study to establish to what extent this hypothesis was valid, a series of more specific objectives was developed as outlined in the next section, below.

The study was intended to be exploratory, and to examine the extent to which information needs can be defined and met through ongoing interpersonal contact between client and professional. It sought to generate data that would help to define those interpersonal dimensions that are significant in effective uptake of information, and thus highlight the need to consider the user perspective in any similar educational programme. The context chosen for the study was a parenting programme called Parents As First Teachers (PAFT), delivered by many provider agencies throughout New Zealand. Parents As First Teachers is explained in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study was *to explore the role of interpersonal communication in parents' acquisition of knowledge about child development and care in the Parents As First Teachers programme.*

Specifically, the study aimed to assess

- ◆ What forms of interpersonal communication are relevant to acquisition of knowledge about child development and care in Parents As First Teachers?
- ◆ To what extent is knowledge acquisition in this regard associated with family, neighbours and community networks?
- ◆ What is the significance of trust in acquiring knowledge about child development and care in the Parents As First Teachers programme?

The term "child", as used in the above aims, is preferred in this thesis because "infant" implies a specialised focus on a narrow age range. Although the Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) programme in New Zealand involves visits to families until their children reach the age of three, in the US where the programme is also delivered, the visits continue until the child reaches five years old. Thus it is a programme aimed at a critical period of children's intellectual and emotional development, beyond infancy, through toddlerhood to early childhood and entry to formal education. However the PAFT curriculum used by the professional parent educators employed to deliver this programme shows that there is a strong agenda for intervention at the earliest possible stage in families where lack of information is likely to lead to poor outcomes for the newborn child. To this extent, the PAFT programme has a particular focus on parents with their first newborn infant, this being a situation and time of crucial need for parents. Therefore the present study did tend to involve families with younger babies, but the term "infant" is generally not used for reasons outlined above, and to avoid the impression that the children referred to in the thesis were exclusively babies

under the age of two years, this being the generally accepted definition of infancy (Newman & Newman, 1975).

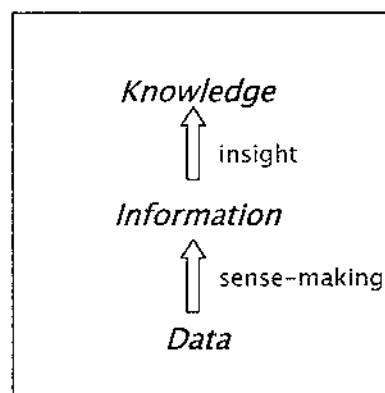
Information and knowledge

It should also be pointed out that the research objective for this study focused on *knowledge* acquisition. For this reason it is important to distinguish between *knowledge* and *information*, since the two terms are used extensively throughout the literature consulted for this work, and not always in ways that clearly point to a difference in meaning. There is the potential here for considerable ambiguity, since the terms tend to be used in different ways (Buckland, 1991), or apparently interchangeably; for example, knowledge gaps are sometimes referred to as information gaps. The process of distinguishing between the two concepts is not aided by the fact that, while knowledge gap theory and information poverty studies (key concepts explored in Chapter 2) deal with largely similar ideas and research contexts, and it can be inferred that information poverty is the condition experienced by individuals who fall into so-called knowledge gaps, it might be supposed that “knowledge” gaps will not be successfully addressed by “information” campaigns if they are conceptually different things. Other researchers prefer to use the term “communication campaigns” (Dervin, 1980, p. 76; Gadon, 2000, <http>), signalling a concern for mutuality in the process of knowledge acquisition.

Information can be thought of as data (unprocessed potential meaning) that have been systematised in such a way as they are made sensible and useful for a particular human purpose (Sligo, 1994). Information is a term “used ...

for objects, such as data and documents ... regarded as being informative” (Buckland, 1991, p. 351) and can be equated with “evidence, as things from which one becomes informed” (ibid., p. 353). It can have an existence independent of users, and yet some argue that information requires “at least two persons: one who tells ... and one who listens, reads, watches” (Belkin & Robertson, 1976, cited in Buckland, 1991, p. 354) for it to be informative.

Knowledge, on the other hand, is information that has been acquired, understood and internalised by an individual so that it is meaningful for that person’s needs. It has become part of that person’s cognitive baggage, lodged in the mind and able to be recalled for later use. Buckland (1991) suggests that the two concepts can be separated by their connection with the tangible and the intangible: “if you can touch it and measure it directly, it is not knowledge” (p. 352). Sligo (1994) argues that the term knowledge has necessarily become differentiated from information because “the widespread use of information as computer-based data” (p. 61) has created a need for a term that equates more with a higher-order product of human thinking. According to Buckland (1991), knowledge is always intangible, a user construct (although it can be represented symbolically as text, sign, symbol, word and so on). What becomes apparent is that, in teasing out the distinction, we are dealing with a progression:



Thus it is possible to draw a distinction between information and knowledge, and reminders of it are included at times throughout the thesis so that the key concern of this work, *knowledge* acquisition, remains clear. In addition, however, the processes of knowledge acquisition through the application of *information* to a context of need, and the negotiation of a user-constructed meaning between the expert and the client, are an important complement to the reasoning used in this study. Kuhlthau (1991) encapsulates the relationship between the two concepts in a useful way:

Evidence of the transformation of information into meaning is present in the products or presentations in which users share their new knowledge with others. (p. 361)

This view clearly represents knowledge as personal meaning created out of information by users, and embodies the progression illustrated in the diagram above.

Parents As First Teachers

Since this thesis investigates the Parents As First Teachers programme, some basic background information on it at the outset will help the reader to understand the research context.

Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) is the New Zealand version of a programme initiated and established in Missouri in 1981, called Parents As Teachers (PAT). It expanded rapidly throughout the USA, establishing a reputation as a cost-effective way of providing support to families and education to children through the earliest years of children's lives. Independent evaluation

research showed that PAT children were significantly ahead of comparison groups by the end of their first year at school (Pfannenstiel, 1989, [http](#)). By 1993 more than 1000 programmes were operating, and by 1998 there were 2000 in 49 states as well as internationally. The number of sites has since passed the 2500 mark.

- Philosophy of PAT

The US-based PAT programme gives strong affirmation to the role parents can and should play in educating their babies, and the significance of early engagement with babies as a means of stimulating appropriate intellectual, social and emotional development (PATNC, 2000, [http](#)).

- PAT Goal

To ensure that the programme remains “on the cutting edge of research and curriculum development” (PATNC, 2000, [http](#)), the PAT National Centre promotes access to Parents As Teachers by all families with young children by adapting the programme to meet the needs of special populations. It would seem, therefore, that it actively seeks to ensure that families who might not normally access the information they need, do in fact benefit from the programme.

- Home visits

The basic educational component of the PAT/PAFT programme is the home visit, in which a trained educator spends an hour each month helping parents to understand “and have appropriate expectations for each stage of their child’s development.” (PATNC, 2000, About Parents as Teachers). In New Zealand, the government funds PAFT through Early Childhood Development

for parents with their first baby for three years, or 36 hour-long home visits for each family.

- New Zealand's Parents As First Teachers: Ahuru Mowai

In 1993 New Zealand implemented the PAT programme, initially running a pilot. By 1995 it had become established in NZ as Parents As First Teachers. From the mid 1990s, work was being carried out on a Maori dimension to *Born to Learn™*, the curriculum provided by the US programme, and this was incorporated in 1999 into the NZ version, called *Ahuru Mowai: Born to Learn™* (Early Childhood Development, 2000).

In New Zealand, PAFT serves first time parents who enrol before their children are 3 months old. New Zealand currently has 64 PAFT programs and slightly more than 200 educators... New Zealand PAFT serves more than 9000 families. (PATNC, 2000, PAT News).

The Maori overlay is not intended simply to be a version of a non-Maori education model, but to enhance it, "to complement learning within the cultural context" (Tarrant, 2000, p.2).

Two provider sites offering the PAFT programme were researched: the first was Organisation A, mentioned above for utilising the client's perspective to optimise its delivery of a wide range of support services for West Auckland residents, especially Maori. The second site was Organisation B, contracted to deliver PAFT in Central Auckland. Using the same multiple methodologies in both cases, extensive data collection was carried out, mainly through in-depth interviews with a range of programme participants. These data were

analysed and assessed so that a fuller understanding of the user dimension in this information programme could be obtained.

Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 establishes an overview together with a statement of the objectives of the research project, together with background information on the Parents As First Teachers programme. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to knowledge gaps and information poverty. It proceeds from a broad overview of the social science context, to a review of relevant communication theory and research. It concludes with consideration of the gap in the current research that this study attempts to fill.

Research design issues, complex in this case, are explained in Chapter 3. Since a combination of methodologies was used as a means of obtaining as full a picture as possible of the significance of interactivity and engagement in effective knowledge acquisition, several data collection methods were justified. In addition, since researcher observation was used as an important methodological “glue” to hold together the perspectives gained from in-depth interviews and other qualitative data, ethical issues are explored here also.

Chapter 4 summarises the results of twenty-two in-depth interviews with parent participants in the PAFT programme, and with parent educators and co-ordinators of the two provider sites. In addition, findings from

observation of interactions, from educator training, and from analysis of PAFT curriculum material are summarised.

Chapter 5 synthesises these several sources of findings, presenting analysis of themes that emerged from the data, and concluding with some implications in terms of knowledge gap and information poverty theory, and of potential information provider use of these findings.

To conclude, Chapter 6 discusses the limitations of the study and points out areas to be investigated in future research, arising from this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study examined the role played by relationships formed over an extended period of personal contact between clients of a parent education programme, and the “educators” trained to teach these parents about proven strategies for enhancing the intellectual and emotional development of their newborn babies. The research aimed to advance understanding of the significance of interpersonal communication networks, and the importance for knowledge acquisition of trust between individuals regarded as informationally needy (by referring agencies, or in their own judgment) and expert sources. Extensive data obtained by interviewing a range of programme participants aimed also to establish the communication contexts that were likely to be most useful to those who needed information at a crucial time. In these ways, the findings summarised later in Chapter 4 present a picture of factors that impinge on or enhance people’s receptivity to information.

This literature review begins by considering communication theory in a broad sense, but it derives its impetus principally from increasingly specific scholarly attention in the communication literature to prediction of the conditions under which knowledge gaps are likely to occur. The knowledge gap hypothesis of the 1970s postulated a paradoxical effect whereby information made available to a social system does not necessarily close the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Those who are already information rich are also likely

to have higher income and education levels, and therefore possess the skills and opportunities to take advantage of information. Thus knowledge gaps have considerable potential to become wider, and scholarly interest since this time has centred on establishing what factors contribute to these knowledge differentials and in so doing to find ways of overcoming them.

Recognition that, beyond notions of economic poverty and richness, there also exist such conditions as information poverty and richness, has led to inquiry into what are the characteristics of the information poor so that effective means of communicating with them can be identified. Research in the areas of the knowledge gap hypothesis and information poverty is central to this review.

Broadly, this chapter shows that the research focus has moved away from implications that the information poor are at fault in some way for not availing themselves of organisational messages, inferences that can be drawn when the needs of the source are the primary focus of interest, towards a concern to explore the receiver's own perception of information needs. Everett Rogers commented in 1976 that communication research in the United States

often sided unduly with the source against the receiver, perhaps a reflection of the one-way linear model of communication and of the mechanistic/atomistic components approach of much communication research (p. 230).

Such an insider perspective needs to consider also the ways in which the information poor go about finding information when they need it, and to what extent they depend on interpersonal communication networks to do so. The

chapter concludes that the role played by individuals' interpersonal relationships and networks of trust remains a relatively hazy area of communication research (Gaziano & O'Leary, 1998; Valente & Saba, 1998; Hughes & Durio, 1983) and has led to the specific focus of the present study.

Mass communication context

The knowledge gap hypothesis, studied since the 1970s, has become established in the literature as a result of communication researchers' interest in the impact of mass media on people as receivers of mass messages, or media effects theory (Griffin, 1997). Theory dealing with dissemination of messages by organisations and leaders to a large number of recipients presupposes the existence of a mass society, and has explored the effects of new media such as radio in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, "some of the earliest thinking attributed great power to mass communication to influence its audiences" (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 13) and was subsequently referred to as the "bullet theory" or the "hypodermic needle" model for its assumptions about the vulnerability of members of the public, easily influenced by media messages. As Severin and Tankard (1997) point out, it is difficult to find scholars who advocated this viewpoint, but it has been a popular public conception, reflected, for example, in beliefs about the power of propaganda, the power of violent media imagery to change people's behaviour, and so on.

Griffin's historical analysis of the development of the communication discipline (1997) points out that few scholars referred to their study as communication

research until the 1940s, so attribution of the hypodermic “model” to any one person is problematic, as the term is used more in retrospect to encapsulate a common understanding of the time. Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1998) attribute the bullet or hypodermic needle theory to the 1930s. It is often used in a general sense to illustrate by simplistic contrast what another theory or model is *not* (Griffin, 1997). Nor is the hypodermic metaphor entirely obsolete or a historical curiosity: researchers such as George Gerbner in very recent times have continued to explore the idea that the medium of television is the dominant force in shaping modern society, and that for those who are immersed in the world of television, violence “is the simplest and cheapest dramatic means to demonstrate who wins in the game of life” (Gerbner, 1979, cited in Griffin, 1997, p. 353) cultivating paranoia in the viewers and a climate of fear in society. There are elements of the hypodermic metaphor at work here, with the idea of violent imagery being injected by the television medium into a mass, passively receiving public.

Earlier United States studies considered the capacity of mass media to affect knowledge gaps in the sphere of public affairs, and the significance for knowledge acquisition of variables such as the level of publicity given to a topic (Star & Hughes, 1950, cited in Gaziano, 1983). For a period of time in the 1950s and 1960s, Gaziano (1983) notes, the view was held that certain segments of the public were difficult to inform, despite massive publicity given to topics of public interest: they were thought of as “the chronic know-nothings” (p. 450).

Since that time the communication field has widened and diversified, and now encompasses many overlapping theories exploring media effects and the responses of social systems to informational influences. The knowledge gap hypothesis is a significant branch of communication theory concerned with knowledge disparities. It has tested a communication effects gap (Rogers, 1976) and challenges the assumptions of the mass transmission model in which information, ideas or opinions can be injected into a passively receptive system producing equitable outcomes for all. For the purposes of this review it is sufficient to point out that the hypodermic concept in mass communication has connections with linear models of communication such as that most famously articulated by Shannon and Weaver in the 1940s (Griffin, 1997), in the sense that such analogies for the communication process emphasise the relative power of the sender, and have less concern with a role for the receiver. Both the hypodermic metaphor and the linearity implied by Shannon and Weaver's source-channel-receiver analysis of communication have less concern with the communicative principle of turn-taking or interactivity that will be shown later in this chapter to have become a standard construct in the literature.

Sociology of knowledge

The latter half of the twentieth century saw increasing research interest in a field that has been described as the sociology of knowledge (Merton, 1971) or the sociology of information (Balnaves, 1993). How does information affect people in a social sense? A wide variety of researchers have shared an interest in assessing the significance and human impact of vastly changed mass media

influences, and rapidly evolving communication technologies in what is now popularly called the information age. Understandings of the significance of information – the lack of it, how it is sought and acquired, the fact that some types of information can be said to have a shelf life, that some people have it and others do not, and so on – are relevant to many areas of human life. Management and organisational theory, health and development communication, social policy theory, media theory, the impact of information technology and others are all dependent upon an understanding of the impact of information on individuals, groups, networks, organisations, communities and so on. For example, ironies and inequities abound in a contemporary world where information has never before been so available, so much in excess, and yet there are increasing disparities in relative advantage between neighbourhoods, communities, societies, and nations. These are issues of concern to governments and of relevance to agencies and organisations whose business it is to provide services to the relatively disadvantaged in the community.

In addition, increasingly sophisticated use of communication strategies by information providers is required in view of considerable social change world-wide, particularly since the 1970s. This change has created the paradox of communities of relatively isolated individuals, even in the urban setting (Balnaves, Caputi & Williams, 1991). While communications media have become far more diverse and powerful than they were in the first half of the last century because of technological advances, it is becoming increasingly difficult for organisations to be at all assured that their messages are getting through

(Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1998). People are therefore differentiated from one another in terms of their belonging to specific societal groups with different characteristics and needs, and it is thought that individuals are likely to be highly discriminating in their response to messages, to choose to withdraw from them, or to be impervious to their meaning. For example, communication researchers Valente and Saba tested a hypothesis in their 1998 study that “low threshold adopters” (individuals who utilised information despite few of their personal contacts having done so) of reproductive health information relied more on mass media to obtain that information, whereas “high threshold adopters” (p. 116) turned instead to personal networks. Therefore designers of communication campaigns need to find out the ways in which target groups will respond to different channels, and be prepared to utilise the most effective ones. There are complex issues to be researched in this area concerning media impact, interpersonal networks and campaign effectiveness.

Furthermore, changes in human communication caused by new technologies are of interest to researchers because of a vast increase in the range and availability of information to the general public, especially since the 1960s with the widespread adoption of television by consumers. More recently the revolutionising of information management, with the arrival of cheap personal computers and networked systems for organisational use, is making information more available to people. In these ways, societies have become subject to unprecedented informational influences through television, radio, the print media, public relations and marketing campaigns and computer-mediated communication technologies. People are therefore, in theory at least, more

exposed than ever in human history to a variety of information relayed to them in a number of different ways. In the not too distant past, information was more likely to have been available principally by word-of-mouth. Now people need to seek it using a wider variety of communication channels.

Increased use of print and electronic media has been paralleled by an increased regard for information as a commodity of steadily increasing value. This can be seen to be true for example in the business and political spheres, where information has “scarcity value” (Sligo, 1990, p. 183, citing Uphoff, 1972) and for this reason access to it can be manipulated by individuals for the purposes of power broking. The modern regard for a kind of atomic weight, or power to transform, associated with information is also evident in the new political orthodoxy of the “knowledge economy” whereby whole nations are being exhorted by governments (such as in New Zealand) to acquire knowledge in order that they (nations) become better equipped to compete in the global economy. Also the functioning of democracy depends on the concept of the well-informed citizen; and the urgency of a wide range of contemporary problems such as those in the area of health and the environment means that the potential for mass communication to inform large numbers of people needs to be harnessed. This can only happen through a full understanding of audience group needs and responses (Severin & Tankard, 1997), and in this way communication research can play a vital role.

Researchers are also seeking to establish what connections there might be between rapid growth in the availability of communications technology and

equity of access to information: is the social empowerment arising from access to information available to those who are in most need of it? Peter Golding (1990) considers that, no, "the communications media have failed democracy" (p.100) and has pondered the implications for the political future of a world in which there is an apparently widening disparity between the information rich and information poor (Murdock & Golding, 1989). Others are assessing whether technology ownership indeed implies use of it for information purposes (Balnaves & Caputi, 1997). Lower socio-economic status can be linked with less education; together, these two characteristics are likely to lead to a reduced ability to purchase and make use of the means of access to information. Social inequities are being linked to economic and social policy changes that took place in liberal democracies worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s (Murdock & Golding, 1989; Golding, 1990; also Schiller, 1998). For example, it is argued that technological advances in communications have held the promise of increased access to information and the ability to benefit from wider choice and access to goods and services, but are now argued to be widening existing disparities in knowledge and civic participation. Those with little or no disposable income are prevented from gaining access to the information and help they need, while those with the means are increasingly benefiting and becoming increasingly empowered.

Finally, the relative disempowerment of individuals within societies is being studied in connection with their ability and willingness to access and use information, and what the influential factors might be in that ability and willingness. "Is information the new property?" asks Mark Balnaves (1993),

discussing whether information can be an “object of property” and consequently imply control and power relationships as suggested above. Information can be powerfully significant in a social sense for the way in which it is potentially an equity issue for individuals and groups who, for various reasons, lack it. Many questions arise, such as, if some individuals lack the information they need to create order and purpose in their lives, why is that? Balnaves (1993), writing of information as a “resource and a commodity”, concludes that because of the growth in “power, wealth and knowledge ... in the modern world”, issues connected with information and power are important to resolve:

Nor would anyone disagree that the central social function of knowledge is as a means of orientation (Elias, 1982, 37). Every member of society depends on the means of orientation. Those who monopolise society’s means of orientation hold in their hands very considerable power chances (p.107).

The knowledge gap hypothesis

So, what of the individual amidst the swirling twenty-first century maelstrom of information? The idea of information as a social phenomenon gave rise to the tradition of research introduced earlier in this chapter which explored the possibility of a link between socio-economic status and knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1983; Ettema, Brown & Luepker, 1983; Childers & Post, 1975; Tichenor et al., 1970). It is arguable that information campaigns are a central concern of the communication discipline (Valente & Saba, 1998), and that there are a variety of important social reasons why researchers should be and are

interested in uncovering clearer principles concerning large-scale communication effectiveness.

It has been seen in some studies (Wanta & Elliott, 1995; Ettema, Brown & Luepker, 1983) that even in consciously planned information campaigns an effect that has come to be described as the knowledge gap hypothesis has occurred. The “knowledge gap” between groups within the community may widen, an effect arising from a range of conditions that may include education, socio-economic status and individuals’ motivation to avail themselves of information (Ettema & Kline, 1977). Under other conditions such as conflict associated with a topic or issue, and ongoing media interest in the topic, knowledge gaps may narrow over time.

In essence the knowledge gap hypothesis proposed that although all sectors of society will acquire knowledge when new information is released into a social system, there is a tendency for those of higher socio-economic status to acquire knowledge more rapidly than individuals of lower socio-economic status. The result is a widening gap in knowledge between these groups (Ettema & Kline, 1977). An attempt to rectify the disparity by injecting information as a means of equalising knowledge therefore will tend to be unsuccessful because those with higher levels of education are better equipped to take advantage of new information.

A number of different explanations for the presence of knowledge gaps have been proposed, including those first proposed by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien

in 1970. Their seminal work argued for a positive correlation between widening gaps and media-generated publicity. Five reasons they presented were the better communication skills of those with higher education, their better prior knowledge of issues, their more useful social contacts and networks, a process of selectivity in accepting new information, and the fact that the mass media is geared more to the interests of higher socio-economic groups.

A review by Viswanath and Finnegan (1991, cited in Wanta & Elliott, 1995) of knowledge gap studies since 1970, concluded that a number of factors such as heavy publicity could have a positive correlation with the existence of knowledge gaps connected with socio-economic status. Others were motivation, a factor found not to overpower education as a determinant of knowledge in a 1993 study (Viswanath, Kahn, Finnegan, Hertog & Potter); and social conflict leading to media coverage. More recently, Wanta and Elliott (1995) found that the hypothesis was not supported in their study of the topic of AIDS. Extensive publicity surrounding the announcement by Magic Johnson that he had tested positive for HIV may have combined with a topic of strong interest to individuals to close knowledge gaps in this instance. A 1987 study of people's awareness of energy issues in Wisconsin showed that the better educated were more likely to obtain their information from the newspaper, whereas the knowledge levels of the less educated were related to viewing television commercials (Severin & Tankard, 1997). The implication of this finding is that consideration of the impact of different channels on different social groups is likely to be important in an information campaign.

There have been numerous studies and varying explanations for knowledge gaps throughout the three decades since the first propositions were made, and many of them such as the ones outlined above use social demographic characteristics, such as education and socio-economic status, to reach a better understanding of how people appear to respond to information. These approaches, using predictors of knowledge gaps that transcend the situations people find themselves in, have come to be described as “trans-situational” (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984, p. 416) or “cross-situational” (Dervin, 1980, p. 98) approaches. Lovrich and Pierce argue that, because their findings show “that SES and motivation are not simple surrogates for each other” (p. 423), it is not a simple matter of predicting that those in higher SES groups will be motivated to acquire knowledge more than others. Their contention is that the relevance and utility of information to individuals, or what they call “situation-specific” (p. 416) variables, play a greater role in knowledge acquisition. Furthermore they argue that the “typically uninformed” (p. 430) can be given the incentive to acquire knowledge if agencies provide them with a motivating rationale. Thus, earlier attitudes to people described by Gaziano as “the chronic know-nothings” (1983, p. 450) are changing.

The theoretical tension between knowledge gap studies that favour a trans-situational approach and those that favour a situational explanation for knowledge gaps (Atwood & Dervin, 1981, cited in Savolainen, 1995; Dervin, 1986) is important in the present study. This latter group prefers to explain gaps by viewing the situation of information need as creating motivational conditions that drive knowledge acquisition. Therefore if information has

situational relevance for an individual, this may overcome the theoretical limitations imposed by educational or socio-economic factors.

Because of the range of explanations explored in numerous knowledge gap studies (by 1995, Cecilie Gaziano was able to review almost one hundred), Dervin (1980) presented a strong argument for theoretical assumptions arising from the trans-situational approach to be re-conceptualised, so that research should “move to a more receiver-oriented social science and ... more receiver-oriented communication programs” (Dervin, 1980, p. 105). Her contention is that the “gap” idea is founded on a linear model of communication. Within this frame of reference, the source or sender defines the receiver’s needs, and the information is treated as having objective truth. The receiver’s role is to simply “catch” the messages. Her conclusion is that this is too simplistic, and leaves out the user perspective. In addition, she argues, knowledge is subjective, experiential and situational, rather than universal.

It is important in this context to differentiate between information and knowledge. As established in Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study information is regarded as systematised data that has potential utility for an individual; knowledge is information that has been internalised through its applicability to an individual’s situation of information need. Information was regarded in earlier communication research (Shannon, 1949, cited in Griffin, 1997; Rogers, 1976) as the reduction of uncertainty, and a means for people to make sense of their lives (Dervin, 1977, cited in Dervin, 1980). Dervin goes on to argue that these beliefs assume that information “can exist independent of

the observer" (1980, p. 89), and that this idea of information as absolute meaning has led to unsound theorising rooted in positivistic beliefs about a describable world. Dervin concurs with I.A. Richards, Cambridge University professor of the 1940s, who believed that "meanings don't reside in words; they reside in people" (Griffin, 1997, p. 57), and yet she is torn between acknowledging that research experience demonstrates "meanings are in people. Messages sent do not equal messages received" (Dervin, 1980, p. 89) while researchers also desire more definitive explanations for inequities. Ultimately her argument is that communication campaigns should recognise that "information is a user construct rather than an observer construct" (p. 95). Dervin's contrast between the user and observer perspective is important to the development of the research approach taken in this thesis. However for the sake of consistency and clarity, and differentiation between the terms, *knowledge* will be used in the sense of a user construct of information, and *information* is regarded as organised data by which an individual may become informed.

"Insiders", "outsiders" and information poverty

Knowledge gap theory using "transsituational" predictors (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984) tends to explore the magnitude of knowledge differentials and possible reasons for these (Wanta & Elliott, 1995; Ettema et al., 1983; Genova & Greenberg, 1979) at a social systems level, viewing people as part of demographic groups. Other recent research into widening knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1997, 1995; Gaziano & O'Leary, 1998) and the condition of information poverty (Chatman, 1996; Chatman & Pendleton, 1995) takes a

contextual, individual level approach. Such studies have begun to demonstrate that the role of interpersonal communication needs to be examined more closely if a fuller understanding of the issues is to be reached. Even in the 1970s, Rogers (1976) was observing that while his and others' diffusion of innovations research had been useful in tracing the spread of new (especially technological, agricultural and family planning) information through a social system, there was an anomaly that needed further research. This was that individuals did not learn about innovations through the role of mass media, but almost totally through interpersonal channels.

Studying the condition of information poverty from an "insider" perspective, Chatman (1996) and Balnaves, Caputi & Williams (1991) have been suggesting, like Dervin (1980), that qualitative data is necessary in order to test and develop the available models. The receiver's viewpoint, it is thought, needs to be examined and taken into account in the search for ways to bridge information gaps. Researchers interested in information campaigns have also considered the importance of feedback in the process of an institution or source effectively reaching its audience. Brenda Dervin (1989, cited in Baran & Davis, 1995, p. 267) has been influential in arguing for information provision to be a process of dialogue between "elite sources and various audience segments."

This focus is not altogether a new development. Everett Rogers commented in the light of his contention that it is necessary to transcend the one-way, linear model of communication, of "needed alterations in the classical diffusion model, such as greater concern with communication effects gaps and the importance of

audience participation in the diffusion process" (1976, p. 230). More recently, Balnaves, Caputi and Williams (1991) argued for the research process to be consultative, so that the subjects participate in an assessment of their own information needs. Contemporary health communication theory certainly exhorts agencies responsible for health communication campaigns to work together with "the priority audience" (Gadon, 1999, <http>) in order to effectively mobilise communities and provide useful health information.

These approaches, acknowledging the world of the receiver, can be traced back to Merton (1972) whose work explored the idea of information poverty through an insider and outsider taxonomy. He suggested that there is an attitudinal barrier to the acquisition of knowledge, this being that "outsiders" are regarded as untrustworthy by "insiders". Chatman develops this concept also (1996) although she prefers a reverse terminology: her information poor subjects are "outsiders" because the owners of information are "insiders" in the sense of having access to powerful knowledge. Information poor individuals are on the periphery, in a state hinted at by the more recent vogue phrase "social exclusion", unable or unwilling to break into the precincts of the empowered.

The information poor were characterised in the 1975 work of Childers and Post (cited in Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 277) in prototypical terms that have provided a basis for further theorising, especially by Chatman (1996). Childers and Post suggested that the information poor are unaware of available information channels, are heavy viewers of television but seldom read newspapers and never read books, do not define problems as needs for

information, are not very active in seeking information, will tend towards using formal channels if pressed by need, and live within deficient information networks (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Chatman's depiction of "the life-world of outsiders" (1996, p. 193) as she describes the information poor, is more extreme, and she characterises them more in terms of their own perceptions. For example, her theory has it that the information poor see themselves as devoid of sources of help, that the outside world withholds information from them, that they are therefore self-protective in order to appear not to need help, that they distrust others in regard to the information they have, that they are unwilling to share their state of need with others for fear of the consequences, and they are selectively responsive to information if it is relevant to their everyday problems. Chatman's important work depicts a world of alienation, and individuals who are difficult to reach because of their self-imposed isolation. Such ideas resonate with those found in other fields of communication research such as that of Gerbner mentioned earlier for his theories regarding the alienation created by the role television viewing plays in modern life.

Nonetheless, while Chatman's picture presents a challengingly problematic profile of society's marginalised, the important and positive signals she does offer are first, that trust is a vitally important component in the relationship between the world of the outsider (her information poor) and the insider (her informationally empowered). She asserts that the self-imposed isolation of the information poor can only be gradually undone when "there is some aspect of trust associated with the source" (Chatman, 1996, p. 196). Second, she wholly

embraces the perspective of the information poor rather than objectifying it; she views the challenge to communicators as being that the picture of information need is composed of two halves, and that the “basic cleavages” (Merton, 1972, cited in Chatman, 1996, p. 195) need to be addressed by recognising the way society’s outsiders perceive their problems. In other words, the receiver perspective needs to be understood.

The contention that participation in the process of knowledge acquisition is a key to meaningful change is paralleled in the literature concerning the broader development needs of impoverished communities worldwide (Rogers, 1976). A recent example is the work of banks providing “micro-credit” to the poor, originally the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (Auwal, 1996), but now seen in various incarnations in a variety of less-developed and even developed nations. The micro-credit model, extremely successful in empowering the disadvantaged, demonstrates the long-term value of utilising interpersonal networks and community involvement as instruments for meaningful social change. It also demonstrates the value of the institution approaching the client, rather than vice versa. Giving communities a degree of leverage with which to make their own choices is a new and powerful development approach to entrenched cycles of disadvantage. If there is to be a new direction for social policy developers and organisations concerned to truly address disparities and the associated social and economic costs, it may be that it emerges from the involvement of previously disempowered participants in the process of becoming informed.

Innovative models of information provision may involve the end-user more in defining needs, with an emphasis on interaction between the source and receiver. The elite source to passive audience model, the “communication gap and inequities ideas” as Dervin (1980) has noted, are perhaps “no longer useful or appropriate perspectives”. An emerging paradigm in which communication theory could be effectively applied to social processes might be a spiral model, involving ongoing interaction, a regard for context, and growth to a state of change.

Psychiatrist Edward Hallowell makes a strong case for the importance of what he calls “The Human Moment” in people’s working lives (1999, p.59) but an application to their interpersonal lives and well-being more generally can easily be inferred. His argument is that humans “can deal with almost anything as long as they do not become too isolated”, but that modern life is increasingly negating the conditions for “authentic psychological encounter[s] that can happen only when two people share the same physical space” (Hallowell, 1999, p. 59). His compelling reminder that we need face-to-face contact in our lives because our “mental acuity and...emotional well-being” (Hallowell, 1999, p. 61) depend on it, underlines the significance of the interpersonal in people’s day-to-day lives. We need information with which to construct an understanding of our place in the world, but we also need to feel connected with others in order to give that structure meaning, and more importantly, an emotional significance with which to anchor it.

Since 1976, then, with Everett Rogers' articulation of the need to assess the role of interpersonal communication in the spread of information within a social system, the call for researchers to look into the receiver's perspective (especially Chatman, 1996, and Dervin, 1989, 1980) has become more apparent. It is thought that communication should be examined as an interactive process in the context of information campaigns. It has not proved to be fully satisfactory to assess the impact of information as if it can be thought of as something that can be thrown and caught (and therefore if receivers do not catch messages it is their own fault). Furthermore, the acquisition of information as "knowledge" needs to be examined as a process involving a good deal more than the uptake of those bundles within a mechanistic, action–reaction system (Dervin, 1980). Referring to our definitions of information and knowledge established in Chapter 1 and again earlier in this chapter, it may be that throwing informative messages can assist in bridging knowledge gaps if interactivity and use of the receiver's perspective allows the information to become knowledge, which is a user construct.

It has been shown that knowledge acquisition is a by–product of a complex of interpersonal communication behaviours and media effects, and takes place in a context of social interactions (Valente & Saba, 1998; Gaziano, 1998; Rogers, 1976). These contextual factors are important in a world in which isolation of individuals is increasing for many reasons, not least of which is the burgeoning use of computer–mediated communication, and ironically, the growth of cities. This area for future research is being noted world–wide: by Mark Balnaves in

Australia, Cecilie Gaziano and Brenda Dervin in the US, and the Communication group of researchers at Massey University in New Zealand.

Social capital

In the United Kingdom and the United States, a new expression of academic as well as political concern regarding the challenge of social inequity is finding form in the use of the phrase social exclusion (Blair, 1997) and the concept of social capital (Putnam, 1995). Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (1995, [http](#)). This concept, “a framework for understanding the depth of a community’s social connectedness” (Putnam, 1995, [http](#)) is being viewed as something of an antidote to social fragmentation and inequity. The concept described by Viswanath and Finnegan in 1996 as “community boundedness” is somewhat similar, and suggests that communication research has something to offer those interested in socio-political issues. The use of these ideas in both academic and political spheres reflects a willingness to see issues of social marginalisation as a complex series of factors, which includes information poverty, and requires “joined up solutions” (Blair, 1997, [http](#)) or integrated responses. This political imperative parallels the interest seen amongst social scientists in understanding that the condition of information poverty requires much more than an injection of information to correct (Dervin, 1980), as previously argued in this chapter.

An example from the United Kingdom is a study of the information needs of minority ethnic groups (Bloch, 1993), which explored the behaviours of six

linguistic groups in urban England in relation to their access to services, and welfare benefit information needs. The findings showed a tendency for these people to find out important things about benefits principally by talking to other people, and that there was a widespread preference for face to face contact. In addition, low rates of literacy indicated that improvements to printed official materials should have a low priority. Thus the needs of these socially isolated groups are unlikely to be met by simply making informative leaflets available to them. They are more responsive to interpersonal contact with social services officers who visit them.

Bloch's study points to the importance not only of careful evaluation of the real benefit of written channels to information poor clients, but also of social and cultural awareness among social welfare staff. Isolation and alienation of informationally-marginal people seem to be worsened by official insensitivity, and they need the assistance of social welfare staff who either speak their language or who are accompanied by an interpreter.

In a similar vein, it has been shown that the delivery of important reproductive health-care information to Pacific Island women in New Zealand must take account of cultural factors that can influence client receptivity to the information (Sligo, Comrie & Jameson 1997). Consequently face-to-face settings and community networks were found to be preferred by the women in the study where reproductive health information was concerned. In the United States too, studies are showing the importance of interpersonal communication networks: a recent study of low income African American householders has shown that they

exhibit information seeking behaviours that are primarily focused on neighbours and family (Spink, Jaeckel & Sidberry, 1997).

Thus it is now well recognised that the cultural context must be considered especially where the provision of health information is concerned as mentioned in the above New Zealand study (Sligo, Jameson & Comrie, 1998). A Ministry of Consumer Affairs Suffrage Year research project (1993) also strongly recommended, for example, government departments recognise that “information was gained in different ways by different groups in the community. For low income women recognition of the strong oral culture would be necessary...” (Kelly, Fa’atasi & Feeney, 1993: 21). It was noted that this is particularly true of Maori and Pacific Island women.

Gaziano and O’Leary’s 1998 study of childbirth and infant development knowledge gaps in parent education in Minneapolis and Belfast has also explored the role played by interpersonal communication in the dissemination of information. An important finding of this study was that “the setting in which interpersonal communication takes place can influence communication effectiveness.” (Gaziano & O’Leary, 1998: 44). The study reflects on the way in which mothers can regard health professional instructors as suspect, and that time is needed to establish trust so that learning can take place. The authors suggest that more research is needed so that the implications of group-based parenting classes and one-to-one communication are better understood in relation to knowledge gaps.

Knowledge gap studies in the 1970s and 1980s, it has been noted, have tended to focus on the injection of information into the social system at the mass media level. A new research focus is emerging to take its place alongside these studies, as it becomes evident that the picture is more complex. For example, new research is needed in order to understand more clearly the role of interpersonal communication where a differentiation is noted between knowledge acquisition and behaviour change. A recent study of a reproductive health communication campaign in Bolivia tested the hypothesis "that the mass media are effective at changing awareness and knowledge, but that interpersonal communication is necessary for behaviour change" (Valente & Saba, 1998: 114). The findings, however, indicate that under certain conditions the mass media may substitute for personal network influences and accelerate the behaviour change process.

The evidence is still contradictory. Gaziano and O'Leary's 1998 study concluded "knowledge may be easier to change than behaviour." (Gaziano & O'Leary, 1998: 46). A recent New Zealand study showed that the use of a mass mail-out in a governmental information campaign was effective in initiating discussion between individuals and within families. However this discussion had little effect in terms of changing behaviour in the way desired by the campaign designers, and discussion was more likely to occur among those of higher education and income (Sligo & Williams, 1999). Therefore the campaign had the effect of increasing information inequality, and interpersonal communication was of lesser importance to those of lower socio-economic status.

The applicability of the knowledge gap hypothesis is being assessed in the New Zealand setting in a series of interconnected Massey University studies of access to information in communities and organisations. This series of six includes a study of Polynesian women's access to health information cited previously; another has examined low-income earners' access to and use of a city council discount scheme intended for them. More recently, the communication impact of a government information campaign to foster a proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility in New Zealand was examined (Sligo & Williams, 1998). This study found that if an information campaign can initiate communication effects such as discussion of an issue with family members or workmates, that knowledge of the issue may increase (Sligo & Williams, 1999). Again, a significant role for interpersonal networks in knowledge acquisition is implied.

Culture and world view

Finally, there are wide disparities, attributable to cultural differences, in perceptions of wealth and poverty, of the concept of ownership, and what is knowledge. This is certainly the case in New Zealand, where an overlay of corporate business culture has added in recent decades to the role ethnic culture plays in highlighting contrasts in belief systems and world-views. The entire history of troubled relationships between the European settler groups and the indigenous Maori in New Zealand has been not least because of conflicting understandings of wealth. Whereas the colonial attitude was that land was to be acquired as property to be held by legal title in perpetuity until sold, Maori cosmology positions land in a spiritual connection with the people. The land,

whenua, is the people; it is a revered and communally nurtured *taonga* that in turn nourishes human life. Notions of owning the land were incongruent in this context: how can an individual own land? It is like trying to own the wind. Thus, conceptions of value, of treasure, of things to be revered, are culturally derived, as are concepts of knowledge. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her polemic on the ethics of indigenous research (1999) describes the dichotomy in this way:

The arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. These arguments give a partial indication of the different world-views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure within the indigenous world ... The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the West (p. 74).

Furthermore, pre-European Maori cosmology placed individuals within a system of inter-relationships, which can be seen to move outwards from *whanau* to *hapu* to *iwi*. *Whanaungatanga* – a belief system and way of life based upon mutual support within an extended family – is a cornerstone of Maori tradition. In contrast, European New Zealand culture tends to be individualist rather than collectivist in its concerns and practices. Perhaps Putnam's "social capital" (1999) represents Western thinking catching up with, or re-discovering, collectivist traditions that have ancient roots.

Organisation A, one of the sites studied in the present study, takes *whanaungatanga* as its model of values and practice (Organisation A, 1996). In addition, the information programme called Parents As First Teachers, the specific focus of the research, develops and facilitates community networks of provider–client relationships, as well as upholding the values of family in the programme itself. An acknowledgement of the importance of family or surrogate family networks in the contexts chosen for this research is therefore relevant and important.

This literature review suggests research on the interpersonal dimension in assistance to marginalised families is incomplete. It might be logically supposed that organisational values, espoused and practised, could provide a natural platform for effective communication with the marginalised that can build outwards from the organisation and into the community. The present study will reflect on this possible link, deriving its focus at least in part from an interest in the role played by organisational culture in maximising the benefits of the programme to selected families, at risk of “poor outcomes” for their children.

What is evident to an informed citizen about the New Zealand social setting in which this study took place is that it has an indigenous culture that differs from the European settler majority in its values concerning family, land, community, spirituality, and knowledge, among others. This is of interest in the light of this literature review, because the New Zealand indigenous culture is lending new understandings to mainstream culture about family and community values, such

as traditionally favouring extended, inclusive families in which child-rearing was a shared responsibility of all adults. This is a tradition that resonates with values that are central to the Parents As First Teachers programme. Indigenous cultures can therefore show that enduring capital is not material, it is social, and yet “even people working in development [talk] about wealth and poverty using a very narrow definition. We use cash as the sole measure. Most of us fall into the trap of working towards alleviating physical poverty, thinking this is the solution to all ills.” (Marcel-Thekaekara, 1999, p.23). This article, reflecting on different cultural concepts of poverty (in this case in Glasgow and among the Adivasi, indigenous tribes people in Tamil Nadu in India) presents their notion of wealth as “Our community, our children, our unity, our culture, the forest...the Adivasis didn’t see themselves as poor. They saw themselves as people without money... A man needs his family, his community, his own people around him.” Thus in development literature also, family and “social connectedness” (Putnam, 1995) are seen to be like the air we breathe, and any programme put in place to assist communities needs to work with and alongside these established networks of trust.

The present study in context

It has been shown that, in the view of some communication researchers, information needs are best defined collaboratively by the user and agency, as Dervin (1980) and others such as Balnaves, Caputi and Williams (1991) have contended. In addition, it has been shown that studies of information poverty are concerned with the impact of social inequities within societies. Finally, these

trends in development and communication research are placed alongside the influence of culturally-derived views of family, and knowledge which is a collective concept in the world-view of New Zealand's Maori culture, so that world-wide interest in the concepts of social capital, social connectedness (Putnam, 1999), or community boundedness (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996) can be seen to have a historical presence in the social context of this study in the form of *whanaungatanga*, the traditional Maori extended family support system. It is possible that this context makes New Zealand somewhat suited to an information programme that takes a collaborative approach to information needs.

As has been demonstrated, increased research attention to the importance of family, friends and neighbourhood or community group networks in information-seeking by the information poor is strongly indicated by recent studies on information access. This research interest suggests a need to assess the insider perspective and the role of the "people factor" in successful communication strategies where provision of information is the goal.

The defining characteristic of the research approach as developed by this literature review is an understanding that the meaning of the information experience, whatever that might be, can only be derived from the individual concerned. This understanding has driven a qualitative research design and methodology for the present study, in the belief that "our work should fully respect the superior knowledge social actors have of their own lives and experience" (Becker, 1998, p. 98). The study considers the need for interaction

in the process of meeting information needs, and seeks to understand the role of interpersonal networks in individuals' access to information that others, or they themselves, consider is necessary to improve outcomes for their children and family in the future. Gaziano and O'Leary (1998) agree, that

Although previous knowledge gap research has been little concerned with the subject of parenting, implications of this issue for improving infants' and children's mental health, improving families' quality of life, and providing solutions to social problems invite researchers to focus greater attention on parenting topics (p. 46).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study aimed to obtain insights from people experiencing a need for information, so that the role of interpersonal communication in the acquisition of knowledge could be explored. To this end, it was desirable to seek insider perspectives from within a coherent context such as an information programme. This would allow the researcher to explore with these participants the extent and significance of their family, friendship and other interpersonal networks for their acquisition of knowledge, in terms of the goals and practices adopted in that programme.

As shown in Chapter 2, studies since the mid-1970s have established some broad, social systems-level explanations for the existence of knowledge gaps and the conditions under which they may diminish or widen. Scholars such as Chatman (1996) have, however, begun to point out that the individual-level, lived realities of information poverty need to be researched, because it is thought that efforts to overcome it will be more effective when the user perspective is taken into account and the part played by interpersonal communication is better understood. In order to get close to individuals experiencing a need for information and then be able to assess the part played by interpersonal communication, a structured information programme in which people were interacting with professionals was sought for this research.

A suitable research context was found in the Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) programme, targeted at parents considered to be in need of information and support because they have a newborn child. These parents are selected by the programme providers on the basis of such factors as their socio-economic circumstances, their family structure and support systems (such as being solo parents), the young age of the mother, and other criteria. Thus the participants in this programme could be expected to be a ready-made sample of information poor individuals whose insights would be valuable for the purposes of this research.

This chapter will explain the processes used by the researcher in approaching two separate sites for study, how their support and consent was obtained, and what role the PAFT staff played in obtaining access to parents who would be willing to participate in the research. The data collection processes are then explained, and the data analytic methods are described.

1 *Two Research Sites*

1.1 Site selection

The context chosen for research of interactivity in an information programme, as explained in the introduction, was the Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) programme. This is delivered by sixty-four different provider agencies around New Zealand, who are contracted to Early Childhood Development (ECD), a division of the Ministry of Education. Two providers of PAFT in a large city in the North Island of New Zealand were selected as possible research sites. They are referred to in this thesis as Organisation A and Organisation B.

Organisation A was approached first, because it is a large umbrella organisation offering a wide range of social services to urban Maori, including PAFT as part of its health division. It presented interesting possibilities from a research point of view, principally because its *raison d'être* is to provide support and information to dispossessed urban Maori, and it operates in an integrated way so that a wide range of services is available in a “one stop shop” type of operation. It has had a reputation as a provider that takes its services to the people, rather than setting itself up and waiting for the people to come to it. It seemed possible that innovative ways of bridging knowledge gaps could be observed at Organisation A, and that exploratory work within it could offer better understanding and possibly a model of effective communication with those experiencing information need.

Organisation B was approached because it was one of two other organisations mentioned to the researcher by a PAFT staff member at Organisation A as offering PAFT in the Auckland area. There are others, but they were not approached. This was because Organisation B seemed very suitable, being an agency strongly associated with infant health in the minds of the New Zealand public, with a sound reputation, long traditions, and an image of reliability. It was anticipated that as a partner to Organisation A in the research, it would increase the range of people and situations as available data at the very least, and it might also show contrasts or other noteworthy connections. Two sites would increase the reach of the research.

1.2 The nature of the two organisations

Other than offering PAFT, the two organisations are dissimilar. Organisation A is large and multi-faceted, and PAFT is but one of a wide range of health and social service programmes it offers. Its mission is to “be a public forum ... concerned with ensuring that facilities and resources are better utilised to benefit and assist the Maori community” (Organisation A, 1996) in the metropolitan area in which it is located. Its organisational structure is broad and complex, with PAFT a single component among many:

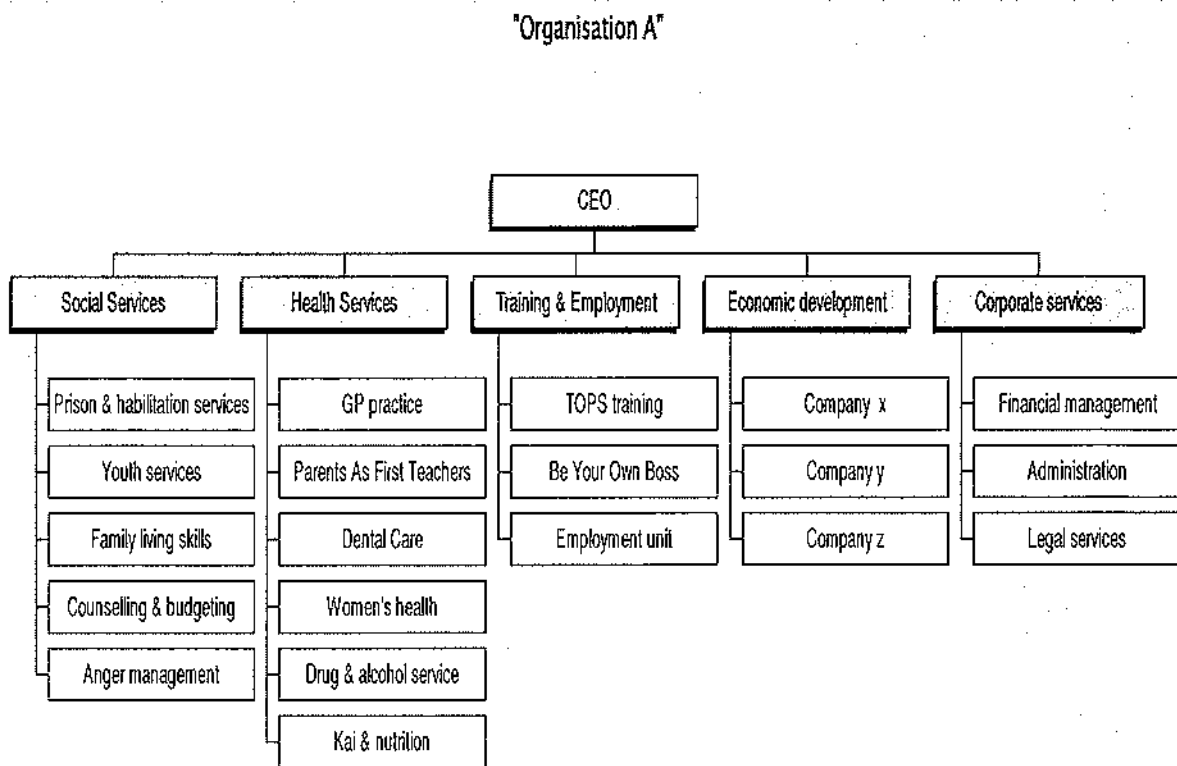


Figure 1: Structure of "Organisation A"

Source: Organisation A Annual Report 1998

By contrast, Organisation B only runs the PAFT programme, although it does belong to a well-known network of infant health agencies operating throughout New Zealand. PAFT is the extent of the work of this agency, unlike Organisation A. It works with a more diverse population in a different part of the city, and is required by ECD to reflect that diversity in its caseload. The contractual obligations of Organisation A require it to have 50% Maori families in its caseload.

However, despite the fact that the organisations are quite different in size and purpose, the PAFT programme is sufficiently prescribed by a given curriculum and regular evaluation by ECD that the two separate PAFT teams operated in very similar ways within different organisational contexts.

1.3 What the present study of PAFT entailed

At each of the two research sites (refer to “Site Selection”, section 1.1 of this chapter) proposals regarding possible research were put to the PAFT teams at their meetings. PAFT team members’ ideas were sought and incorporated into planning to a certain extent: for example, recommendations on appropriate approaches to potential interview subjects were helpful in deciding the methods that were ultimately used, such as being flexible in the use of written information sheets with some families.

These initial discussions with PAFT staff at each site made it possible to develop key contacts receptive to the idea of being involved in the research. The first phase of data gathering, observation of educators’ visits to parents in their homes, was facilitated by these contacts at PAFT who obtained consent from the parents concerned.

The next phase of the study involved in-depth interviews of volunteer parents, and of volunteer PAFT educators. In total, twenty-two interviews were completed and analysed.

The researcher also attended an annual PAFT educator training week, run by ECD. During this week, the researcher was a participant in information and discussion sessions on the PAFT curriculum being launched in 2000, a new edition of the largely US Parents As Teachers curriculum manuals, with specific adaptations for the New Zealand cultural context.

Finally, the new PAFT curriculum was consulted, and key concepts relating to the interpersonal relationship aspect of knowledge acquisition were drawn from it.

These data collection methods are explained more fully in section 4 of this chapter, and their inter-relationships are summarised in visual form in Figure 2, page 62.

2 *Design Rationale*

This study aimed to build on theoretical and hypothetical frameworks available in existing studies of information gaps and the information poor, especially those of Gaziano (1998) and Chatman (1996), antecedents referred to in Chapter 2. Chatman in particular was a reference point for this study, because she formulated a series of propositions characterising the information poor, and emphasised a distance between the worlds of the “insider” and “outsider”. Chatman’s propositions were tested in a prior study strongly linked to this one (Sligo & Williams, 1999), sponsored by the Massey University Research Fund, and it was intended that the present study should build on its findings. Chatman is therefore a significant benchmark in terms of recent information poverty studies. It was anticipated that the goal of theory-building in this study would be achieved through an exploratory approach, using the insights and reflections of people experiencing a need for information, and these could be obtained only through inductive methods.

2.1 Ethnographic approach

The research design was influenced by the traditions of grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology. A strong belief underlying methodological decisions in the present study, for example, was that the researcher would need to get close to the Parents As First Teachers programme in order to understand its dynamics, to obtain insider perspectives, and to place it in the context of communication theory. Thus “methods that [would] take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings [would be] ‘grounded’ in the empirical world” (Patton, 1990, p. 67) were considered to be the natural options. By selecting strategies that would, especially over time, facilitate trust between the programme participants, the PAFT professionals and the researcher, it was hoped that the study could come as close as possible to “lifting the veils that obscure or hide what is going on ... getting close to the area ... by digging deep in it,” (Blumer, cited in Patton, 1990, p.67). The researcher aimed to obtain the perspectives of the insiders involved in a specific setting, by also becoming an insider (Jorgensen, 1989). This was made possible by becoming, unofficially and in a moderately involved way, a part of each PAFT team for the duration of the research. From the early phases of meeting with the teams to the conclusion of the interviewing and observation, this was a period of seven months.

While the participation in the work of the PAFT teams was limited, in the sense that the researcher was not a part of confidential discussions and day-to-day administration, there was involvement in several ways that made it possible to learn about the cultures of these groups and organisations. PAFT staff invited

the researcher to meetings, training sessions, functions for the PAFT families, and home visits, and they volunteered their time for interviews. This level of involvement was as much as the researcher expected to obtain, given that the staff had concerns about confidentiality and the purpose of the research. So a moderate level of participation, together with a number of other standard ethnographic practices such as building trust early, becoming involved but maintaining an analytical perspective, developing strong contacts with a few key informants, and multiple data gathering methods (Hussey & Hussey, 1997), meant that this was a case study in the ethnographic tradition. The combination of practices enabled the researcher to be “immersed in the culture under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 67), where the culture in this case is that of PAFT, and the organisational cultures of the two research sites.

The ethnographic tradition usually involves the method of participant observation as a means of understanding cultures. The broad concept of culture is significant in two ways in the PAFT project: firstly in the sense that the programme itself, derived from a successful and popular US model, has a strong, identifiable organisational culture. This is evident in its structured programme, transportable to different social contexts, and in its belief in the mentoring approach. This organisational perspective was available to the researcher through various observations, activities and interviews.

Moreover, the New Zealand PAFT has a local flavour involving indigenous cultural values, so that it could also be said that there is a distinctive version of the PAFT “programme culture” evolving in this country, influenced by the

traditions, beliefs and practices of New Zealand's indigenous Maori. These considerations are relevant to the objectives of the study, since cultural differences extend to beliefs regarding the role of parents, families and extended families, and such interpersonal networks are a significant concern of this research.

A second level of significance for the concept of culture is that the two separate providers of the programme studied for this project also have clearly identifiable traditions and organisational cultures. It is possible that these could affect decisions about the application of the PAFT programme in each case. While observations about such matters are beyond the scope of the project, they do have relevance to selection of parents who are eligible to be on the PAFT programme, and for this reason some reflections are made on the ramifications of organisational culture, in terms of delivery, in Chapter 5. Again, these are perspectives made possible by participant observation, since the researcher was able to discern organisational culture by working within it.

The influence of the phenomenological perspective in this study can be seen in the fact that its primary concern was to understand the condition of information need from the participant's own frame of reference (Hussey & Hussey, 1997) and to explore the notion of knowledge as a user construct (Dervin, 1980). Phenomenological inquiry implies that research methods ascertain "what people experience and how they interpret the world" (Patton, 1990, p. 69), thus interview, participation and observation were chosen as logical mechanisms for achieving this in the PAFT research. Also favouring participant observation as a

data-gathering tool, “phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (Patton, 1990, p.69). This question comes very close to reflecting the objectives of this study, since its primary concern was to elicit a range of subjective experiences of the educative and mentoring relationship that is the basis of the PAFT programme.

Finally, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Mills, 1999) influenced the thinking behind this study in the sense that observation and reflection were intended to lead to theory-building, and that this would be faithful to the researched world. However while this inductive approach and intuitive researcher responses were felt to be valid given the nature of the research problem and objectives, these were balanced by awareness of extant theories and models as explained in the literature review in Chapter 2 and were informed by them.

3 Ethics approvals

The initial research phases, the discussions and negotiations with PAFT staff at the two research sites, were necessarily exploratory. While the researcher retained control over what were the fundamental research questions to be asked and answered, to a degree the methodology was negotiated with key staff members. Early development and planning of the project was aimed at securing in-depth interviews with selected parents. In order to achieve this access, the

ethical aspects of the process needed to be fully worked through. This was the crucial first phase of the research.

Four approvals processes were undertaken:

- Massey University ethics approval, for a study involving human subjects
- Consent from Organisation A
- Consent from the national society responsible for Organisation B
- Approval from Early Childhood Development (ECD), a division of the Ministry of Education responsible for contracting out PAFT to providers nation wide.

In addition, the PAFT teams had to be consulted and involved in the approvals. Approaches varied in each instance. Proposals appropriate to the needs of each committee or other audience were prepared and communicated in person or by letter. As so many distinct groups were involved, the consequence was delay, because one organisation's approval tended to hinge on whether others had given approval. For example, PAFT at Organisation B declined to give active support or specific advice until the ethics committee of its parent organisation had given approval. Yet the important ethics committee approvals depended on developing convincing, detailed plans with the teams.

The development phase of the study was protracted. Initial consultation with Organisation A began in April 1999, and continued throughout 1999 as the various approvals were sought. All approvals were complete by March 2000. The data collection phase was confined to five months from May to September 2000.

3.1 Research ethics and the bi-cultural dimension

It was important in this study to take account of issues of cultural perspective, because the project sought to gather data from, and was developed initially within, a Maori organisation. Organisation A made its name and established a strong public profile in the 1990s as an organisation advocating for the needs of urban Maori, and in offering an integrated approach to social services provision. Although Organisation B doesn't identify itself with an ethnic culture in the same overt way, observation subsequently showed that it too was becoming conscious of issues connected with culture and economic disadvantage.

Therefore attention was paid to the views of Maori academics such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) regarding the damage caused to Maori by the inherently colonialist empiricism of Western academic research. The Maori world-view and values are at odds with the quantitative research tradition. To Maori, knowledge is a collective concept, and cannot be captured by setting a questionnaire before a research "subject". Edwards and Morrison (2000) echo these views, and also point out that non-Maori research on Maori tends to highlight negative statistics, and to create the impression that nothing positive occurs as the result of Maori initiatives. This, they argue, perpetuates unhelpful colonialist attitudes. They encourage attempts to involve Maori (at the very least) in research on their own people, rather than subjecting them to a process with agendas that they do not buy into. Auckland University's Ella Henry (1999, presentation to postgraduate students) presented a convincing case for non-Maori having significant challenges before them in communicating effectively

with Maori, whose world-view and cosmology is fundamentally in conflict with contemporary values as represented in the so-called global culture, a kind of homogenised internationalism. These sorts of viewpoints were consulted and became part of the thinking behind the entire project. If a researched group regards Western-style research with suspicion because it tends to be a process done *to* subjects, and responds more favourably to a collaborative approach, then it is important to incorporate that into research planning and objectives. Without this, the notion of an insider/outsider conflict, as in the literature relevant to this study, could be exacerbated.

Despite the potential for tensions over attitudes to research, the exploration of communication concepts within the PAFT programme at two sites was made possible by trust extended to the researcher by the staff and families involved. Trust was earned through a measured process, openness and the researcher's belief that the research was about sharing the process and the products of it. It was made clear from the earliest proposals to Organisation A that the relationships between the families and the organisation, and the data obtained through researcher observation and interview, belonged to the *whanau* (organisation or family, or organisation as family, the term '*whanau*' meaning all these things in this context). It was felt to be important and appropriate that the researcher should operate in an open and respectful way, in the belief that this type of research involves taking something from people, that any taking should happen on the basis of things offered, and that the giving can and will only happen if the subjects have some concept of the usefulness of the research to the researched and the researcher.

A key part of the exploratory phase of the work was researcher observation of home visits, and it was stated in the approaches made in order to obtain informed consent that the session belonged to the family, and that writing up of observations would be sensitive to this ownership. The researcher also withdrew from one visit where it was apparent that her presence was creating barriers to the success of the session, because the child was wary of the observation process.

From the earliest stages, the two organisations were consulted. At regular intervals, feedback was sought from the PAFT co-ordinators and educators, and their advice regarding culturally appropriate data-gathering was taken into account. For example, written questionnaires were originally planned, and focus groups had been a possibility, but neither of these was pursued after discussions with staff members, whose advice was that these would be difficult to administer successfully. Ultimately the methodology represents a collaboration, the outcomes of which were intended to benefit the organisations involved as well as to advance communication theory. In this sense the work was also in the tradition of action research (Lewin, 1946, cited in Hussey & Hussey, 1997), in which the researcher and the research itself are part of naturally occurring change in the social world and the work is designed to initiate and evaluate action. The current study was not fully collaborative, because it did not aim to identify specific organisational problems, and was not intended as either an evaluative (therefore potentially damaging) study, nor a blinkered and laudatory one (therefore at risk of being regarded as politically

correct). However it was envisaged that the findings *could* be of organisational benefit because they could lead to enhanced practice.

Contemporary Maori viewpoints on research processes and culture resonated with the objectives of this study, and so the project emerged as an ethnographic study rooted in beliefs about the need to include the participants' voices in its design, to prefer a qualitative approach that would to a degree evolve over time, and to accord a status to the findings that would be in the nature of a shared resource for various groups, whether these be communication researchers, Organisations A and B, or providers whose work is focused on improved outcomes for groups experiencing information need, to put to good use in future.

4 *Data collection processes*

A combination of methods based on an understanding of naturalistic inquiry was planned and developed in consultation with PAFT co-ordinators. The central concern was to gain the trust of the staff involved through discussion and an open approach so that to a degree they could assist in framing the design. This was more of an issue in discussions with Organisation A, which had had a good deal of media attention and political scrutiny, and thus may have found the attention of researchers unwelcome.

The goal was to be able to work alongside the teams at both sites in their ordinary activities, and in so doing to develop research practices that would be ethically and professionally appropriate and acceptable to both organisations. It was also part of the *modus operandi* that methods employed would be overt and negotiated on the basis of informed consent.

The principal data collection methods used were:

- Observation of PAFT home visits
- Interviews with parents on the programme
- Interviews with educators.

These were supplemented by:

- Participant observation of PAFT annual educator re-training (four days of intensive workshops) and team meetings
- Analysis of the PAFT curriculum documents.

The nature of “participant observation” as a data collection method in this study is discussed and defined more precisely on p. 65.

4.1 Dual perspectives & triangulation

The goals of the project, focusing as they did on the roles played by trust and interpersonal communication in the provision of information to parents, were to be met in large part by seeking the personal insights of participants in the Parents As First Teachers programme. It was felt important that this central interest of the study should be reflected through dual perspectives: those of the educators and of the parents, and in this way, data would shed light on both sides of the trust transaction. This was for two reasons: first, triangulation of data sources is useful because, as stated by Patton (1980) “consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources and reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings” (p.467). Second, the dual perspectives were sought for reasons explored in the literature review for this study, which show that in communication terms the user or receiver perspective would be usefully weighed against the source agenda and intentions. In addition these two perspectives would be compared with data obtained from researcher observation and review of secondary source material.

Thus a form of triangulation through multiple methodologies was built into the research design, with the aim of producing valid analysis. Denzin (1970, cited in Patton, 1980, p. 464) asserts that the use of multiple methods, theories and

data sources can help to “overcome the intrinsic bias” that can come from single method studies. Figure 2 represents the inter-relationship of the multiple data collection methods used in this study, and shows the way they enabled reflection on the others. Altogether, the methodology was multi-dimensional but formed a single coherent context.

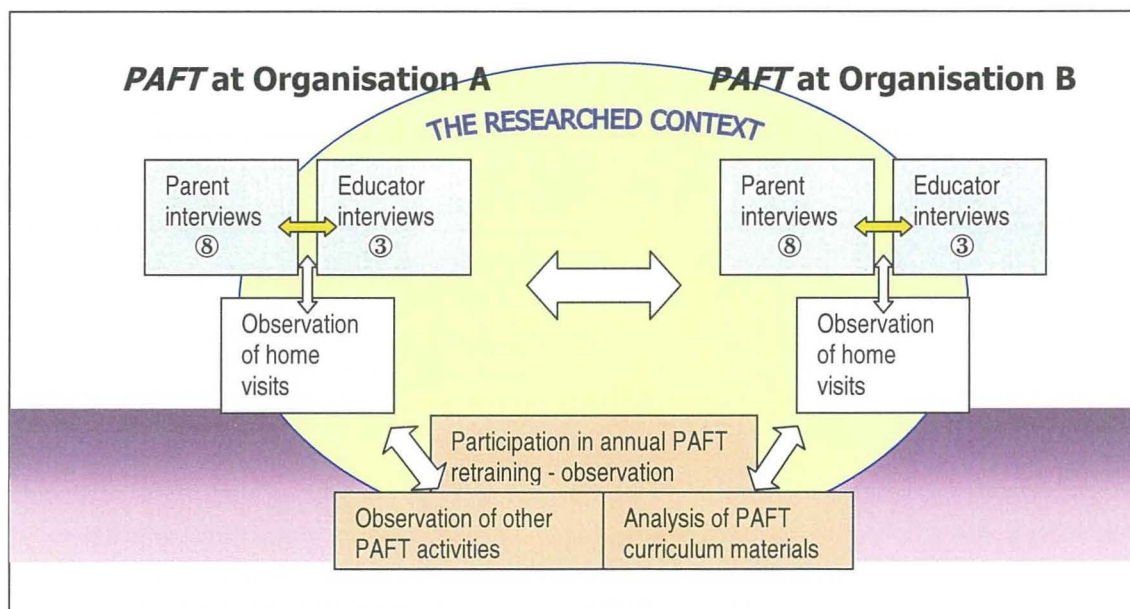


Figure 2: Two-site replication and inter-relationship of data-gathering methods

The key contributions to the data, however, were to be from the parent interviews. The following sections, describing the three principal data-gathering processes used in the project, explain the route to the volunteers who participated.

4.2 Observation of home visits

It was felt that an initial contact between the researcher and prospective interviewees could be facilitated by the educators through their scheduled home visits. In this way parents who were comfortable with the process of inquiry could be identified and subsequently contacted by the researcher to arrange an interview. The over-riding concern was to ensure that, from even minimal exposure to the research process to more active participation through an interview, involvement in it at any level was voluntary.

Presentations were made to the PAFT educators at the two research sites, at team meetings attended by about ten staff in each case, so that the aims of the project could be explained and data collection methods discussed. This was at about the time that ethical approvals and consents were being negotiated at higher organisational levels, and methodological decisions were being made. At these meetings, several educators gave qualified support to the research and indicated that they would be prepared to be actively involved. These women were regarded as key contacts in that they were vital as conduits to the subjects. In a sense they could also be viewed as key informants "who have special knowledge, status, or access to observations denied the researcher" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, cited in Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p.57). Their co-operation was an essential factor in obtaining access to interviewees. Once ethics approvals had been obtained, it was possible for observations to begin.

The researcher worked quite closely with these people over the course of eighteen weeks, going out with them in their work and observing thirteen home

visits, participating in four full days of training with them, and interacting on a trusting level such as through regular telephone contact and at meetings. They may have volunteered to offer their help in the first place because they felt an empathy with the researcher, being professionals involved in the education field. For these reasons, there were degrees of ambiguity present because of a blurring of the researcher's role (Patton, 1995, p.263) as time passed, and the observer became a somewhat trusted colleague, and side-by-side participant in some contexts.

Subsequently, interested PAFT educators (two from one team and three from the other) either explained the prospect of home visit observation or gave a written information sheet explaining the purpose and process to their clients, so that they could agree to or decline permission for the researcher to be present at the next home visit. In these ways a process of negotiation over access to possible volunteers was occurring from the most elementary levels, at the same time creating the conditions for informed consent should these parents agree to be interviewed.

Educators then either invited the researcher along for a day's home visits (normally four of one to 1 ½ hours in duration in a working day), having spoken to the parents beforehand and obtained permission, or they would indicate times and addresses of specific family home visits where a parent had indicated agreement.

4.3 Observer as participant

The observations were designed to be unobtrusive. The researcher was introduced to the parent and child, where appropriate, in a low-key way as the educator arrived. The researcher's intention was as far as possible to blend into the background, but because observation also involves a degree of participation, through the fact of being present as one of a very small number of people (usually only three others), observation is a form of intervention. Bogdewic (in Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 55) cites Jaeger (1988) to the effect that observation is "the more passive dimension of the participant observer role" and explores the range of stances that a researcher can take in this role, from being an "active participant" to a "privileged observer" or a "limited observer". In the present case, the stance favoured was that of privileged observer, in the sense that the researcher was benignly tolerated by those observed. Bogdewic goes on to cite Junker (1960) as defining the possible researcher roles as more a matter of degree of participation, so that the researcher can be "complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, [or] complete observer" (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 56). This type of continuum is echoed by Jorgensen (1989).

The "observer as participant" role describes most aptly what occurred in the documenting of events at these home visits. Considerable effort was made to be unobtrusive; yet on occasion it was inevitable, in the presence of small trusting children, that a child would approach the researcher with a toy or a book, and demand involvement. In this way the observations did alter normal events a little; yet in the way that Jorgensen (1989) describes, it was felt that any

supposed theoretical conflict for the researcher between the observer and participant roles was in fact minimal, given that we learn to manage multiple roles as a normal part of everyday life.

It was possible to at least minimise disruption to normal events in a home visit, through several conscious strategies. These included:

- Being seated in a way that took note of where the educator, parent and child were seated in the room, and being attached to the grouping without moving into it, or “owning” it.
- Sitting in the same way as the observed people, e.g. if they sat on the floor, so did the observer.
- Avoiding interacting with the parent and child verbally, except to greet and thank them, so as to allow the educator to take all initiative in the session; however this is not to say that a leaden silence would descend, but rather that the researcher consciously strove to take a back seat.
- Using positive and courteous non-verbal communication so that it was clear the researcher was interested, responsive, and held supportive intentions.

During the session of about one hour, the researcher simply observed, almost always without taking notes since it was felt that this might wrongly signal an evaluative role. As soon as possible after the visit, notes of the observations would be recorded. These included notable features of the locale and environment, descriptions of the nature of the session, the focus of discussion, the interpersonal communication style of the educator, the responsiveness of

the parent, the extent to which the interactions were mainly with the child or the adult, and other details that seemed relevant to the central concerns of the study.

Findings arising from observation of thirteen home visits are reported in Chapter 5. The observations were intended to serve several purposes: (1) to acquaint the researcher with the standard format of a home visit session; (2) to observe a range of educators at work, seeking to document different styles of interaction; (3) to facilitate personal contact with parents so that a follow-up interview would be with someone they had already met; and (4) to create the conditions for acceptance and a relaxed experience for the parent.

It became clear after about six home visits that purposes (1) and (2) above had been satisfied. While number two was important in regard to assessing the dynamics of personal (educator) interaction style insofar as this forms a component of the trusting relationship between educators and parents, data were also to be obtained from parents and educators themselves through interviews. To this extent, it was felt to be sufficient to observe five educators. In addition, there may be an element of unreality about pre-arranged observation sessions, in that those observed may enhance their standard practices, energies or interactions for that particular session. Finally on this particular point, the whole series of data-gathering methods were reliant on educator goodwill that would be stretched by the inconvenience of too much researcher observation.

Purposes (3) and (4) above were satisfied without having to persist with the observations for every single interview. The home visit observations proved useful as a mechanism for creating interview opportunities, and allowed the researcher to demonstrate trustworthiness to both educators and parents through professional objectivity and discretion by remaining in the background throughout the session. Information sheets given to all involved stressed that the session belonged to the parents and children, and that the researcher would not intrude on that.

However while purpose (3) was initially very important to the researcher out of an ethical regard for approaching parents in a sensitive way, as the project advanced and interviews were completed, the perception of a need for this courting of potential interviewees diminished. Thus some later ones were arranged by educators without the intermediate step of the observation taking place. Educators were entrusted with the role of go-between, creating the understandings on behalf of the researcher. The limitations of this practice in research terms have been discussed earlier in connection with the concept of key informants. In one instance in this study the researcher felt that the educator had a distorted understanding of participant selection, since she did not have the informed academic perspective. Anxiety over this point proved to be unfounded, since closer work over the course of time with this educator enabled her to develop a clearer understanding of the research goals.

4.4 Parent interviews central to the study

It was vital to obtain insider insights from the individuals involved, both the

expert professional viewpoint and that of the individual parent. Skilful interviewing could provide the platform for subjects to reveal experiences, past, recent and current, and views about the values and benefits or otherwise of the PAFT experience, or “thick descriptions” (Denzin, 1989, p.11). Another motivation in placing the in-depth interviews at the heart of the project was to set the lived experience of parent and educator side by side (Denzin, 1989), in this way examining the assumptions and the realities of these experiences, so that a healthy element of evaluation would act as a counterbalance to the inherently descriptive nature of the work.

The interviews of parents were seen to be critically important to meeting the objectives of the project. It was felt that the trained professionals might be more considered in their reflections, more wary; that the parents, being the informationally needy, were the “insiders” (Merton, 1972), or “outsiders” (Chatman, 1996), depending on your perspective, whose life experiences were sought. As demonstrated in the literature review, the unexamined angle of information poverty is the realm of the receiver.

4.5 Pilot study

A schedule of questions to guide parent interviews was developed, in consultation with a PAFT co-ordinator, and trialled with two volunteer parents. As a result of these pilot interviews, minor adjustments were made to the order of questions, and to the wording of the questions themselves. The groupings of questions that were the result of this process were designed to be the basis of

semi-structured rather than structured interviews. Nor was it anticipated that every individual question would necessarily be required. In some cases, the groups of questions are related and even similar, so that if one question seemed inappropriate or was not eliciting a response, another or others could be used.

The question schedule (refer Appendix 3) therefore falls somewhere between what Patton (1990) describes as the “interview guide approach” and the “standardised open-ended interview”, in that the concept of a guide allows for flexibility in the sequence and wording of questions, but a standardized open-ended interview asks the same questions of all subjects. Elements of both were present in the subsequent interviews.

The question groupings were arranged in such a way that the parents would be led from basic description about their household and time with the PAFT programme, through to their support networks, development of confidence (or otherwise) in approaching the role of parent, to viewpoints on aspects of the personal visits they receive from PAFT. Thus the interview was planned to lead the subjects deeply into topics most relevant to the project objectives by a gradual process.

Subsequently the schedule shown in Appendix 3 was used to guide 16 in-depth interviews of parents, over the course of five months. The data-gathering period was extended in this way because other interviews were being conducted as well, as shown in the following sections of this chapter; interviews were arranged as follow-ups to home visits, which were also being completed

throughout the time; other data-gathering was taking place; and transcribing of interviews in many cases was being started at around the same time. For these reasons, and for the fact that the researcher wanted the process to be reflective and unhurried, the interviewing continued for some time.

4.6 In-depth interviews of PAFT parents

Mutually convenient times for interviews were arranged by the researcher, and all took place in the parents' own homes, except in one case where the parent was a resident of a drug rehabilitation facility where she lived with her baby. In most cases it was possible to conduct the interview without children or babies present. It was felt desirable that only the baby's mother be interviewed (although this was not specifically requested), since in almost all cases she would be likely to be the one with the most direct experience of the PAFT programme. In only one case was there a father present, for half of the interview time. In this case the interview had been proceeding very haltingly, with the mother appearing to be nervous about how to handle the questions; yet once her partner sat in on the interview and contributed some thoughts, she relaxed and was able to speak more freely.

Some interviews were quite free-ranging, and although the schedule of questions was returned to as diligently as possible, the interviewer tolerated some latitude in the areas of discussion, while still attempting to probe for answers on key issues. This meant that at times the interview guide was not used strictly in the order in which the questions appear in Appendix 3, and the

interviewer allowed the individual to follow lines of thought that seemed fruitful if the response had a bearing on the objectives of the research. Some interviewees were less articulate and needed a lot of probing and prompting. At times with these and others, there was a sense in which it was important that the interviewer should permit them to just be heard once the cognitive process of articulating their experiences had begun, such was the difficulty in getting them started.

4.7 Interviews with educators

To balance the perspectives of the parents, the viewpoints of several PAFT educators were sought. The reasons for this have been explained in the introductory overview of data-gathering methods; to briefly reiterate, the relationship between parent and educator is at the core of this research. To understand its importance as a tool in knowledge acquisition, both participants needed to be interviewed.

It was felt, for example, that the establishment of trust in this long-term relationship was likely to require skilful application of expertise on the part of the educator. This is not something which the parent would necessarily have an understanding of, or would observe. The parent might be able to articulate the end result, but only the educator would be able to reflect on the professional challenges and barriers to communication, and relate the provider viewpoint – the agenda, the motivation, the expectations.

To this end, a set of guidelines (refer Appendix 4) was prepared to provide a platform for discussions with four educators. The guidelines were designed to establish the level of experience of the educator, to draw comment on what was appealing about the long-term mentoring role in the lives of a large number of new parents, and move on to more in-depth reflection on the significance of the long-term relationship in regard to the success of the programme. As with the parent interviews, the discussions with the educators in each case were expansive and the range of insights was broad. This breadth was encouraged in the belief that unsolicited comments could well be relevant and useful.

Finally, the PAFT co-ordinator for each of the two organisations was interviewed as well, in order to include the perspectives of experienced managers. Since both of these women were educators in a part-time capacity as well, the same interview guidelines were used.

4.8 Participant observation of PAFT educator re-training

New Zealand's Ministry of Education Early Childhood Development (ECD) unit runs annual re-training for all PAFT educator teams. In June 2000, ECD facilitated four days of training for the Auckland teams with a special emphasis on the revised *Ahuru Mowai: Born to Learn™* curriculum manuals. This emphasis, creating an intense focus on curriculum matters where usually a range of professional development workshops are offered as options to educators, reflected a conscious fostering of developments initiated in the USA Parents As Teachers programme. It was evidently a necessity to familiarise the

teams in New Zealand with the inclusion of “neuro-science” information in the new manuals.

The researcher attended the re-training by invitation of ECD as an observer and participant. Using Junker’s (1960) description of stances that a researcher can take in this role, in this instance the researcher was an “observer as participant” (Bogdewic, cited in Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p.55). In this sense the role was more observation than participation. The objective was to gather insights into the professional approach to the role of interpersonal communication in the programme through intensive exposure to discussion with educators and information sessions provided by ECD. It was understood that these insights would arise randomly and incidentally, but nonetheless it was a valuable opportunity to understand the provider point of view.

Participant observation included listening to presentations from ECD curriculum trainers, joining in small-group activities and discussions, chatting casually over meals and at other informal opportunities with a variety of PAFT educators.

A summary of observations pertinent to the objectives of the project is presented in Chapter 4.

4.9 PAFT curriculum manuals

ECD gave the researcher a copy of the two new curriculum manuals on loan, so that PAFT guidelines to educators and information to parents could be looked at. The comprehensive manuals consist of notes and session guidelines to

educators for every home visit from month 1 through to month 36. Since the manuals are the material representation of what the programme is and how it sees itself, and the basis on which it monitors delivery, it was felt that this public face of the programme was important to consider in obtaining a picture of what it is aiming to achieve.

5 Data analytic methods

Once collection was complete, the data for the project consisted of twenty-two transcribed interviews, field notes from observation, PAFT curriculum documents and other items such as newsletters to parents. The methods used to analyse these are explained as follows.

5.1 Parent interviews

The transcripts show that the parent interviews proceeded predictably through the interview guide questions (refer Appendix 3). As explained earlier in this chapter, the question groupings were not necessarily worked through in their entirety, since the groups were developed in such a way that if one question appeared less successful in producing a response, others from the same group could be used. In each case, therefore, there was some variation in approach depending on the interviewee's level of response. However every effort was made to ensure that responses were obtained on a number of key themes that would have a direct bearing on the research objectives.

A coding protocol (Table 1, page 77) was subsequently designed to structure the transcript analysis process and make it systematic. The table shows the relationship between the interview questions and research objectives, and five key themes for this study. The themes were arrived at by relating the interview question guide to the research objectives, so that material on belonging, motivation, situational relevance, trust and communicative elements of the PAFT programme could be synthesised in such a way that the research questions could then be answered. The themes are specified in more detail in Chapter 4, in which the results of the study are summarised.

The transcripts were then analysed in depth and notes made relating to each one using the five themes as a coding system. In this way a synthesis could be developed of all data relating to each theme, leading to interpretive analysis as a final stage. This process is a type of analytic induction (Becker, 1998; Patton, 1990) used by ethnographers “to develop descriptions of parts of organised activities and their interconnections” (Becker, 1998, p. 196) by working from patterns in the data rather than imposing predetermined patterns and categories.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Interview questions developing the theme</i>	<i>Theme related to Research Objectives</i>
<i>1. Belonging and support</i>	Individuals' sense of being supported, through neighbourhood, friendship, family or other networks; ability to move freely beyond the confines of the home as desired.	Question set 1 (lead-in) Questions 2 and 3	To what extent are subjects isolated from, or supported by, interpersonal communication networks, and how significant is this factor for information acquisition?
	Willingness to approach others for advice and information.	Question 4	
<i>2. Motivation & information-seeking</i>	Early life experiences that the individual perceives as having been influential in terms of attitudes to bringing up own children, and thus to motivation in information-seeking. What level of motivation do these individuals show to seek information relevant to their current parenting need?	Part of question set 1	Does motivation help to define this sample of the informationally needy? To what extent do the subjects share a drive to seek information?
<i>3. Information needs in the parenting situation</i>	Degree to which subject felt the need for information with her own newborn, and views on whether in general this is a typical parental response at this time.	Question sets 5 and 6	The context of information need in this case is new parenthood: is this typically a time when interpersonal communication networks have an important role to play?

	The experience of parenting creating vulnerability with regard to information need.	Question set 7	
4. Role of trust in knowledge acquisition	The importance of trust, interpersonal contact, and a personal relationship with a key provider of parenting information	Question set 8	Effective knowledge acquisition may be connected with a stable trusting relationship. What is the significance of trust in this sense?
5. Other communication benefits in PAFT	Value added by the PAFT programme as an educative experience	Questions 9, 10 and 14	Are there additional elements of this (PAFT) information model that add to current understanding of effective use of interpersonal channels for knowledge acquisition?
	Significance/efficacy of the written, verbal and non-verbal elements of a PAFT learning session.	Question sets 11 and 12	
	Perceived efficacy of the programme in relation to long-term impact for the individual	Question sets 13 and 15	

Table 1: Interview analytic process by theme

5.2 Educator interviews

The six educator interviews were analysed in terms of themes in a similar way to the parent interviews. However, the analysis was simpler, covering the experience and motivations or commitment the women had to the work; the nature and importance of the interpersonal relationship, and communication benefits in the interactive approach. The analysis was followed by synthesis into patterns and common threads of comment, and these were summarised.

5.3 PAFT curriculum

ECD provided a loan copy of the two manuals that make up the recently revised curriculum *Ahuru Mowai: Born to Learn™*. These manuals are an extensive, comprehensive and highly-organised package of information and guidance for educators. Each monthly visit to parents, from the first visit when the baby is newborn, to the last at 36 months, is filed in the folders with a detailed outline of what should happen in the session, handouts ready for photocopying to give to the parents, background resource materials for the educators, and additional handouts on special topics such as toilet training. There is also a comprehensive introduction covering the nature and philosophy of the programme, and how the home visits should be conducted.

The manuals were studied for key elements of the way the philosophy and practice of PAFT, as represented in the manuals, had a bearing on the objectives for this study. A number of aspects were found to be relevant to the view PAFT

has of the respective communication roles played by the source and receiver in this context. These are reported on in Chapter 4.

6 Design Limitations

6.1 Observation

Getting close to PAFT involved the researcher in becoming an observer for some of the data collection. The potential limitations of this role were carefully considered in the developmental stages of this study. A planning issue was that because the researcher needed to work closely with PAFT staff, from the earliest discussions through to the data collection of various kinds, it was possible that objectivity could be compromised.

Objectivity could have been vulnerable in a setting where it is important to the organisation to be seen as successful, especially in the light of claims that emerged in Parliament in the early months of 2000 regarding alleged misappropriation of government funds in Organisation A. A fine balance was required between interpersonal skills on the part of the researcher moving within the organisation, and skilful application of research methods. This was achieved through conscious use of discretion balanced with openness regarding the objectives of the study. It should be acknowledged however that in this type of work, data collection is necessarily informed in an ongoing way by a tapestry of experiences which lead the researcher along a particular path, guided as far as possible by being well informed in the field of study, but also to a degree by

intuition. The use of this word is not to be taken as acknowledgement of bias in any direction, but to admit that participation and observation in a research setting bring with them the inevitable use of an intuitive approach.

6.2 Sampling method

This study developed in part as a further phase of a previous study, sponsored by the Massey University Research Fund, which examined the characteristics of information poverty in urban New Zealand (Sligo & Williams, 2000). The intention was that it should develop those findings through a particular avenue, which was the role played by interpersonal links and networks, and by trust, in overcoming barriers connected with information need.

The need for research into these contextual and attitudinal elements has been clearly signalled in the literature on knowledge gaps, as explained in Chapter 2. Therefore it was desirable to interview as many parents as possible in the lower socio-economic groupings, since socio-economic status (SES) and/or education level are thought to be strong indicators of knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1983, 1995), although these are by no means the only factors influencing acquisition of knowledge. In this sense the sampling that would be most useful was that described by Hussey and Hussey (1997) as judgemental sampling, in which “participants are selected on the strength of their experience of the phenomenon under study” (p. 147).

However as the data began to emerge from the growing body of interviews, the need to focus especially on lower SES individuals diminished. It began to be evident that interviewees from diverse family situations and income levels were revealing views and experiences that drew them together into a somewhat homogeneous group who could be said to be exhibiting a need for information that had more to do with their role as parents than with their socio-economic status. In other words, it began to seem possible that information poverty could be found in diverse settings amongst a wide range of people, and that it might be characterised as a state of mind that could be mitigated by human interactions. Above all, information need began to appear connected to individuals' perception of it, and compounded of many contextual factors, some of them no doubt material and some of them experiential, perceptual or attitudinal. It seemed that genuine perceptions of need were present in affluent, educated families; equally, attitudes of strength in adversity were present in families who were struggling with hardship issues. These themes are developed further in the discussion and conclusions chapters.

Thus at this time, the pursuit of a sample consisting exclusively of lower SES parents was weighed against the desirability of further developing a perceptual model of information poverty (or *need*, a term that may be preferable, since poverty is a loaded term implying a kind of helpless victim state, as will be explained in Chapter 5). If it seemed possible that interpersonal networks such as family, friends and community linkages were significant in overcoming parental information need, as is implicitly hypothesised in the objectives of this project, then it was also possible that these networks of trust would be

significant throughout a wide range of family circumstances. Consequently there was some impetus for choosing a maximum variation sample (Patton, 1990), so that hypothesis testing could take place on the basis of a wide variety of subject types. Patton suggests that this type of sampling has the advantage that any patterns emerging from great variation in the data can be of particular interest and value (p. 172). While this method was not pursued in its pure form either, the seeking of programme participants on the basis of socio-economic factors became less of an imperative in the face of an increasing need to obtain a variety of points of view, based on the picture emerging in the early data.

An additional factor that came into play was that it was difficult to find interested volunteers in the lower SES category. Educators felt that such parents had particular reasons for not wanting to be interviewed, such as a concern that “professionals” should not see the conditions in which they lived, an anxiety that “professional” interest could threaten their security in some way, and in some cases a defensive attitude that professionals should mind their own business.

In this way it became practically difficult to obtain interviewees who, according to theoretical assumptions, would be likely to exhibit characteristics typical of information poverty. However they are present in the final sample, as are a variety of income and education levels, none of them exclusively. It should be added that parents who volunteered for this research are likely to be interested, motivated, and generally confident enough to talk about their experiences, and this also limits the sample. Volunteers for such research activities are less likely

to be found among society's disempowered than among those motivated and having positive experiences to relate.

6.3 Selection bias

PAFT parent educators exercised a small degree of control over selection. This was unavoidable, given that the research required volunteer parents. For this reason, parent educators were a necessary part of the process so that the researcher could be brought into contact with parents through someone already known and trusted. The influence of educators over selection could potentially come into play in the following ways:

- Appropriate selection depended on their correct understanding of the characteristics of likely subjects.
- An over-zealous desire to be helpful could have manifested itself in a controlling response.
- Less than assiduous interest in obtaining volunteers could result in many possible interview subjects being overlooked.

In practice, it was accepted that these factors were at best only moderately controllable, but that the researcher had ultimate discretion over selection. In other words, the parents suggested by educators as potential interviewees were not necessarily all followed up.

Ultimately the limitations of the selection process were mitigated by an effort to achieve breadth (five different educators) and as many willing subjects as were feasible within time constraints. Thus as the project progressed, and responses from interview subjects began to show some trends, selection became a matter of finding willing participants, rather than selecting in some way on the basis of SES factors. There was no incentive for individuals to volunteer. Participation became a matter of whether they were prepared to find the time to do the interview and whether they were interested in the project, as explained by the researcher's information sheet or by the educators. Therefore the final set of 22 interviews represents a convenience sample of the clients of five PAFT educators, the educators themselves and the co-ordinators of the two PAFT providers.

The convenience factor means that the sample is not random and nor may it be entirely typical of the PAFT parent population. It is however a snapshot of the experiences of a range of individuals participating in the programme, as delivered by two urban New Zealand organisations in 2000. To this extent it is a useful sample for ascertaining participants' perceptions of the role played by interpersonal communication networks at a time of high information need. In addition, the sample size was regarded as adequate, since "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 1990, p. 184) and there can be a "trade-off between breadth and depth". It was preferable in the light of the objectives of the project and the nature of the topics being discussed to aim for depth in a smaller number of interviews. Also, the interviews were to be complemented by other data collection methods.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter contains a number of perspectives on the process of knowledge acquisition, obtained at two different research sites, Organisation A and Organisation B. The central purpose of the study was to explore the role of interpersonal communication in parents' acquisition of knowledge about child development. This objective was subdivided into three research questions concerning the forms of interpersonal communication that are significant for knowledge acquisition in this context; the importance of family, neighbours and community networks; and the role of trust in knowledge acquisition as shown in Chapter 1. The research design reflects a concern to obtain insider perspectives that would provide a rounded answer to these questions.

A range of insider viewpoints were obtained using multiple data collection methods described in Chapter 3. These were chiefly in-depth interviews with different groups involved in PAFT, and researcher observation of PAFT events and activities that are significant in defining what the programme is all about. These included observation of the so-called "home visit" to a parent's home by the PAFT educator, participation in and observation of educator training, and analysis of the PAFT curriculum. Data collection was thus carried out by interview, observation, participant observation, and analysis of PAFT documents. The intention behind collecting data at two different PAFT sites, Organisation A and Organisation B, was to increase the range of contacts and potential

interviews, broadening the sample and making it possible to reflect on points of difference in interviewee responses from the different sites. In practice, there were no relevant discernible differences, and the sets of parent and educator interviews from the two separate sites were treated as a single composite set of PAFT data. Certain assumptions regarding client types, and delivery styles that could be characteristic of each provider, proved unfounded or contradicted. Instead, the needs inherent in the parenting context united the respondents into a single framework. Any points of difference in delivery of the PAFT programme in different geographical settings were less relevant to the research objectives. The study was not evaluative in intent, but exploratory.

This chapter presents summaries of all data collected at the two research sites. To assist the reader, the following outline is presented to indicate the way the material is structured in the chapter:

1. Findings from observation of home visits p. 88
2. Parent interviewees: characteristics p. 95
3. Findings from interviews with parents p. 97
4. Findings from interviews with educators p. 148
5. Findings from observation of educator training p. 172
6. Findings from analysis of PAFT curriculum p. 176

These perspectives altogether provide evidence of a beneficial dialogic communication experience in the PAFT model, to be further discussed in Chapter 5.

1 Findings from observation of home visits

This first section summarises observations of the monthly interactions between PAFT educators and parents, in the parents' homes. The purpose was to familiarise the researcher with the home visit process, and to establish contacts for interviews. The summary will give the reader a picture of what typically happens in a home visit, and overall what were notable features of the visits from an informed observer's viewpoint, mainly focusing on interpersonal communication. This will set the scene for the major section analysing data from interviews with parents.

A total of 13 home visits by five PAFT educators were observed in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the source–receiver interpersonal relationship in action. As described in Chapter 3, the observations were undertaken in an unobtrusive way. The homes visited represented a wide variety: from extended families in a poorer area to a single parent in a home unit to an affluent family with three children. Sometimes notes were jotted down during the session, and in all cases full field notes were recorded as soon as possible after the observation.

Of particular interest during the observations of parent–PAFT educator interactions were the following aspects of communication style and use, of relevance to the key research objectives. Each observation point is followed by a summary of what was seen overall in the thirteen home visits.

◆ *Structure of the sessions in regard to interactions*

The structure of the thirteen sessions varied, while they all included a standard series of components. This was a format recommended by the PAFT curriculum, and included a period of rapport-building, a brief review of the previous visit and developments noticed since, a play activity with the baby or child and discussion of its importance developmentally, initiation of book-reading by the parent with the baby while the educator recorded notes of the session, and finally, summary points and information such as upcoming events.

Variations observed included an apparent focus on interaction with the children rather than the parents, in two visits by one educator. In one case about 90% of the interactions were with the child. It was also observed in this instance that there were periods (of minutes) of silence, in which no interaction was taking place and the child was colouring or attempting a jigsaw puzzle. The parent and educator observed the child. In these two cases also, the family members stayed on the periphery of events, not asking questions or being invited to participate by the educator. It seemed that they thought the session to be for their child, and that their role was to watch. This is at variance with PAFT philosophy and recommended practice, as explained in section 6.3 of this chapter.

So at one end of the spectrum, the structure of the session could be weighted in favour of interaction with the child. Another educator appeared interested in the child to a minimal extent, a little interested in securing the interest of the

parent in the developmental learning point for the session, and most interested in the recording of details on paper to leave with the parent for filing. This is also a variation from PAFT guidelines. There may well have been unseen reasons for the observed events on this particular day.

The remaining 10 visits provided evidence of highly verbal, interactive events generally aimed in equal measure at both the child and the parent. Parents seemed willing to ask questions and avail themselves of the opportunity to discuss issues. Observations made it possible to listen to some wide-ranging and stimulating discussions on topics such as babies' eating problems, toddler behaviour, the imagination and fantasy life of a gifted child, and others.

◆ *Role played by written records in the session*

Official documentation of the visit in each case included a full handwritten record of developments and noteworthy achievements, completed before the educator left the house. Parents said in their interviews that they usually filed these in their PAFT folders together with the handouts they had been given to read. In order to be able to complete this single-page record, often (although not always) closely written, the educators needed to move the activities towards something that the parent could be going on with independently with their child, such as reading a book. This freed the educator for the several minutes required to concentrate on writing.

It was evident in the observed sessions that some families were given very detailed records; others were given considerably sketchier accounts. For this reason, there was variation in the amount of time spent completing the record, from about three to four minutes, up to 10 minutes or more out of the one hour available.

◆ *Rapport-building and delivery styles*

Rapport-building elements of the visits varied with the personalities of the educators, and to a degree perhaps of the parents themselves. There was a variety in styles of delivery. Two educators had cheerful, enthusiastic, energetic styles. They would adopt positive, smiling demeanours from the moment the door was opened, greeting all family members and especially the PAFT child, and inquiring of the parent how things had been since the previous visit. These two were observed pleasantly and assertively directing events, and utilising strategies such as repetition of key points to drive home the topic for the day.

One of the five educators was quite low-key: pleasant and friendly but less energetic than the others and giving the appearance of enjoying herself less. She also appeared less focused on the children, seeming to simply do an activity and get onto writing up the record of the visit, whereas the others were very actively seeking to make links for the parents between what the children could be observed doing, and general developmental, informational points. The

remaining two educators were somewhere between the enthusiastic and the low-key styles.

In general, the degree to which the sessions were driven by the educator seemed to be related to their communicative skills, such as assertion, clear enthusiasm, skilled questioning, summary and so on. Where an educator had an apparently conscious approach to managing the interaction in the session, and seemed to be working to a planned strategy for use of the available hour, then it was clear that the educator was in charge and driving the session towards a desired outcome. Some visits seemed to have less vigour about them in this regard, which may have been to do with a variety of other factors, such as the educator's energy level or sense of well-being on the day. The less vigorous approach seemed to allow more of an opportunity for less directly useful social talk, or discussion of less relevance to the topic for the month. Parents did not appear to be at all unhappy with this approach, and most commented favourably on their educator regardless, in separate interviews.

♦ *Methods used to convey information*

Information was provided in three principal ways: through verbal interaction, demonstration and prepared handouts. In addition educators would give out special notices of upcoming events, or a newsletter. By far the most important communication channel was the verbal component of the visit. This was because in the majority of cases it would take up the most time, and offered all

the advantages of securing and retaining the parent's attention, responding to nonverbal cues, and utilising feedback, all features that are inherent in the face-to-face context.

One of the two more skilled communicators of the five used a wide range of strategies to fully exploit these advantages. For example, she used paralinguistic features such as clear articulation, pacing and varied intonation, using her voice to obtain attention and enhance memorability. There was a balance between informative talk from her and questions or problems that the parent wanted to bring up. She worked hard on reassurance, and highlighting the baby's progress since the previous visit. She foreshadowed developments to expect in coming weeks, and strategies the parent could use to capitalise on these. She sometimes used a role-playing voice or persona, speaking as if she was the child, for example "I'm feeling very assertive, Mum," in this way being an advocate for the child's perspective, which could otherwise be overlooked by parents. She would also use a collective persona, for example "We just learn so much playing in the sandpit, don't we Thomas?" In this way she was again highlighting the small person's perspective, at the same time advocating it, and drawing attention to the activity and encouraging the parent to see it as beneficial. Adding to all of these apparently consciously used devices were repetition, summarising, open questions and active listening techniques, among others.

Handout material was generally given to the parent to read later. Sometimes it would be more specifically referred to with nonverbal cues as well, reinforcing

key points through actually pointing at them to draw parents' attention. The other key element of the session was the demonstrated play activity, which was directed at the child in the first instance but intended as a point of observation for the parent who could watch the child's response, and think about how she could accomplish the same or similar outcomes with her own available resources.

Information seeking by parents appeared to involve questions they had been wondering about and saving up for the visit, rather than arising from events in the session itself.

2 Profile of parent interview participants

Following a number of home visit observations, summarised above, a series of parents volunteered to participate in in-depth interviews that took place over a period of twelve weeks. The final sample of 16 parents consisted of residents of the inner and western suburbs of the greater Auckland city area. As explained in Chapter 3, half of the participants were clients of the PAFT programme at Organisation A (West Auckland), and half were from Organisation B (Central Auckland).

2.1 Characteristics of Interviewees

Code no.	Age	Ethnic group	Educational Level	Number of children	Age of PAFT baby at time of interview	Number in household	With partner or single
1	34	European	SC	2	2 ½ years	4	P
2	30	European	6FC	2	2 ½ years	4	P
3	35	European	Tertiary	1	12 months	3	P
4	22	Maori	6FC	1	8 months	4	S
5	22	European	6FC	1	2 ¾ years	6	S
6	32	Maori	None	3	6 months	5	S
7	32	Rarotongan	None	4	17 months	6	P
8	34	European	Tertiary	3	2 years	5	P
9	37	European	Tertiary	1	2 ½ years	3	P
10	30	European	6FC	1	2 ½ years	3	P
11	33	Maori	6FC	4	2 years	5	S
12	24	Maori	SC	2	15 months	6	P
13	28	European	6FC	1	2 ½ years	2	S
14	37	European	6FC	3	10 months	10	S
15	32	European	Tertiary	1	3 years	3	P
16	21	European	Tertiary	1	12 months	3	P

Table 2: Profile of interview subjects

The participants were all women, but on one occasion, a partner joined in the interview for a short time with Parent 12. The women's ages ranged from 21 to 37 years, with a median age of 32 years. The youngest participant was a full-time student at polytechnic; of the remainder, two were part-time tertiary students, one had part-time work, and the remaining 12 were full-time mothers at home. Nine participants had been referred on to the PAFT programme by

another agency such as a hospital, family doctor or Plunket nurse, and six had referred themselves.

For nine of the parents, the baby (or in two cases, twin babies) that they had enrolled onto the PAFT programme was their first child. One of the mothers of twin babies had an older child also. Altogether, five of the mothers in the older age bracket (32 - 37 years) had three or more children. The PAFT "babies" were often toddlers: their ages ranged from six month old twins to 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ years, with a median age of two years. This was a useful indication of the length of time the parent had been involved with the PAFT programme, and those with older "babies" could be expected to have a clearer understanding of the programme.

The family situations the women were living in were varied. Ten of the 16 lived with their partner, and six were single. For three of these single parents, the baby's father was involved with the family such as visiting the home each evening or having custody on the weekend; for the other three there was no contact at all between the father and the family.

Ethnicities represented were Rarotongan, Maori and European, the majority (11 of 16) being European. Two of the mothers had no formal qualifications; two had School Certificate; seven had Sixth Form Certificate, and five stated that they had enrolled in or had completed some form of tertiary qualification.

3 Findings from interviews with parents

The most copious and important data come from the 16 parent interviews. Transcripts of these were analysed in depth for their commonalities of theme in relation to interpersonal networks, the educative relationship that is at the heart of the PAFT programme, and the role of trust in knowledge acquisition. The data analytic method, described in Chapter 3, was based on a coding protocol which provided a systematic means of gathering the findings into five themes:

- *Theme 1 – Belonging and support:* the extent to which each parent derived and sought support from interpersonal networks.
- *Theme 2 – Motivation and information seeking:* factors that could help explain information seeking through PAFT.
- *Theme 3 – Situational factors:* the role of context in defining information need.
- *Theme 4 – The role of trust in knowledge acquisition:* the importance of the trusting relationship with the PAFT educator in creating receptivity to information.
- *Theme 5 – Communication benefits in the PAFT model:* aspects of the instructional mode of PAFT that are effective from a communication viewpoint.

The themes were devised as a means of linking the research objectives and the questions asked of parents in their interviews. The five themes represent a complete integration of objectives and method, providing a framework for interviewee responses that made it possible to address the central goals of the study. The interview data are summarised in this thematic form as follows:

3.1 THEME 1 - BELONGING AND SUPPORT

Motif: "I'd rather do it all myself"

In view of the objectives of the study, it was important to find out the level of support these parents had from family, wider family and other networks such as friends, neighbours and other groups. In this way a fuller understanding could be reached of the extent to which they could rely on readily accessible information from within their own milieu, and therefore the level of support being actively sought and given, and the way in which PAFT added to or replaced other support mechanisms. Therefore each participant was asked a number of questions that invited them to explain how they saw themselves in this regard.

In 10 cases out of the 16, comments from parents indicated a degree of isolation within the neighbourhood. Physical isolation down a long driveway in the case of one parent was mirrored by a preference for keeping to herself: "I'm not really interested in the neighbourhood" (Parent 10). This same mother had a clear perception of family:

I've always classed my family as my partner and my children is my family... you know I guess as long as S. [*partner*] is here, and my children are here, that's all that's really important.

Other parents were likewise clear in their perceptions of neighbours:

I like to keep to myself. I don't really like to know the neighbours next door ... I just choose to be quite private really... I'm not really one to go and just ... strangers as such, I'd rather fall back on my family and friends. (Parent 6)

This parent revealed that she had moved to the area in the first place because she had wanted "a fresh start ... a place where nobody knew me". Two other women were unequivocal in their views on the subject:

I'd rather do it all myself ... just me, my mum, and P. [*partner*] (Parent 12).

I say hello to them but I don't actually - socialise with them... I don't [*trust*] - I'm very wary of people ... I'm always with my whanau - we've got oodles of children in our family! ... we just work as a team (Parent 11).

Like Parent 11, other parents stated that they'd say hello to neighbours, but that would be the extent of their social contact. They were willing to obtain support from family if necessary, as seen in the above example, but neighbours were less likely to be approached, being more in the category of people you are polite to at a distance, rather than being people you interact with. This was something that these interviewees seemed happy about. Parent 13 felt secure in the knowledge that there was a "silent eye" - neighbours observing events - but appreciated that "your life's still your own, and you have a certain degree of privacy."

Thus for about 2/3 of the interviewees, there seemed to be a preference for a self-contained existence in regard to neighbourhoods. One clear exception was Parent 7, who lived in a block of Housing NZ flats. She said that she got on well with her neighbours, and that

We usually have a little chat, if something happens, you know we're all out the front *[adjacent terraces in a row]* (Parent 7).

For this woman, the immediate neighbourhood, perhaps because the flats were adjoining and the occupants' lives had become intertwined through children's activities and other events, provided a secure and supportive environment. She talked of the children all gathering and going up to the park together. One of her sisters lived "out the back" in a type of garage dwelling, and the two were in daily contact.

Nine out of 16 mothers had ready access to their own transport. Seven of the 16, or almost 45%, had problems in getting out when they might like to: two because each of them was due to have another baby, a third woman because she was living in a rehabilitation centre where the residents were allowed to go out only occasionally under certain rules, and another because she was the mother of very young twins, and getting out was such a difficult thing to organise:

It can be quite stressful - I just can't handle the crying in the car when I'm driving, and there's no-one there to put the dummy in the mouth or whatever, so I try and avoid all those situations. (Parent 6).

Another young mother living in her parents' house was restricted to getting onto a bus with a heavy baby and pram if she wanted to go out, and this made her feel somewhat trapped. Parent 11 was reliant either on asking her sister to drive her to places she needed to go in her car, on catching buses or on walking. Parent 7, mother of a baby with a moderate physical disability who required regular attention by medical specialists, was particularly fearful because of various incidents with the child's health, and a loss of confidence in medical people. She was confined to calling taxis because the family didn't own a car, and preferred taxis to catching a bus because she seemed to feel that buses presented risks to her child. Nevertheless she felt limited by this situation:

I get so sick of you know it's like I wish I had a car I mean I can't even drive
(Parent 7).

There was a significant issue then for almost half of these women in terms of their ability to get out into the community with ease, should the need arise.

If about 2/3 of the parents were less than interested in their neighbours for support, and yet almost half were to varying degrees confined to their home because of transport issues, to whom did they turn for assistance? There was some variation regarding which interpersonal networks, if any, were significant for information purposes where neighbours were not. For Parent 13, "my sister's my best friend," and they would speak to one another once a day. Parent 11 talked of her family as a team, and that "I normally just rely on my family," in terms of child-sharing and generally helping whoever needs help. In these

ways, family in the strict sense of the word was preferable for the majority parents over networks of neighbourhood contacts. However, as becomes apparent later in this and subsequent chapters, the findings of the study reveal the existence of broader types of “family” operating around individuals in their need.

One of those broader structures was Organisation A, which operates in both a literal and a philosophical sense as a *whanau*. To continue with the example of Parent 11 mentioned earlier (“I’m always with my whanau”), Organisation A was also for her a wider *whanau*, and while she preferred not to resort to using its services, she had done so at times and was fully prepared to utilise it if she felt she had nowhere else to turn.

Her reflections are interesting in the light of organisational culture. She was drawn to it because

Being half-caste ... I’m one of the lost ones ... I suppose it was a longing really...
to learn a bit more about my Maori culture.

She yearned to discover her heritage, and had over four years sought to educate herself through the training available from this organisation. In addition, if she had any concerns regarding her four children, she would refer these to her doctor or to Organisation A, which had a full range of health and social services available.

For Parent 10, however, a specifically nuclear family concept (mentioned earlier) extended to include cool relationships with her own parents, and an antipathy toward her in-laws (“you don’t want to be too close to them”). Added to these was a desire to stay aloof from neighbours. This parent had found a surrogate family through an antenatal group that had since become a regular social coffee group offering social, practical and informational support. Yet she would not necessarily talk to other parents at kindergarten, where her attendance was perhaps more fleeting. Her comments throughout her interview also show a person with an intense focus on being busy and active, and living within very clear definitions of her own role and relationships with others. The intense focus in some way seemed to be an effort to mask her uncertainty. She observed that she was “probably not the greatest” at approaching people, and that “I haven’t sort of gone out of my way to try and be extra-friendly to people” (Parent 10). In this case, lack of confidence may have kept her isolated but busy, and feeling safest in a regular social group of peers.

A group of other parents meeting regularly at the local Playcentre was also the context in which to seek necessary reassurance and ideas for another young single parent, Parent 5. Yet another, resisting the unwanted advice of her mother-in-law and Plunket nurse, preferred to cultivate the bonds of friendship that had emerged in a close-knit group of four friends who all shared a sense of isolation in their role because of the unavailability of family support. They therefore had found a substitute family for child-sharing: “We don’t even need a reason we just say – that’s fine” (Parent 1).

An extreme case in the sample, a parent who lived with her baby in a drug rehabilitation centre, had no neighbourhood network in the normal sense. The immediate environment of the Centre was in some ways her support system, with its routines and structures and strict disciplines, but in other ways was a hostile setting where she felt besieged by the external world, beginning with the women and children with whom she shared a house on the site. Her best intentions for herself and her baby on the PAFT programme were being constrained and frustrated by the setting:

It can get very difficult living with so many other kids, when they've had shit backgrounds basically. I mean that's why we're all here – we've all had shit backgrounds, we've all been fucking addicts (Parent 14).

She also reported brittle relationships with her own family, and ultimately relied on only one extremely supportive friend: “I tend to fall back on what she has to say”. PAFT appeared to be a lifeline for her. Parent 11, a single parent of four, stated that in her belief, “you’re better off by yourself” and, in terms of trust, “I don’t. I’m very wary of people.” In this way a picture emerged of a group of people who were, ironically, somewhat isolated by choice or circumstance, even within densely-populated urban settings. When they needed support, several tended to call on family, whereas others had found substitute families in regular social groups of parents or friends, especially where family were unavailable.

However for several parents, the isolation resulting from being intensely focused on the people within the walls of one’s home was somewhat offset by the presence of grandparents and other close relatives. Five of the 16 interviewees

lived in extended family situations within a single dwelling, so there were other people close to the mother and baby who were available to share in the baby's care. The extended family living within a single dwelling appeared to function for some as a self-sufficient unit, the members supporting one another in various ways, such as with transport, or in the broader sense of providing moral support. For example, a young woman who fell pregnant at the age of 18 and lived in her parent's family home with her son, aged two at the time of the study, commented that

I think with my family's support I'm quite certain about what I want for D. and so that makes me less vulnerable (Parent 5).

Thus the reassurance of a larger multi-generational family was helpful to her in her need to stay clear in her goals for her son. In another extended family, a mother of baby twins, whose own mother had recently "resurfaced into our lives" and now lived in the same house, remarked

I'm just grateful that my mum's here because ... I wouldn't have been able to cope by myself. I just wouldn't have ... I tend to take a lot of notice of what my mum says (Parent 6).

For this parent, her own mother was on hand as an information source.

So the interviews give evidence of supportive extended families for a little under 1/3 of these parents. Sometimes the support was a little more widely spread, such as for one parent who reported that with her own mother, sister, a close friend and neighbour all being near and part of her support network, "I've

always got someone" (Parent 2). She also received support from her occasional involvement in a church. Altogether, a sense of belonging and support is derived mainly from close family rather than neighbourhood; or alternatively, surrogate families in the form of friendship or social groups.

Many interviewees (nine out of the 16) believed they found it easy enough to ask for advice, mentioning family members, family doctors, and their PAFT educators as trusted sources. "It's better to be safe than sorry," thought Parent 4, who took full advantage of her close relationship with her PAFT educator, and would phone her if she was ever in any doubt. A single mother, she very much valued the access to reliable advice. "I was always brought up to ask," was the view of Parent 2, who would approach her own doctor for preference, feeling let down by her experiences with specialist medical people. Others said they preferred self-help through books, referring to popular authors on parenting topics such as Steve Biddulph and Barbara Coloroso.

While only one parent in this group of 16 stated that she didn't really want to hear other people's advice, Parent 2 (who saw herself as feeling comfortable about seeking advice from friends, her mother and sister, her doctor, indeed a full range of sources) implied that some parents are selective in their receptivity to information from outside sources. She cited a friend who would only take the word of a professional: "You just couldn't tell her anything unless a doctor told her." Six interviewees expressed some reservations about whether they had difficulties asking for advice. Often this was because the nature of the issue or problem would dictate how they responded. Parent 8 thought the professional

distance of the PAFT educator made it easier to ask advice of her. Overall, the parents were reasonably relaxed about and willing to seek advice if the situation warranted it.

An additional factor in an overall social isolation evident in this group was the unwillingness of a baby's father to be involved in its life, which was the case with a 22-year-old who was also trying to find her feet as a single young mother. Two other mothers in the sample were likewise living without the babies' fathers being involved in their upbringing, or only a little; another three fathers were somewhat involved, visiting the house every day but not living there. For these women, issues of information need presented additional complexities - who to trust, who to talk to, who to listen to in the end. These were decisions that for them had to be taken alone. Isolation for another parent arose because her partner worked long hours, and at night also, so that there was little time available for discussion of issues, or for time as a family.

To sum up on the belonging and support theme, the findings show this group of women had a tendency to be physically or emotionally isolated in the situations in which they lived, and were less inclined to seek the help of those outside the immediate family. If they did, it was from trusted groups of other mothers. There is a sense of neediness and insecurity among the group, and their response tends more towards self-sufficiency than information seeking. Following this theme is an examination of factors that could be considered to be motivators for these parents in their approach to PAFT.

3.2 THEME 2 - MOTIVATION AND INFORMATION SEEKING

Motif: "Anything that I feel was negative, I want to turn around".

To help fulfil the research objectives the interviews also sought to consider aspects of motivation that might be characteristic of information seeking parents, given that some knowledge gap studies show that motivational factors related to situational relevance can overcome the theoretical limitations imposed by education or socio-economic status. For example, parents could have had particular experiences as children themselves that might make them keen to seek the aid of a programme like PAFT to advantage their own families; or parents might see in the programme a way for a particular personal need or experiential deficit to be met by proxy through their children. These responses could clarify what the parents were looking for in the programme, and provide a fuller understanding of the information user perspective.

Nine of the 16 parents had been referred on to the PAFT programme by a doctor or other professional. These nine tended to be the less educated parents, although it is not as simple a matter as stating that, for example, those with higher qualifications referred themselves. It is possible to note only that there was a tendency for education to correlate with the circumstances of referral. Of the seven self-referred participants, four had reached the tertiary level of education, two had 6th Form Certificate and one had School Certificate. Of the

nine referred to PAFT by others, two had tertiary qualifications, four had 6th Form Certificate, one had School Certificate, and two had no qualifications.

Interviewees talked of a wide variety of formative experiences. Several of them reported traumatic family break-ups, or loss of a parent in other ways, so that, for example,

I try to be mother and father, because that's what my mother was (Parent 1).

Parent 8 had been sent to boarding school as a teenager, and in these years her parents' marriage also ended. For four other parents, some type of loss through death or departure of a close family member had meant that they had had to grow up quickly, assume adult responsibilities, and become independent or learn a parenting role that had somehow stuck with them: the role of mother had happened to them subsequently almost in the way that people talk of as 'destiny'. One of these four had stepped in to "mother" her two infant nephews when their mother left the family, from when she was 18 years old until she was 21. Parent 5 talked of the way children were very loved as part of the culture of her family, and there were always plenty of them; she cared for a baby brother from the age of 10. She recalled a certain inevitability about having a baby herself at 18 years old.

Admiration for the job her own parents had done, and a desire to emulate that, were significant for Parent 4 and three other interviewees who wanted to carry the role modelling through to the next generation:

Because she brought up five kids on her own ... *[and she was]* supportive, strong and humble - never takes the credit for anything - always puts us before her. (Parent 4).

In contrast to the above, a clear and important motivational thread linking more than 1/3 of this group was a desire to break existing patterns, either inter-generational ones or as a result of wanting to do better this time with a new baby, having had children earlier in their lives. These feelings produced a very evident determination to obtain as many opportunities as possible for their youngest child, and PAFT suited them for this reason. Parent 14, having had a late baby after a gap of at least a decade, regretted that "I didn't play with my other kids" and saw in PAFT a chance to gain access to information so she could learn how to do things right this time:

OK this is my chance to do it right from scratch, you know? ... just giving her the best I possibly can ... because I have nothing to lose by asking what I need to know... I mean nobody has all the answers, but you can find them... because I *want* a better life for B.

This parent had particular reasons for being so focused on wanting better things: she had reached rock bottom in her personal life, and "I'm not going down the same road I went before... I'm not going to have her go through the same shit that I went through" (Parent 14). Another mother, whose life experiences were not quite so extreme but involved "being in the mother role sooner than most kids would be" at age 10 when her mother left her father with

four children to care for, had a child herself at a very young age. She felt that with the baby twins she had had 11 years later, and with PAFT's help, she could

enjoy them as babies, teach them as much as I can, and actually – love it, instead of just doing it because you have to – that's what it felt like the first time round – this time it's been different. I *wanted* to make it different (Parent 6).

Similarly, Parent 7 recalled having thought of the baby she had at 18 (and of handing it straight to her mother – “here you are mum!”) as being like a doll, and having no understanding of its needs in terms of learning and developing. She was able to see with the assistance of PAFT that there were many “amazing” developments that she could observe and participate in that she would never have been aware of with her first child.

A fourth parent whose comments showed this theme clearly was Parent 13, a highly articulate woman who described herself as an “independent parent” (in preference to “solo mother”), and who expressed herself in forcefully positive terms in talking of her life. She had had a “free-spirited” father who had left the family, so that she wondered in later years “why hadn't my dad been there for me?” and a mother who was “extremely the other way – much more rigid”. She realised that her own mother was far too busy with five small children to be able to devote individual attention to them all, but she was determined to do things differently with her own little daughter:

There's a few links in the chain that ... I've wanted to change ... I want to be open-minded ... I want to have good communication with her ... because I didn't

feel like I could do that with my mum. And - oh there's lots of positive things that my mum did as well, so I want to do those also ... but ... anything that I feel was negative, I want to turn around.

One thing that this parent was particularly keen to change was that, unlike her own experience, "I want J. to have a really powerful self-esteem."

Yet one more parent, bringing the total so far to five out of the 16, talked of regrets over past parenting:

I did make errors with my other children - *[for example]* not introducing them to books (Parent 11).

This mother liked the idea of "a bit of extra help when it came to parenting on the theory side" and exhibited some of the strongest motivation of all of the interviewees. A single Maori mother of four children under the age of 10 years, she seemed determined to change the cycle in her family, which in her childhood had had a history of violence ("we saw the beatings"), abuse and drunkenness. Speaking in aphorisms, she commented, for example, "There's no opportunity down in the past. It's this way, forwards. Positivity. You just got to keep on going forward." Her goal was to "try and make my children become all they can, to give them the right knowledge ... so that they'll be ... good men - or women." She wanted PAFT as part of her drive to educate herself, seeing it quite pragmatically as a resource for her use to benefit her family, and that

it's important you know how to use the organisations ... if you're stuck ... some mothers can get so stuck ... and haven't even progressed forward – I call it stuck in the past, cause you can just repeat the same old cycle over and over again until one day you go click (Parent 11).

This woman, who described herself variously as “stubborn,” “a pretty confident person” and “a bit shy,” also stated that her father was never available to her as a child, and “you always want him. There’s a great need to have a father, but he’s not there ... even though he does bad things, I always forgave him because he was my dad ... I still want him in my life now, but he’s just not there”.

The only male voice heard during the course of the study was a father who participated with his partner in her interview for a short time, and volunteered an interesting perspective on the reasons why PAFT could be useful to people who need information. The primary role he saw for the family’s educator was in providing strategies for them both to help them avoid dealing with their baby twins in anger. He reflected “loving children doesn't necessarily give them the best”, and seemed to feel that a lack of knowledge or awareness creates a vacuum in which “bad things” can happen:

Because you know if you haven't been educated and if you basically just do what your parents taught you, and carrying it on to the next generation, those times when um – when anger comes out and stuff like that, if you don't have any idea what to do when you're angry or – if you can't cope, what to do, then that's when the bad things happen, to you. At that stage. Because most of the time you're

all right, but it gets a time when you just can't cope - I'm the same, and M., she says she can't cope - and um so we - we calm each other down.

The twins' mother, his partner, commented after he had left the interview that "I used to be quite an impatient person. I still am - but I'm able to handle it a lot better." She and her partner evidently attributed the positive changes in their family life, and the availability of helpful strategies, to the intervention of their PAFT educator.

Parent 11 also wished to pursue different methods of discipline, having seen "the beatings" as a child:

You know sometimes you can lose control, but ... I'm at that level where I don't give them a good bash over ... we used to get beatings: I don't beat my children.

She therefore sought through PAFT the strategies she needed to support her efforts to break an inter-generational cycle. She can be added to the group of five others seeing PAFT as an opportunity to create change, so that in all there are more than 1/3, six out of 16, in this category.

"Getting the best for your kids" (Parent 2) in a more general sense was also a clear motivator. Overall, most parents saw in PAFT a chance to maximise their child's chances in life, though usually what that meant, specifically, was quite hazy. There was simply a pervasive view that life is tough these days, and anything that would get their children off to a good start was worth pursuing. "It's a learning point with PAFT, that's why I welcomed it," commented Parent 11. Parent 10 referred to her aspirations for her two year old toddler and her as

yet unborn baby: "If C. goes to university," and later, "He'd better! They'd both better!" She thought this strong desire for her sons to move ahead in life was "probably because neither of us did." Thus motivation to be on the PAFT programme was in the sense of an investment for a future return.

This parent only (Parent 10), out of all 16 interviewees, volunteered negative remarks about her educator (despite all participants being specifically told that evaluation of educators was not wanted). She simply went ahead and stated criticisms without prompting as soon as the interview began, as if she had been waiting for an opportunity. She had very clear expectations about what she and her son were entitled to, and felt that what they had received didn't measure up. Although she was unaware of the error, she had been misinformed by a friend about the purpose of PAFT, so that she expected it to be a type of intensive coaching for her son. Moreover, she explained that she had sought PAFT because

I'm not so good at sitting down and playing with him ... I probably find it boring or just don't know how to play with him as such ... I thought oh this is going to be good, I'm going to have someone come in once a month, they're going to sit down with him for an hour and they're going to play with him ... but anyhow it never turned out like that.

Many of this parent's comments detailed a full weekly schedule of activities for her son, including gym, swimming, dance and kindergarten. She stated that she didn't have time to talk to other parents and make friends, and went on later in the interview to talk of another underlying reason for wanting PAFT. Amidst her

full weekly schedule, it seemed that her PAFT home visits were important to her in a social sense:

When you've had a baby you can't really do a lot with it, so it was more - OK well at least once a month I've got this person coming to see us, you know, which is going to take a bit of time... It can get quite lonely... you've got all these other days to fill in ... even if it was just chitchat.

Parent 5 also was principally motivated by a need to establish social networks, in a broader sense than Parent 10 above. She felt she would have liked to meet other young mothers like herself; however this personal agenda had not been fulfilled for various reasons, such as that she didn't find much of interest in the PAFT group meetings where networking might have taken place. In addition, part of her motivation was that because it was "free", she was

interested in getting as much information as I could to help me bring D. up, you know, how I wanted him to be... so it will help me be a better parent and for him to have a good childhood.

In summary, analysis of motivating factors shows a group of people united in their desire to take as many opportunities as they could to help their children in their future lives. For a significant proportion, this motivation has come about because of a desire to initiate change in entrenched cycles of parenting behaviours. Added to this group of a little over 1/3 of the sample, are those who simply wanted to gather up as many opportunities as possible for their families for a range of reasons, so that in some way all 16 parents were

moderately to highly motivated in their approach to the PAFT information programme.

3.3 THEME 3 - SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Motif: "You don't want people to think that you can't cope".

A group of questions was used in the interviews to explore aspects of each participant's self-perception in terms of their need for parenting information. These questions concerned, for instance, experiences the person might have had in the past in caring for babies that could have built knowledge and confidence in approaching the arrival of her own baby, and how confident the parent felt as the baby's arrival became imminent. This could have some bearing on an interviewee's attitude to the importance of PAFT in informational terms.

The goal with these questions was to explore the possibility that information need has more to do with the nature of the situation people find themselves in as new parents, than with their social demographic characteristics such as education and socio-economic status. Assumptions that these factors can be correlated with the existence of knowledge gaps underpin the trans-situational approach to the knowledge gap hypothesis.

It was shown in the first theme exploring the parents' sense of belonging that this group of women had a tendency to be physically or emotionally isolated in the situations in which they lived, and were less inclined to seek the help of those outside the immediate family. This evident isolation, summarised

previously, is linked to this section of findings. These parents of newborn babies found themselves stressed by a lack of knowledge and the relative unpredictability of life with a new human being, but they often either chose to remain alone with that stress or were assumed by others to be coping with it, or both. This tendency is explored as follows.

While seven mothers felt reasonably confident about their knowledge before the arrival of their babies, the reality when it arrived was sometimes very different:

I've always been a baby person ... but I don't think I knew what I was in for with newborns until I actually had my own (Parent 6).

A young single parent found being mother to a newborn was actually frightening:

I was the one looking after him all the time – it was scary at first ... during the day it was just me at home – no-one was behind me saying you're doing it right or whatever ... it was really lonely during the day when it was just us two. (Parent 4).

Altogether, nine mothers talked of varying degrees of anxiety about how they would cope, even with supportive family members at hand. Parent 16 said she had “an overload of advice” and felt vulnerable to pressure because of her young age. A parent who spoke not only of her aloneness with “kids screaming” (Parent 1) but also, at length, of assumptions about how she was coping coming from many quarters, found herself psychologically marginalised in her new role

because of these attitudes. When she found herself pregnant with her second baby only six months after the birth of her first, a boy, people assumed she would be happy. She was not. When the baby was born and it was a girl, people assumed she would be glad ("oh good you got a girl!") to have a boy and a girl; furthermore, they thought, "that's your lot, you don't need any more now, do you?" In addition, her mother-in-law assumed

that I was just a natural mother ... I'm a natural mum so I don't need anything ... it was quite clear at the time, you don't need anything so you're fine (Parent 1).

In these ways, the mother felt a lack of empathy and true understanding from those around her, and this increased her sense of aloneness. Later, she developed a friendly relationship with a PAFT educator who fulfilled an important role in her life, but when that educator had to move on and the parent was provided with a new educator by Organisation A for the last few visits she was entitled to, she found herself again feeling alone with whatever parental insecurities she had, because her new educator made big assumptions too:

Someone else comes in and says "well you know everything, how to do everything ... I probably shouldn't be here!" (Parent 1).

This was clearly a confidence not shared by the mother herself, and so PAFT in this instance was unwittingly adding to the parent's isolation through mistaken assumptions.

However Parent 1, like others, felt that she was alone with the task of coping with a screaming baby essentially because no one else can really know your situation. Although her mother was available to be consulted, she was only able to say “When you were a baby - blah blah blah ... [so] you just had to do it by yourself really”.

She also admitted that “other people’s advice sometimes wasn’t what I wanted to hear” and she “didn’t want to hear what the Plunket nurse had to say.” Parent 6 felt that “a lot of parents out there do need help, but they don’t really know where to go.” In these ways, a conscious striving to cope and be self-sufficient in the task of bringing up a baby exists side by side with inaccurate assumptions from others, and lack of awareness of available sources, to increase parents’ sense of isolation.

It could be inferred that the state of anxious coping that these women find themselves in, resulting from expectations that they are able to just get on and do the mothering, would be found mostly among the less confident. However it is worth noting here that even the most confident parent in the interviewed group remembered reaching a point where she had left it too late to seek advice, because she had an independent streak:

Oh there were times that I may have left it a bit late, you know, when ... you feel like you’re not coping or that you’re doing everything wrong ... because...I am independent, I like to think that I can - manage? ... I think with parenting you feel like you’re being judged as well, when you’re a new mum, and you don’t want to feel judged or you don’t want people to think that you can’t cope or....

It's the one job that you just want to know that you can do, you know – because you have to, it's a natural thing? ...You're just expected to do it, to know it (Parent 13).

This comment illustrates the degree of pressure parents can feel to rise to meet others' expectations. Furthermore, this parent who gave the impression of being capable, positive and a self-help type of person, also consciously strove to be well-informed, for example in connection with the immunisation debate, by reading from as many sources as possible. Yet she felt censured by other parents over her decision not to immunise her daughter, to the extent that she felt she wanted to consciously isolate herself: "In the end I found I just wasn't telling anybody." In effect, Parent 13 was describing a self-censoring process.

There was also evidence in the data that the parent's aloneness can be exacerbated by institutional insensitivity. Parent 7 and her disabled child were required to visit a large children's hospital in the city regularly as part of the child's ongoing health needs. This woman had evidently come to feel reliant on the psychological and emotional security that this medical back-up provided. However two experiences in particular had since left the mother feeling that, despite the child's obvious need for close medical attention for some considerable time to come during her formative years, she was reluctant and even frightened to approach the hospital voluntarily. On one occasion the mother had had to take the child to hospital to have a slight head injury attended to. She found herself subject to questioning that she found intimidating. She took the inference that hospital authorities were suggesting she could have caused the injury, and questioning her fitness to be a mother.

She was traumatised at the time by the prospect that her baby might be taken from her. In her interview she was evidently still stressed by the recollection.

On another occasion, Parent 7 believed her baby to be having “fits”, but the hospital could find no cause for concern. The impact of that experience was that she felt her word was not believed (“I felt like a liar!”), she felt humiliated, and she continued to be distressed by an anxiety that her child was in danger of brain damage. “I just won’t ring an ambulance, I’m too shy to ... I’ve lost confidence in them,” she concluded. Fortunately in this case, her PAFT educator was providing invaluable emotional and informational support that appeared to be creating something of a safety net for this family.

The women interviewed, many of them anxious in their role as shown in this section of results, sought out others who were in a like situation, and in this way sought to solve problems. “You sort of talk to your friends and compare notes with them – you know, my child’s doing this, is your child doing that?” (Parent 10). A variety of parents sought out these social networks such as social groups or playgroups to meet their information needs, not just the well-educated, or the affluent, and the reason they sought the reassurance of a group where they felt they belonged is that they needed to solve problems through hearing a range of viewpoints. This point is explored further in Chapter 5.

Parent 1’s response to information need can be seen in her admission that she chose to be self-sufficient with the help of a small group of close friends, and resisted support from certain people, such as her mother-in-law. “I think

family support is great but ... too much of it is damaging ... one opinion can damage ... mother-in-law still does *[this]* now and I smile through my teeth..." She carried this view over into her handling of friends' needs for advice, seeing advice-giving as interfering, which she preferred not to do. This attitude found its inverse in that held by Parent 13, who knew those to approach for advice, and "some of those people come back to me" in a "what goes around, comes around" attitude to sharing knowledge.

Beyond the issues summarised earlier of vulnerability and the isolation caused partially through the assumptions and expectations of others, and the consequent seeking-out of social support from others like themselves, there was something seemingly arcane about the art of parenting a newborn that made these parents yearn for answers. Parent 6 referred to "the right advice" that could have helped a friend, if only she hadn't listened to the, presumably wrong, advice of Plunket. What is "the right advice"? This parent seemed to feel it was out there somewhere, if only she could locate it. Parent 14, in a similar way, thought that the knowledge she was short of, once located, would act something like a band-aid:

I knew that I didn't know what I needed to know to be the sort of parent I wanted to be ... I have nothing to lose by asking what I need to know... I mean nobody has all the answers, but you can find them...

This search had led her to discovering PAFT.

Many parents' comments and stories demonstrated their belief that you need to listen to a lot of different people, and then trust your own intuition and do what you think is best. For Parent 13 it was important to her to "stand by what I feel"; Parent 7, when faced with advice from one professional that differed to that of another, felt "to me inside, I knew I shouldn't do that," also affirming the importance of this inner voice. For Parent 11, it was important to retain a sense of autonomy, so that

I will take notice of ... organisations I have been to a lot, so I'll just utilise that and see how I'll use that, their methods, and if that don't work ... I just rely on my own intuition ... everybody raises their children differently - *[it]* really depends who they socialise *[with]* or what organisations they're into ... you know if you're in the church they will follow their values. I will just use my values.

At least five of the parents in this sample viewed the programme in this way, stating that it increased the range of options for them, allowing them to synthesise inputs and arrive at a solution that worked for them. PAFT was an important component in parents' problem-solving response to their need to acquire knowledge.

In summary, the evidence gathered above on the theme of situational need has shown a tendency for these 16 parents to feel insecure in their role, and at the same time to feel the weight of others' expectations. Institutional insensitivity and the assumptions of family and friends were significant in this way among this group. The anxiety over being adequate parents can create a response in which parents try to appear to be coping. A need to find information that will

support them, however, can encourage a problem-solving response also, in which parents seek a range of viewpoints, such as that of PAFT, in order to find a solution that suits their needs. Some parents referred to a type of “inner voice” that speaks an appropriate truth for them once the problem-solving process has been engaged.

3.4 THEME 4 - TRUST IN KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

Motif: "She's part of the furniture, and it feels really good".

A number of questions were put to interviewees to allow them to reflect on the importance of the long-term relationship they developed with an educator in the PAFT programme, especially in regard to the role of trust in helping them to be receptive to new information. This was a key element in the research objectives.

In 13 of the 16 cases, the relationship the parent had with the PAFT educator was highly valued. In only two cases were there equivocal feelings reported, and one further parent was quite negative about the service provided, nevertheless feeling that the educator was a "nice" person. Thus favourable views of educators were clearly in the majority, viewpoints ranging from the mildly positive to the effusive. The one clear exception has not been excluded from the data but is discussed separately at the end of this section. The views of this parent together with those of the two who were less than enthusiastic, have some significance as part of the full range, and as a contrast to the majority.

A clear picture comes through in the majority of the interviews of friendships between the parents and their educators. This is not necessarily to say close personal friendships (although for two parents this was the case), because educators in their separate interviews talked of the importance of maintaining a professional detachment, but a "friend of the family" type of relationship. The

educator was perceived as taking a special caring interest in the whole family, and as using that knowledge to inform her approach to handling the family's needs. Responses to these needs could range from referring the parent and child to another agency, to taking the mother and baby to an appointment, or "popping in" to see if the mother was okay if she happened to be passing.

An educator was thought by the parents to be "like a guide" (Parent 12) to the parents, and "like an aunty" (Parent 1) or "a Nana" (Parent 13) to the child. Parent 7 thought of her educator as "part of the family, like a cousin or a sister ... she's part of the furniture, and it feels really good." The words "friendship" and "support" occurred repeatedly throughout the transcripts. "Support person and motivator", another parent's description, is a phrase that sounds very like the attributes of a coach, which seems an appropriate concept in view of the philosophy of PAFT, which aims to empower parents through relationships with educators.

Trust did not seem to come into question for the parents, right from the beginning: "I just have faith in her - she knows more than us" (Parent 12). It was simply there, without question or doubt, with the exception of one parent who admitted that she didn't feel a bond with her educator straight away because she seemed "pretty loud, and I wasn't sure we'd get along," but in due course, the fact that she listened as well helped a respect and rapport to form. Others felt their educators had indefinable qualities that inspired respect, trust and acceptance: "Some people have an aura - pleasant, brilliant, bright people ..." (Parent 13). Interviewees usually accepted and trusted the educator from the

start: “I respect her more than trust her ... experience is best – I don’t think trust ever came into it” (Parent 1).

Thus a trusting relationship was present, forming a platform for rapport and receptivity. With this platform in place, information appeared to be accepted readily, especially because the situation these PAFT clients were in involved varying degrees of stress. For example, a parent of twins, pregnant with another child, had experienced postnatal depression, and the educator for this family was able to fulfill an important role in helping the couple through this. The woman’s partner valued this very much, because in addition to “lots of insights ... lots of ideas ... resources ... men’s evenings”:

every time she comes, she – and M. spends some time with her ... she gets centred again ... it’s neat that we’ll be seeing D. for the next couple of years.
(Parent/s 12)

Certain characteristics in educators made them more or less trustworthy in the eyes of some parents. Educators being “upfront” and “pull[ing] no punches” was valued by Parent 14, who felt people needed to be told honestly if they were doing things wrongly. On the other hand, she valued being told when she was doing well, and this increased her confidence. The confidence-boosting factor was mentioned by a number of interviewees. An example is Parent 7, evidently very insecure in her care of a disabled baby, who felt that her educator was “really helpful not only in, like for A., but for me as well ... it’s sort of making me feel good as well – like, confident ... I get so scared.” She, like others, was benefiting from the security of knowing there was someone taking an active

interest in and monitoring the progress of her child. In addition, she felt she was learning a great deal about the baby's small accomplishments that she would not have noticed with her previous children, and more especially, she was valuing a new understanding that these small achievements had an important meaning and function in her baby's development. In this way, the educator was acting as a trusted observer and guide.

It seems logical that educators with strong interpersonal skills would be most successful in establishing the rapport so necessary to success in getting across information, and it proved so in this group. For instance,

"Don't be afraid to ask questions if you're not sure" – M. knew I had a lot of questions but was too shy to ask. And we've built a really strong relationship (Parent 4).

Straight away, this educator was "really friendly" and seemed "a really upfront person ... comes straight out and tells me her opinion straight off, no beating around the bush". When asked in what way her life would be different without her educator's involvement, Parent 4 felt she

wouldn't have known as much as I do now ... it's having that friendship – someone over to visit ... *[I would have]* missed out on a lot of information – I wouldn't have had her to turn to when I've got all these questions – wouldn't have got involved in the *[name supplied]* young mothers' group. (Parent 4).

Another parent noted of the same educator that she felt “quite comfortable” immediately, and “she was so - oh, how can I put it? She was so happy? She’s like ‘Oh hello!’ You know and I’m sitting there like ‘Oh hi-i!’ [*singsong voice*]. And now it’s like ‘Oh gosh, M’s coming’ - you know I get all excited” (Parent 7).

Some educators had interpersonal intuitions and abilities that made them successful and admired in the role, and, as in any profession, some gave more of themselves to the work than others. This was seen in observations of a range of home visits, reported earlier in this chapter. Parent 7 and Parent 4, mentioned above, both had the same educator, and had received extra special handling by her. This was possibly because she responded with empathy to the difficulties they were experiencing. This was noted in observation of her home visits and discussed in a separate educator interview. Because of the good nature and commitment of the educator who went out of her way to be supportive, the relationships appeared close and mutually respectful.

There was a credibility issue for parents in regard to their conscious or half-conscious receptivity to messages, in terms of how like themselves the educator happened to be. If educators were younger or seemed to be of an age group where they might have young children themselves, or relatively recently, this was seen to be an advantage. If an educator had not had babies, “don’t tell me that it hurts a little bit!” and if she had not experienced mothering, “don’t tell me the kids can get naughty!” (Parent 1).

This type of “judgement call” being made over whom to listen to is echoed in a degree of antipathy evident at times when the name Plunket was mentioned. Some parents had a high regard for the service Plunket provided; others spoke, somewhat stereotypically, of the Plunket nurse as an authoritarian figure, a little fearsome, who was thought to take a limited type of weights and measures approach to the wellbeing of an infant (in fairness to Plunket, as much a budgetary issue as a philosophical one). Given the investment by Early Childhood Development in PAFT, a programme luxuriously resourced with time (refer to Chapter 1, Parents As First Teachers – Home Visits) it was easy for parents to make unfavourable comparisons between the two services. It was plain that contrasts were being drawn even though these agencies have different purposes and goals: “I’ll actually listen more to what [PAFT] says than what the Plunket nurse says” (Parent 6). The reasons given in this case were that the educator was more down to earth, easier to relate to, and younger. Another parent used similar words, explaining that PAFT was “more modern and a little bit more [up] to date ... that is flexible to suit a wide range of parents,” (Parent 13) whereas “The Plunket Way”, being rather inflexible, was less effective with younger parents, for example. “I don’t think you can NOT benefit from PAFT,” thought Parent 13.

In addition to the credibility factor associated with whether the educator was herself a mother, approval was given to PAFT professionals when they not only had specific early childhood education training, but often had expertise in health as well. This is one of the key points of difference between PAFT and other services such as Plunket, which focuses largely on health checks: PAFT is

primarily about education and developmental aspects of infancy, but an awareness of health issues is important and relevant. It becomes apparent in examining the parents' perceptions of PAFT educators that they are regarded as what might be termed "expert mentors", a description that embodies the qualities the parents most value.

Finally, some parents' reservations should be noted. Skilled interaction with both adults and young children is, logically, something of which educators should be capable and that they should be consciously striving to improve, since it is the central mode of instruction in the PAFT model. Researcher observation showed this to be true of most educators, and parents themselves almost all felt their educators to be "really good talkers and listeners" as one of them put it. Yet it is so easy to get the basic skills wrong and, since some parents have high expectations of what the programme will deliver to them, unwittingly offend them or diminish their receptive attitude. An example is Parent 5 who, despite overall satisfaction with PAFT, felt that the educator spoke down to her son:

She talks to him in a certain way that I wouldn't ... she refers to herself as P. rather than saying I'm going to do this or whatever ... and she does talk to him sometimes in a sort of a – more of a baby voice.

The most unsatisfied parent in the sample, Parent 10, who aspired to having her sons attend university, took her two year old to four different activities each week, and expected the programme to be a type of intensive coaching for the little boy, would, on the face of it, be difficult to please in view of her high expectations. So in this case, perhaps no educator would have succeeded in

impressing her. Yet her dissatisfactions should be noted. She felt the educator was less interested in talking about her son than about her own dogs, other families she had visited, or simply "chitchat". She stated that she (Parent 10) "doesn't even bother to read" the handouts, and the educator did not refer to them or go through them with her. She felt that the written record given to her at the end of the session simply showed the points of progress in her son's development that she herself had reported to the educator, rather than being based on the educator's own observations. Indeed, what was recorded as an observation of an event at the previous home visit she claimed was something that did not even occur. She had a problem with the handouts too - they were "too late, we're past that stage."

These dissatisfactions should be viewed in the context of this parent's misunderstandings about the purpose of the programme, detailed in section 3.2 of this chapter. Drawing an inference based on the two observations, a tentative conclusion could be drawn that the ill-informed client is unlikely to benefit from the programme. This possibility is explored further in Chapter 5. It may be also that this parent saw her interview as an opportunity denied her by the ECD/PAFT evaluation system, which gives parents a chance to comment on the quality of the service they have received every six months. Organisation A chose to administer this evaluation through the educators, in person. So there was no anonymity or confidentiality built into the process, and this parent did not feel free to voice her dissatisfaction since her educator would see what she had written.

One parent was less negative but rather lukewarm about her educator. However in this case, the educator had taken over from another who had resigned her position, and with whom the parent had got on very well. Because she was nearing the end of the series of 36 visits she felt little commitment to establishing rapport with her new educator, and stood back a little removed from the process. She felt the educator to be a little young, inexperienced, and that she made wrong assumptions about her. So she was not at all receptive (although it was evident that the educator was unaware of this, from separate discussions) and at this point not really benefiting very much from being on the programme. In a similar case already referred to, the initial reaction to the educator was that she was "loud and opinionated", but that impression had been tempered over time by the realisation that they could have stimulating and worthwhile discussions.

Finally, Parent 11 expressed disquiet regarding professional and client relationships at Organisation A. While she seemed happy enough at the quality, relevance and timeliness of the information she was getting from PAFT, and that this would benefit her child, the trust that she had once had in her educator had become somewhat eroded since she overheard another educator openly discussing families with other Organisation A staff. While enthusiastic about the organisation in general terms, Parent 11 showed a degree of cynicism about an espoused organisational policy of confidentiality that conflicted with values in practice.

To sum up on the theme of the trusting relationship and its significance in knowledge acquisition, it has been shown that, on the whole, the PAFT educators in the study were viewed as family friends. They were trusted implicitly because of their expertise and experience, and usually occupied a position of privilege, in that they had come to know each family intimately and needed to interact with the whole context in order to function effectively. They were generally highly respected for their knowledge, their visits were eagerly anticipated, and in these ways the parents were in a receptive frame of mind for taking up information. There was a small minority of the sample that did not enthusiastically support these views, but there are useful inferences and conclusions that can be drawn from these cases as well. These are expanded upon in the final two chapters of the thesis.

3.5 THEME 5 – COMMUNICATION BENEFITS IN THE PAFT MODEL

Motif: "The ideas are just going to be carried on always".

Questions in the latter part of each interview gathered comment and reaction regarding the communication channels used in the PAFT programme, and other communication elements they found beneficial. For example, each PAFT home visit consists of three principal informational elements: the interpersonal interaction between educator and parent, the largely non-verbal demonstration of a play activity with the child, and a pre-prepared handout sheet on the relevant developmental topic for the month. Parents were asked to reflect on the relative merits of each for the purpose of learning and remembering, and to talk about what they would usually do with the handout. Broadly, the questions in this latter part of the interview asked parents to reflect on the benefits of certain aspects of the home visit from a communication perspective. It was felt that useful additional insights on the workings of the coaching or consulting relationship between parent and educator could be obtained in this way.

The convenience of having the professional come to the parent's own home was highlighted by several parents. This was valued not only because it reduced stress for the baby, but it also meant that the educator could see the child in his or her own environment where they would be more relaxed. The same would apply to the parent, presumably, although this was not explicitly mentioned. The relaxed approach of the educators themselves was also commented on.

Educators would, for example, as a matter of routine get down on the floor to play with the children and talk to the parents, who usually sat there too.

Familiarity extended to a sense of genuine understanding between the educator and the family. Parent 5 valued the continuity in the relationship between the educator and her son, made possible by the long-term nature of the programme:

When I'm talking about him he's not just um a child that they don't - you know they don't really know? So the relationship is important.

Linked with the relaxed approach is the value placed by parents on discussion. Parent 5 liked the fact that the hour (or more) her educator had available to spend with her meant that issues could be fully discussed, unlike in other more hurried situations such as with other mothers at Playcentre, and there were "times that I felt like I really needed to talk to P." Yet even interaction for its own sake was valued:

She - was willing to listen to what I had to say ... and I enjoyed sharing ideas with her - I mean we talked about lots of things - sometimes we didn't even talk about baby things.

Almost identical sentiments were expressed by two other parents.

Impact of acquired knowledge: a ripple effect

1. An important image that recurs in four parents' comments is what might be described as a ripple effect in the impact of new knowledge in a family. The knowledge transfer arising from the relationship between parent and educator could be thought of as the centre of the ripple. For example, Parent 12 (actually a couple being interviewed together at this point) talked of the way he and his partner had been learning new skills from PAFT, and that these were also being taken up by the grandparents who were sharing in the care of their twins. This knowledge-sharing was seen by the parents as being of great value within their extended family home. The knowledge was moving from one family member to another.

In a slightly different application of this concept, Parent 2 reflected on how she herself had become more assertive in regard to getting what she wanted for her children, because of increased knowledge gained through her learning with PAFT, and that she now encouraged her daughter to

be not outspoken, not rude, you know but speak her mind if she's not happy, so don't be afraid ...

It is possible to see here an application of new behavioural understanding: the mother had gained in self-confidence and learnt assertion, and was now teaching these skills to her child.

2. Another variety of movement of knowledge was hinted at by two other parents, and reinforced by comments made by one of the educators in a separate interview. Parent 2 (above) said that she had been receiving the PAFT handouts from someone else before officially getting on to the programme; Parent 13 stated she had “passed things on as well, to other people that aren’t involved with PAFT”; Parent 9 volunteered that she photocopied her handouts to distribute them to her friends, who were desperate to be in PAFT. Her educator was aware of this, and tacitly supported it from the point of view of social conscience:

one of the beauties of PAFT is it’s personalised, but you know that the odd resourced person that you go to, probably like S, takes a lot of the knowledge and she imparts it – she offers it then to her group. So – seeing yourself as working out there in the community, and not being scared to let that knowledge drift a bit – (Educator C).

Additionally, she reflected on the ownership of that knowledge:

I encourage that, I think that’s lovely – I think this becomes their knowledge, and what they do with it ... you shouldn’t hold on to your knowledge.

A distinction has been drawn between ripple effect 1 and 2, above, because the first one is no more than might be expected in a situation where family members are learning new skills and talking about them or practising them in order to improve family life. The second demonstrable impact, however, indicates that the PAFT information programme has reached more people than it

probably intended to, families who are not directly involved in the programme but benefiting from it nonetheless.

A slightly more formal extension of the process of community network formation that seemed part of the programme's effectiveness for these parents was the way the educators actively fostered and organised group activities. Educator B had organised a young mothers' group for some of her parents, to boost their confidence and inform them in a more social setting. Parent 4 was appreciative of being able to be part of this, because it was "like you're not the only one that has to ask questions." This was important as she was quite young, she was single and her comments suggested insecurity and shyness. Her educator would drive her to the meetings and home again. The participants in this "young mums' group" (Educator B) were given the opportunity to brainstorm what topics they would like to be covered by guest speakers at these meetings, and in this way were given ownership of the information-seeking process.

Reinforcing this fostering of community "ripples" and networks is the fact that PAFT also taps into the support networks already available in the communities in which it operates, referring parents on to appropriate agencies, professionals or groups should a problem or issue be beyond the scope of its own education-focused service. In the case of PAFT at Organisation A, this process was eased and facilitated by the fact that the umbrella organisation was a network of social services agencies anyway.

An important consideration as part of the research objectives in this study, in part being to assess the significance of interpersonal communication in knowledge acquisition, was to seek participants' views on another key ingredient in the PAFT home visit, the written handout material. This is used as an important part of the knowledge transfer process. How was this textual material regarded in comparison to, or as complementary to, the interpersonal relationship with an educator?

With only one exception, the 16 parents valued these handouts, and the folder they were given to file them in month by month, very highly. This was for a number of reasons. While 15 stated that they read each month's handout after each home visit, enjoying it as reinforcement of what they had heard about verbally, many also valued the fact that they could refer back to it (although most said they did not, in fact, or lacked the time to follow through on this possibility) should they need to do so. One parent reported reading and making notes on her handouts. Another valued the handout because most of the time, her partner was not home, so the information supported her in his absence or unavailability. Other attributes of the written channel that were valued were that it seemed authoritative; it meant the parent didn't have to remember all the information; and the growing file of handouts served as a resource collection for the future: a reference work. "I have a browse through," said Parent 11, "and you know just take note and just keep on giving her [*daughter*] that information - feeding her it."

The one parent of the 16 who stated that “I’ve never bothered to read the handouts,” explained that this was because they were received too late. She felt her child had already advanced through the normal developmental stages detailed in the handouts, before she received them. She also expected her educator to go through the handout with her, and this didn’t happen.

Even more prized was a detailed handwritten record of the visit completed by the educator toward the end of each session and left with the parent to file away for future reference. Some regarded this as a convenient service, appreciating the fact that someone else was doing this task for them because they didn’t have time to do it themselves. Most saw the monthly report as a gift of value, positive reinforcement and recognition that they were doing a good job as parents. It was a tangible sign of the understanding reached between them in the home visit sessions.

At the most basic level, the benefit in information terms of having a trained professional in a parent’s home to talk and teach, was that a parent could be *shown* how to interact well with their child. Parent 11 had learned that parenting could involve “fun and games, and read[ing] books,” which she hadn’t done with her older boys; Parent 12 had “learned to play” with her twins, and she had begun to understand now that this could stop them grizzling and therefore stopped her from losing her temper. These might seem elementary lessons, but they appeared to be needed by some parents who lacked the role models to show them a better way.

Parent 7 had created her own versions of the home made educational toys she had been shown, and her comments display a real sense of discovery of new ideas and concepts. "I find it quite amazing," she said, that something as simple as grasping the thumb and forefinger together in order to put clothes pegs into the neck of an empty plastic milk bottle, is a developmentally significant achievement for a small child. The use of an instructional non-verbal element in the teaching of parents was therefore important in getting new ideas across.

The one negative case, Parent 10, did not appear to respond at all enthusiastically to PAFT's "do-it-yourself" approach, which encourages parents to make their own toys from readily available materials: "I'd rather go and buy what I needed." Yet other parents appreciated the awareness shown by educators of budget and finances, or their need for simple, easy to understand written material.

It is also noteworthy that the educators themselves modelled good communication practice, both with the parents (using open questions, summarising, paraphrasing) and the babies (using plenty of nonverbal cues to reinforce meaning, and eye contact, which is at times not well-established between parents and babies where confidence and knowledge is lacking), and that this knowledge had also had an impact on parents' behaviours. For example, Parent 13 felt that PAFT had encouraged her to have "a nice interactive involvement" with her daughter. If this was learned through the role modelling of her educator, and observation would confirm that this was the case, then there is the possibility of behavioural change as well as more intangible learning

going on as a result of PAFT involvement in these families. This parent believed that there were “lots of things that I’ve taken, and apply” in her parenting since the introduction of PAFT into her life. She also foresaw that these changes would continue to have their effect: “the ideas ... [are] just going to be carried on always.” Other parents echoed this confidence that what they had learned would be of ongoing benefit.

In summary on Theme 5, in regard to communication benefits, the PAFT “package” presented the users in this study with a comprehensive combination of communication channels, including one-on-one, face-to-face interaction, printed handouts, newsletters, group meetings, discussions and outings, and demonstration and instruction sessions. Almost the entire group of parents interviewed were enthusiastic about this variety of channels, whether used separately or in combination, such as in a typical home visit session, which involves at least three of them. Finally, a pattern emerged in the transcripts regarding the movement of knowledge beyond the original PAFT context of parent and educator. For the purposes of this study, this has been referred to as a ripple effect, and will be further discussed in the next chapter.

In this third section of the results chapter, 16 interviews with PAFT parents have been analysed and presented in a framework of five themes connected to the research objectives. The five themes move from emotional and informational support needs in theme 1, to broader needs as embodied in parenting motivations in theme 2. Theme 3 presented an overview of the responses relating to the parenting context. In theme 4, aspects of the importance of trust

for knowledge acquisition were assessed, and this section of the chapter concluded with theme 5, being an assessment of the PAFT model of information provision from a communication perspective.

The data so far present a composite picture of information need in new parents as comprising a degree of isolation and insecurity, with a response more toward self-sufficiency than information seeking. Where they did seek support, it was more likely to be from within friendship networks. The group overall was strongly motivated to initiate change in their families' lives. Their situations tended to be defined by the expectations of others, increasing the self-sufficient response and a desire to appear to be coping. However there is evidence also that a problem-solving approach came into play, whereby parents synthesised a variety of information inputs in order to arrive at their own decisions. In this context, PAFT was sought out because its reputation has spread by word of mouth, and the educators are trusted and valued friends of the family. Because of the continuity of the PAFT relationship over a long period, parents are receptive to the interactive, shared approach to learning that is the hallmark of the programme. Finally, a number of advantages have been demonstrated that are inherent in the PAFT provider model from a communication perspective.

This major section of the results will now be set against the viewpoints of the PAFT educators themselves, who offer the "provider" or source perspective. The chapter concludes with brief reference to organisational assertions and the guidelines that lie behind the educators' practice. All of these different

perspectives will be synthesised and discussed in relation to the literature in Chapter 5.

4 Findings from interviews with educators

A balancing perspective to set against the data from interviews with parents was obtained by conducting interviews with four PAFT educators, two from Organisation A and two from Organisation B. In addition, the coordinators of the programme from each of the two sites were interviewed. Since they also spent time as educators aside from their managerial duties, their responses are treated as part of the composite whole. Altogether, then, this section of results will present the findings of six interviews with trained PAFT professionals.

Five of the six women were Maori, and one was European. All three of the educators interviewed from Organisation A were Maori. This weighting in favour of the *tangata whenua* is probably a reflection of organisational employment policy since Organisation A seeks to serve disadvantaged Maori in the community. One of the six women had been involved in the early pilot programme of PAFT in New Zealand, in South Auckland in 1994. She had been with PAFT ever since, and had the most experience of all the educators in this sample. The remainder had been involved for lengths of time from eight months to five years.

The interviews were examined and analysed according to topics arising out of the interview guide (see Appendix 4) of relevance to the research objectives. The interview content moved from a focus on their professional backgrounds and the attractions of the PAFT work, to the nature and significance of the educator–family relationship, and finally to aspects of communication strategies

and channels. This overall thematic movement was also the basis of the parent interviews. Clearly it is not possible to generalise on the basis of six respondents; rather, key points have been drawn together into patterns and contrasts as follows.

4.1 Rewards in the PAFT work

The six women had all come from professional backgrounds in nursing (Plunket, Karitane, geriatric, psychiatric), early childhood education, community work, or primary school teaching. One of them had come into PAFT straight from early childhood training at a polytechnic. These backgrounds in the “caring professions” showed through in their comments regarding what drew them to the PAFT work. They reported in different ways an interest in getting out into the community in a real sense, “one-on-one” (Educator D) with families (as opposed to dealing with large numbers of children in a day-care centre, for example), “supporting women in their parenting ... being a catalyst” (Educator C), and seeing their skills and knowledge put to work in a meaningful way, so that they might see over time that parents’ increased knowledge and involvement in their children’s development could become a long-term behavioural change. The strong commitment they showed is relevant to later discussion of the importance of trust and dialogue in knowledge acquisition.

Educator D made noteworthy remarks about her own attributes that she believed made her effective in a different way to other educators. While one of the two team co-ordinators had talked of the need for well-rounded individuals

for this role, ideally with experience in early childhood education and health, Educator D reflected on something she lacked that, ironically, she saw as a distinct advantage in her professional role: she had no children of her own. Parents had talked in their interviews of the desirability of educators being parents themselves, so Educator D's assertions were an unexpected contradiction. Educator D was of the view that because she didn't have her own children, she was

not comparing [*her child with her client's child*] ... a lot of parent educators ... actually talk about their own children quite a bit ... I have no ties to children of my own – I can go in and be completely and utterly focused on that baby, and I will celebrate everything that child does ... because they're like an extension of my family.

A sense of vocation and commitment is clear throughout the educators' responses. Educator E had seen in her previous primary school teaching experience that lack of awareness among poor inner city parents of the importance of teaching "the basics" to their children, such as how to handle books, "kind of limited their potential". She wanted to put her skills to use in such a way that earlier intervention in the lives of families could make a difference, and saw PAFT as a much more direct way to do that than her teaching of school children had enabled her to do.

Interestingly, one of the educators talked of identifying with "where they [*the parents*] are at" (Educator B), having been in the situation of having babies without having her family around her – "we did it on our own". Her description

of herself as a parent echoed those of the parent interviewees. She felt the fact that she is Maori, and Maori “are a proud race,” meant that she tended to be self-sufficient, a theme that was seen quite strongly in responses from parents also. She reflected that “a lot of things could have been done better” with her first son (a regret she shared with several of the parents), and she had since become committed to making “a difference for our Maori people” (Educator B) by sharing her knowledge with families at the earliest possible stage. She wanted to do this because Maori face “a heck of a lot of issues”. One of these issues, she said, was the need for better understanding within Maori families of the difference between discipline and punishment. She hoped to use her expertise to achieve this, by helping parents to understand that the way they were brought up may not necessarily be the only way.

Another educator was alert for “a shift in thinking ... a shift in behaviour”, so that she would see “a parent who stops hitting because they’ve learned a better technique” or “parents who are now talking to their children instead of waiting for the children to talk to them” (Educator E) as developments that indicate real progress. These changes, she said, gave her a great deal of satisfaction. These findings regarding a high level of professional commitment are useful in the light of the focus of this study on the needs of the end user or receiver in an information programme. It is of considerable advantage to an information provider to have frontline staff whose personal goals and values are congruent with the goals and values of the programme, as appeared to be the case in this sample.

The satisfaction that the educators evidently derived from their work with families came from “making a difference” (Educator B and F), a result of the learning that PAFT brings to parents. There were different motivations arising out of different professional backgrounds, personal beliefs and world-views, but a common factor is clear: these women came into the job because they saw that they could use their skills directly in the community in one-on-one interactions over a satisfyingly long period. They anticipated seeing the benefits of their work in families where children and parents learned to function better together because of improved levels of knowledge. These women had a sense of vocation and social conscience that they could bring to bear in their work.

These types of intrinsic reward arising from the work are the clearest theme in the interviews. Being a part of a process, and being able to see parents “develop a real awareness about their child and what their child is capable of doing” (Educator D) made the job worthwhile. For Educator E, “it’s gotta be a buzz,” seeing “the parents are really starting to appreciate the children ... for me that’s the reward – I mean parents can do it just as well as anyone, they just need the confidence to actually know what they’re looking for and what to do.” On a personal level, an enjoyment of being “able to connect with people” (Educator D), “building positive relationships with *whanau*” and seeing “*whanau* eager to get to the next level” (Educator F) were additional layers of reward.

A number of challenges of being an educator were also raised. These did not outweigh the rewards (although one educator volunteered the observation that there had been a high turnover of staff in the PAFT team to which she

belonged), but kept the educators fully stretched coping with them. These challenges were mostly to do with working within organisational constraints, such as those created by heavy caseloads of families, and the limitations imposed by inadequate resources. Yet there were also more personal challenges posed by family structures and cultures, for example interfering grandparents; and frustration when parents were not home for appointments. There was stress resulting from the potential for closely identifying with a family, and feeling overwhelmed by their needs; and stress from adjustments made necessary by dealing with several totally different family situations within a working day. There was the challenge of working with

people *[who]* continue to fall through the gaps, because they (a) aren't aware of the services within the community ... and (b) they are often of the mindset that is unmotivated ... and are in a social welfare spoon-feeding situation where everything is given to them rather than empowering them or encouraging them to actually make choices for themselves (Educator F).

There were frustrations too that were rather more systemic, arising for example from differing philosophies in regard to the levels of need of the families who are accepted onto the programme. The Ministry of Education department responsible for PAFT, Early Childhood Development, had given a directive at the time of this study that the programme be targeted to families according to specific criteria, including:

- ◆ low income
- ◆ young age of the mother

- ◆ ethnicity
- ◆ family structure such as solo parents
- ◆ lack of community or family support
- ◆ lack of parenting information (not likely to access it for themselves).

Concerns expressed by educators in their interviews and informal interactions with the researcher regarding entitlement to an information programme are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless they formed a backdrop of debate within the PAFT teams regarding whether the programme should be targeted to families at risk of “poor outcomes” for the child, or whether all families would and should benefit. A related question that two of the educators had been debating was whether parents all needed the full three-year programme, or whether some could derive adequate benefit from two years, one year or even six months on the programme.

In general, educators seemed to feel, however, that “everybody, every person, every parent has needs when it comes to being a parent” (Educator B) and all families need support on a very basic, human level. For example, educators saw it as a natural part of their role to just listen, because people lack relationships that enable such interaction: “just letting her talk, so she solves the problem, not me ... sometimes you’re the only one that they can actually talk to – there’s not a lot of support around” (Educator E). Overall, however, the interactive relationship that is the basic structural unit of the PAFT programme was something that the educators celebrated and from which they derived a good deal of personal reward, irrespective of the sorts of issues mentioned above.

4.2 Educator-family relationships

“Parent educator” is a title that made one educator in this group uncomfortable. Her feeling was that it implies that parents need educating, and that it suggests a hierarchy in which the parent plays a subordinate role. She preferred to think of herself as providing support, having “the tools and the background ... and sharing experience ... you can share your knowledge”. (Educator D).

The remaining five women held similar views to Educator D, seeing themselves as facilitators more than teachers, setting in motion a process of empowerment, although “we’re not there to rescue them” (Educator E). There was a strong belief that the parents need to take responsibility for educating their child, and that PAFT home visits are not all about the educator coming in to be a “baby teacher”. Yet the programme was still being perceived that way:

A lot of our families believe that the programme is for the baby and that you’re there to play with the baby and so it takes a lot of skill to actually pull back and say “no - I’m here for you, and you’re going to do this for the baby” (Educator E).

The educators seemed fond of metaphors, which are useful in gaining an insight into the way they view themselves in relation to the families with whom they interact. Educator C thought of herself as “a bit of a catalyst - you plant the seeds,” and “sometimes you need to plant the seed, and wait for them to water it,” thought Educator F. She also saw herself as “not the font of wisdom, but more the channel”. These metaphors suggest a process of facilitation, not so much intervention. The image of a channel suggests that educators are

mechanisms by which knowledge can be directed towards appropriate needs; it implies that the organisational challenge lies in engineering access for the information poor. The issue of access is reflected too in the ECD targeting criteria listed in the previous section of this chapter, which highlight the possibility that lack of information can be viewed as a lack of access. The latter is a condition of separation, which may involve inability or unwillingness to be active in the search for information. Access is also an issue for message sources to address, as discussed in the context of “chronic know-nothings” (Gaziano, 1983, p. 450) or the “typically uninformed” (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984, p. 416) in Chapter 2 of this thesis. There, the idea that some groups are at fault for not obtaining information was discussed as a simplistic viewpoint associated with linear and hypodermic analogies of the communication process. It may be, for example, that sources need to find a motivating rationale for people to inform themselves.

Educator C saw her role as triggering a capacity in parents that is already present (through acting as “a catalyst”), which is also a different concept to filling up empty vessels from a font of wisdom. Another image she used was of adding to a structure, as if a parent’s understanding was a work in progress, a building under construction: “I do not believe that I go in with all the knowledge, I believe I add to what’s there, I build on ... you scaffold ... you definitely add to what’s there”. Her strong belief was that parents are already experts with their babies, but they just do not feel that way, and need to be given confidence by having their important work validated. She did not feel that parents were given this validation much, if at all, by society at large.

Educator C also used a series of images connected to process, to movement, to learning as a journey. She saw herself as a companion to parents on that journey, something like a guide:

[parents] are on a walk with parenting according to how [they've] been parented, to the types of contact that [they've] had with children ... so they're all along a walk, I feel ... [and] one of the challenges of being an educator is being able to deliver across the board ... to be able to settle in any home and find a - find a path to take .. finding somewhere to start.

Acknowledgement is present above, and elsewhere in the interviews, that a parent's own background can affect their ability to take on board the PAFT information: "maybe they haven't had good experiences at school, they have had problems with learning themselves, and don't see themselves as being able to teach their babies," (Educator E). Educator F added that there are "truths" for many families in the district served by her organisation, including "poverty and oppression and unemployment and loss of sense of self ... they haven't been in a position to know that there are other strategies that can be used". These factors were cited as barriers to parents' response to the programme, making the educator's work more challenging.

Other clear barriers with which the educators appeared to grapple were real issues of day-to-day survival, to the extent that the PAFT curriculum could seem irrelevant in some homes on some days, and the educator just needs to sit and listen or assist in solving other problems: "sometimes the PAFT curriculum just doesn't even come into it" (Educator D). These barriers that "cloud what's

happening” (Educator B) can be relationship breakdowns, financial hardship causing the household power supply or telephone service to be cut off, illness, postnatal depression and many other problems connected with the most basic of human needs. Receptivity to learning is likely to be minimal under these conditions, and that is something the educators learn to manage in a variety of ways:

We’ll also transport families to doctors and things like that – you get there and the family’s in crisis and mum’s got no transport and the baby needs to go to the doctor now – flag the lesson and just do it, and come back later and do the visit (Educator E).

Similarly, Educator F referred to family dynamics and events:

... it may be an off day and you have to actually change the style of delivery for that day – or re-schedule; so it’s very much a matter of going in, accepting what you find, assessing whether it’s appropriate, and working within the particular circumstance of that particular moment in time with that family.

In addition, Educator B referred to the fact that there is a broad familial context into which PAFT must enter. Behind the barriers indicated above, “it’s a whole family unit that’s getting involved”, she said. Others also stated that it was important to welcome the grandparents and whoever else in the family that wanted to be a part of the learning process, to do so. Educator E felt it was equally important to build trust with grandparents, not only the parent. This viewpoint is also emphasised in guidelines to educators in the PAFT curriculum.

Educator F talked of engagement with the family as being a holistic process, “actually working to find their need, to provide choices for them”. She thought of a

young teen mum who’s feeling really *whakamā* or really shameful ... she’s sixteen and she’s got a year old baby and people make judgments about her and they have no idea how she got to that particular point in her life ... you might need to bring her to a group meeting and deliberately introduce her to another – a peer who is in a similar situation who has made those networks out there and just encourage them to *awhi* [support] each other.

Alternatively, such a “young mum” might look on the PAFT educator as “a replacement parent ... or a big sister” (Educator F) and in this way the PAFT relationship can draw the educator quite tightly into a family type of role.

Shared by all of the educators was a belief in the importance of a low-key, relaxed approach to the parent’s need, but in a way that is appropriate to the family. Educator A talked of making families feel at their ease, and to this end an awareness of her body language was important, such as avoiding sitting on furniture if the parent chose to be seated on the floor: “I give them the power, it’s their home, I’m a guest in their home”.

An educator who was conscious and proud of her Maori heritage and its importance in her work, especially with Maori families, described her own style as “quite informal – down-to-earth ... just respecting how they feel comfortable,” (Educator B) and thought the fact that she is Maori gives Maori

families “a sense of relief”. This was because she believed organisational representatives coming into people’s homes are often seen as symbolising institutional authority, and therefore are potentially a threat, but that they would relax when they met her. Another Maori educator spoke of her belief in the importance of presenting the programme in a “conversational rather than a lecture-type style”. She felt she should not necessarily avoid jargon and make the assumption that people would not understand, but use the terms and clarify them, so that there is a “repetition of alternatives, all the explanations for the jargon that they can take on or leave off”.

Educator C emphasised the significant role played by the relaxed relationship built up over three years of close contact between PAFT and the parents, in that it creates the conditions for “good transfer of knowledge”. She also felt that if trust was present, then an educator was in a unique and privileged position in which she could “challenge a little bit” in order to get the parent to think in a new way. “If they feel comfortable they will take on board some of the things you’re saying”. Educator E put the same idea this way:

Trust allows people to try what you’re saying ... Trust is the basis of any change.

Educator B expressed this viewpoint as well, saying that the trust and rapport plays a vital role in the effectiveness of the programme, because “sharing of knowledge between both parties comes a lot easier when you feel comfortable within your environment.” Interestingly, a difference was noted between some parents who look on the educator as “The Professional” as someone to trust,

whereas others look on the educator as “A Professional” as someone to be indifferent to. This was because the educator came from a different world: “that doesn’t apply to me”, and for some families it was a case of “what can I get out of this person?” (Educator E). This “insider/outsider” perception is discussed in the next chapter, both in terms of its presence in the group involved in this study, and the ways in which the PAFT programme offers solutions to such perceptual barriers.

Another issue of note in regard to trust is the role of cultural perceptions, especially where a European is visiting a family of another culture – will the educator be trusted? And to what extent will parenting values be compatible? Educator E felt that it is necessary to negotiate or explore what is acceptable practice in such situations. An example given by Educator E was a parent who was a recent migrant to New Zealand from an African nation,

using a stick to beat her son ... so CYFS are involved, and now she’s working on other strategies ... and I’m just following on and building on that basis. But you know, “it’s our culture to whack our kids around the head, and why should we stop?” – “It’s OK to twist his ear”. So you deal with those things all the time.

So while good rapport is essential, it is often, in the view of educators, achieved as a result of conscious building of common ground and shared understanding. On the other hand, educators are aware of the need to “at the same time, *[stay]* professional, and not *[lose]* your focus ... it’s very easy for PAFT to become like a coffee morning”. Elaborating, Educator C explained that

you are there to impart knowledge, to deliver a programme, to transfer some knowledge, to be a support, to be a listener, to take on board whatever issues someone's got there for you.

The idea that there must be a professional balance between involvement and detachment in the PAFT relationship was of concern to these educators. This is because it is necessary for them to become close to families to establish rapport, but at the same time for their own emotional health they need to remain somewhat removed. For example, a young educator revealed that she had learned that there could be an emotional cost in "[hearing] a lot of secrets", and she felt that there was "a massive responsibility to have that" (Educator D). She had found that "people would drain me a lot, and I'd get everything thrown at me," and had since learned that many issues are beyond the scope of the PAFT programme, so she refers families to other suitable agencies straight away, making her role more manageable. She also found however that it could be painful to lose contact with families who had become friends, once they "exited" from the programme after three years. That was something she was learning to adjust to.

Two of the six educators did admit that they had come to regard some of their clients as friends, even while being aware of the "boundaries as a parent educator and professional" (Educator B). Also, although personal phone numbers should not be divulged, in one case where Educator B felt the mother was indeed a friend that she cared about, she had done so. She would also do

“support visits” (extra visits over and above the basic monthly one) for this parent who she felt was in need of the moral support.

Finally, the women interviewed talked of their role as being a very privileged, and therefore powerful, position. Because of their knowledge, they felt they were “quite respected” and “valued” (Educator C), and were in a position to make a difference, and to be there when things go wrong. On the other hand, it was also “a very humble position” (Educator C) in the sense that educators were trusted with confidences, and they “know the family stuff, what’s going up, what’s going down” (Educator C). Educator C added that there were responsibilities inherent in that powerful position, and yet that the power needs to be held in perspective. She said she emphasised to parents that she was “not going to come in here and turn cartwheels, I’m not an educator that’s going to turn it into a degree”. She felt it to be vital to keep the ideas and information at a low-key level, the sort of advice and common sense suggestions that might have come from a woman’s mother in a past era, when families were more close-knit. “If you’ve got no family [*around*], what have you got?” (Educator C).

4.3 Communication strategies & channels

A striking factor that emerged from these extensive interviews is that the educators need to be skilled managers of a communication event each time they visit a family, doing so up to twenty times a week, and on each separate occasion working with very different family environments, needs, demands, and issues. This requires of them that they be highly adept communicators, and,

thought Educator B, “it’s important for us as parent educators to always be reviewing our work”. The six women referred to the necessary skills and understandings in comprehensive detail, each reflecting individual perspectives and priorities, but altogether building a coherent catalogue of receiver-focused strategies. In addition, what they had to say was supported by observation of them carrying out their work in home visits to their families, reported early in this chapter.

Being “positive in your interactions” (Educator D) was thought to be elementary in a situation where educators needed to create and maintain mutually respectful and co-operative relationships. Educator B felt likewise, that it is important that “a parent *[should]* feel good about what they’re doing, and encourag[e] them to do it more and more and more”. Beyond that baseline of being positive, Educator F talked of the challenge of being adaptable and flexible in a range of different situations:

It’s all in the way you actually present the information, and each of those presentations I believe is very much a matter of knowing – of actually tuning into that particular *whanau* and presenting it in a way that they’re ready to hear.

Tuning in to the separate needs of up to sixty-six families requires a ready array of interpersonal communication competencies. Educator F saw the skill required in terms of an ability to observe, to comprehensively assess, to provide information, to reinforce, and more:

you need to be observing and assessing all the way through because ... the opportunities for encouragement sometimes need reinforcement as well – the fact that you offered them information and then you come back the next month and you say “Well did you follow through on that?” and they say – “Yeah well I was going to” might mean that you need to actually get a little bit closer in your support ... it may be just that little bit of encouragement ... and saying to them “Look I know you can do this!” without being patronising. Not “I know you can do it” [*indulging tone*] – I mean it’s all very much those communication skills of saying “well– how about, if you haven’t had a chance to follow through on this by the next visit...”

This educator was talking here of, among other things, a reinforcing principle in the provision of the PAFT service, so that there can be a continuity from the current visit, to the previous one, to future possibilities. She also refers to this principle as a spiraling process, which is briefly referred to a little later in this section and followed up in the next chapter.

A vitally important understanding the educators felt they need to be constantly developing is an intuitive awareness regarding the question – when has the parent reached saturation point in information terms? Consequently, when is it appropriate to pull back to avoid information overload? This skill requires a more or less continuous, conscious evaluation of parents’ responses; it involves an ongoing intuitive assessment of needs, and judgment of parents’ capacity to understand and take up information. “Sometimes you go in and you think – that was a waste of time! And some families open up right away – thank goodness you’re here!” (Educator E). For example, this educator talked of having illiterate

families among her caseload, as well as recently arrived immigrant families with little English. The consequence of this for her was that she needed to manage the significant amount of PAFT information given as written text to all families in a different way with those who had low levels of print literacy. First of all she needed to find out those levels by whatever means was sensitive. Then she might choose to work through the handouts verbally, or mark the key points with a highlighting pen. Or she might choose to minimise the role of the written channel in some cases, but leave the handout with the family so that they are given the choice of working on an understanding of it in their own time.

This task for the educators is eased somewhat by the availability of two different versions of the written material for parents in the PAFT curriculum manuals, one being suited to a reading age of 14 to 16 years, and the other being aimed at a reading age of around 10 years. The standard version is entitled the "Your Child" series, and the simplified version is entitled the "Your Baby" series. The educators talked of different ways of handling the delicate task of deciding which version is more appropriate for each family, among these being to seek out verbal response on a given handout, and showing parents the alternative version to see if they would prefer it. Clearly this would need to be handled sensitively.

One of the educators reported a strong antipathy to the whole notion of having a simplified version of the written material available, believing that the choice necessarily required "insulting" (Educator A) assumptions to be made about a parent's intellectual ability or educational level, and this made her

uncomfortable. Presumably this was because assumptions could be false, and she preferred to regard all parents as being equally literate.

Implicit in the comments made about the written material by other educators though, was a belief that parents are owed a level of information that they can cope with *now*, but accompanying this recognition of present needs should be an expectation that parents can and will grow to a new level. This view is connected with the PAFT philosophy of growth to a state of change, an approach that logically should apply no matter how literate, articulate or educated the parent happens to be at the start of the programme. Educator F believed it to be part of an educator's duty to "encourage" by working through the handouts with the parents:

that's the encouragement they need ... you've put value on it, you've actually run through it and said oh look at such and such, but I'll leave it to you ... you're actually saying to them, your expectation is that they will work it through. And they may choose to or they may not; that's OK because you can use that as a jumping off point for your information next time.

Expressing a similar view, Educator C felt that part of her role was to "chang[e] a cycle," so that if a parent didn't value the written resource, they could be encouraged to do so through regular reference to it: "you can change that over time ... you can pull the written material in". Educator F commented too that there are cultural elements in a sometimes reverent attitude parents can demonstrate towards the folder of PAFT handouts: "in some of the cultures that

we serve," she said, "they turn it into a decoration that sits up on the – you know, beside the Bible ... it's put up there as ... almost like a trophy."

The information overload issue also encompassed a concern that in providing too much information to parents, the more important advice contained in handouts on special topics could be overlooked. This concern was more acute at the time of this study, since a good deal more neuroscience research and information had been incorporated in the 2000 edition of the curriculum. However, PAFT concern is not confined to the limits on learning imposed by the constraints of print literacy levels. Degrees of ability to engage in verbal interaction, and in listening comprehension among parents, are elements of this relationship that must be skillfully managed. Educator E felt it important to explain things slowly, pacing her verbal interactions carefully, "deciding how much the family can take at any given stage, and when to shut down and when to stop and listen."

Communication strategies that could be thought of as being standard in teaching or coaching were highlighted by all the educators as being important in their sessions with parents. These included, for instance, avoiding excessive jargon, repeating of key points for the visit, summarising at the end of the visit, active listening techniques including paraphrasing, re-phrasing, and seeking feedback through open questions. Repetition and emphasis of key points was thought by Educator B to be most important with younger parents. For Educator E, these basic strategies were thought of as most important for people who do

not speak English fluently, and she added elementary sign language to the list of useful competencies.

However, educators thought overall that these interpersonal communication strategies are important more in an ongoing sense than in themselves within a single session with parents. This is because judicious use of repetition or summary, for example, enabled a skilled educator to weave information back and forth from this visit to the last or previous sessions, and to foreshadow what is to come in a future visit. These practices were thought to enhance long-term retention of information. In these ways, reinforcement of key learning points occurred in an ongoing rather than an isolated way, and underlined the back and forth reinforcement process that occurred for parents, some of whom had said in their interviews that they would save up or write down questions they would like to ask of the educator at the next visit. Educator F described the weaving back and forth in this way:

One thing I find with the PAFT programme is that - you spiral back - information that you've given out at the beginning of the developmental period you're summarising at the end of each session, but you're also summarising at the end of that developmental period ... and for all of us it's that repetition, repetition ...

Educator D felt a sense of satisfaction when the parents managed to make these loops or connections back to previous key ideas for themselves, "and they go - 'oh that was just like when...!' - so I like them to do that".

Other than the written channel and the interpersonal strategies, educators also talked of the importance of role modeling. For Educator F, coordinator of her PAFT team, the most important role modeling that needed to happen was, at a base level, acceptance and lack of judgment. For her this meant operating within the culture of the family and their ways, even if these were different to the educator's own way: "I'll try and do things that are appropriate for that whanau". Moreover, role modeling involved resisting judgment over the way a family chose to budget, even if they needed a food parcel but had a leather lounge suite and a large television set. This baseline behaviour highlighted by Educator F was important to her in establishing rapport and trust with a family.

For Educator C, when she spoke of role modeling she meant that which she used to show parents the type of interactions and play activities that they could be doing themselves with their baby or toddler. She believed that this was the most effective way to teach some parents who could be less responsive to written handouts, and that the hour available in the home visit was an opportunity she should consciously exploit to the maximum to create impact with that parent. In line with PAFT curriculum guidance to educators, she said she always started the session by asking the parent to tell her what changes she had noticed since the last visit, and in so doing she invited reflection, an observant attitude, and an active engagement in the process of learning. Thus open questions were used to feed an interactive source to receiver approach to delivering information.

Finally, one of the coordinators of the two PAFT provider teams expressed the view that looking beyond the PAFT curriculum was important as a means for PAFT educators to stay abreast of research and early childhood writings in general. She had one of the members of her team spending "quite a bit of time on the Internet" sourcing up-to-date information on topics of special interest to particular families, because "for your knowledge you need more, and being able to access other information is important." So research using electronic sources was also adding to the knowledge pool of the team, to be disseminated as relevant and required.

Section 4 of this chapter has presented the findings of six interviews with PAFT educators, within three overarching topics. These women talked of the rewards and motivations in the work, and showed strong commitment to a role embodying facilitation of change; they reflected on the importance of the relationships they develop with parents and families; and they detailed the skills and strategies they employed to enhance the benefits of the programme. These perspectives from the trained professional viewpoint have added weight to some of the findings from the parent interviews. Just as the parents often referred to a desire to bring about change in child-rearing patterns, so too did the educators, who were drawn to the work out of a desire to make a difference, to be catalysts for social change at a household level. Just as the parents saw PAFT as a useful tool in a problem-solving approach to parenting information need, so too the educators viewed themselves as facilitators who could add to the range of choices available to parents. The educators also saw the strong interpersonal relationships as the basis for change, and saw this as being of

central importance. These and other resonances will be discussed further in the next chapter.

5 Findings from observation of educator training

From 19 to 22 June, 2000, the researcher attended a Ministry of Education Early Childhood Development (ECD) annual training course for PAFT teams in the Auckland region, held at Whare Waatea marae in Mangere. The nature of researcher involvement as participant and observer has been outlined in Chapter 3; to briefly recap, the course involved presentations to PAFT educators from Auckland teams, as well as small group discussions and plenary sessions, video presentations from the PAT organisation in the US, and other standard 'workshop' techniques used to explore and enhance understanding of key topics. The purpose of the observation for this research was to obtain insights on the significance of interpersonal communication in PAFT from the source or organisational perspective.

The following summary points briefly reflect the ECD and PAFT organisational concerns that link clearly to the objectives of this project.

5.1 Importance of first and early home visits to success with families

Large group discussions among PAFT educators and ECD training facilitators at various points in the June 2000 ECD course showed that educators were anxious

to obtain commitment and cooperation from parents as early as possible in the PAFT process. This appeared to be because some parents new to the programme have a less than serious attitude and forget appointments or decide to drop out after three months. The programme is costly to run, and educators agreed that it is frustrating not to have full “buy-in” from parents, because this takes their energies away from other families who could be benefiting.

Connected with this desire to achieve a clear shared understanding at the first visit or even before, while the mother is still pregnant, is the frustration of not successfully getting the message across that “I am not your baby’s teacher – *you* are!” as one of the educators stated. One educator felt that rapport with parents begins in the first telephone call, arranging the first visit. However there is a conflict for educators between the need to ensure that parents understand the nature and requirements of the programme, and a concern not to inundate them with information, since this is a risk to rapport.

5.2 Access to information

Discussion returned from time to time in small and large groups at the ECD training to ideas concerning parents’ access to information. A topical background issue at the time of this week-long training course was the Labour Coalition government’s broad social policy programme at that time called “Closing the Gaps”, a package of policy initiatives aimed at closing the statistical gaps between Maori and non-Maori. A viewpoint expressed in one of the above discussions was that the closing of gaps should be thought of not in terms of ethnicity but in non-specific terms of gaps in education, in health and other

indicators of social wellbeing. Furthermore, a programme like PAFT had a role to play in teaching people how to access the information they need to change their lives. A facilitator from ECD contended that “all families have the resources...” to educate their children effectively, no matter what their income, but that PAFT could play a role in steering families towards other sources and agencies in the community to enhance opportunity for the children. “Changing cycles is pivotal to the educator’s role” was a typical description of the place that PAFT educators saw for themselves in helping families gain access to the advantages provided by information.

5.3 Cultural identity

An entire morning at the four-day ECD training was dedicated to exploring the role played by cultural awareness in educator effectiveness with families, and the need to affirm rather than ignore cultural identity. Many points of detail in communicating well with Polynesian cultures were covered by educators representing different Polynesian groups. For example, the fact that a parent might not mean “yes” when nodding and smiling but could be doing so to be courteous and not offend, was mentioned.

Bigger issues such as some families' shame associated with not being fluent in English were raised and discussed. Of more specific relevance to this study was the point that PAFT would be likely to be dealing with a whole family, not just the parents, in Polynesian cultures especially. It was thought important for educators to be aware that, for instance in the Tongan culture, it would not just be the mother telling the child what to do, and that all aspects of family life

including discipline, decision-making, money matters and more are all shared. Therefore all family members should be included in the delivery of PAFT. Many other points of differentiation between European, Maori and Pacific Island cultures were noted, including contrasting attitudes to nutrition, food sharing between parent and child, noisy behaviour by children and appropriate responses to that, and many more. The main consequences of these differences for PAFT are that a dogmatic approach to appropriate parenting practice should be avoided, and an awareness amongst educator teams that linguistic and cultural diversity is a challenge they need to rise to, particularly in the Auckland region where ethnic diversity is increasing, is vital.

5.4 Information overload

Also of relevance to the objectives of this study was the issue of how *not* to overwhelm parents with information. It was thought to be futile to simply hand over the information: some people will just turn away. The educators were aware that many parents will not or cannot take it all in, and various strategies to overcome this were discussed, such as an early effort to build rapport mentioned in 5.1.

Some educators felt that the volume of information (increased with the new “neuroscience” content added to the 2000 edition of the curriculum) was simply too much for 18 year-old parents, for example, and EAL (English as an Additional Language) families. It was suggested that more visual content, such as video material, would be helpful in these cases, and that information has to be delivered effectively in a way that suits a family.

5.5 “Filling empty vessels” or “growing families”?

Finally, the thoughts of an educator who could be described as a *kuia* are useful in the light of the questions at the heart of this study. This older Maori woman had spent long years working in various roles in her community with Maori *whanau*, most recently as co-ordinator of a PAFT programme in a provincial town. She offered her insights informally to the researcher at different times throughout the week. This woman, highly regarded by other educators for her breadth of experience with Maori *whanau*, felt that the problem for her in using the PAFT curriculum was that its highly structured format was unsuited to the Maori world-view, especially young Maori, who “have no idea what they’ll put on the table that day, let alone arranging an appointment for the following month.” In addition she felt that much of the content and concepts were far removed from their understanding. She expressed the hope that added flexibility built into the new curriculum (for example, allowing for the possibility of extra home visits according to families’ needs) will offer her ways of keeping families in the programme for longer periods.

She also talked of her approach at the first visit to a family, which she described as *whaka whanaungatanga*, in which she found out as extensively as possible about a family, its support systems, needs, aspirations – “what would you like, what do you need?” In this way she assessed “where is this family at, say on a scale of 1–10?” For her, the true skill of an educator lies in appropriate needs assessment, and “growing families” from there. This appropriate assessment at the earliest stage is fundamental to effective use of PAFT for the benefit of Maori. She disagreed with the notion of “filling empty vessels”, which may have

been a metaphor for her understanding of PAFT as objectified information in the form of a print-based curriculum. Her “growing families” analogy is rather like the range of metaphors used by the educators who were interviewed more formally. As reported earlier, in section 4.2, one of them referred to herself as a catalyst, a planter of seeds; she thought of herself as being a supportive guide to parents on their journey. Another educator explained her role as being a channel of wisdom; and that while she would plant the seeds, the parents themselves would water them.

In summary, exposure to discussion by educators and ECD trainers showed that from the perspective of organisational philosophy and goals, PAFT is very aware of the need to tailor its informational agenda to the varied needs of families. In this sense, it is an information programme that is seeking ways to enhance its effectiveness through considering significant barriers to learning in its target “audience”. Data obtained through this observer as participant method has added to the detailed picture emerging of an effective style of provider–client interactivity.

To conclude this chapter of results, a final brief overview of aspects of the curriculum that have a bearing on the goals of this research is presented as follows.

6 Findings from analysis of curriculum manuals

The 2000 edition of the PAFT curriculum manuals, called *Ahuru Mowai: Born to Learn*, had three principal points of interest in relation to the communication objectives of this research:

- the manuals set out a clear role that the programme should play in facilitating a process of change that will take families beyond dependency.
- the educators are provided with handout materials for parents that are available in two versions, so that different literacy levels can be catered for.
- clear guidelines defining the conduct of the educator–parent relationship are given in the manuals.

These three aspects are summarised below.

6.1 PAFT as a Strengths Model

The fundamental principle of the curriculum is that the programme is intended to support parents in such a way that the information they derive from their three years involvement will empower them to make their own changes, rather than passively receive changes imposed on them. The curriculum describes this approach as a “Strengths Model”, (ECD, 2000, p.1.1), and is centred on a concept of change agency.

The “strengths” model involves the parent in defining the need for change, and in seeing the self as an “active player” in this. It uses the parent’s own knowledge supplemented by “expert knowledge”, the educator being “a consultant and enabler for change.” (ECD, 2000, p.1.1).

This model, which gives the parent the leading role in the educative relationship, is set against a “Deficit Model” in which the professional defines the problem, and is the expert possessing specialised knowledge unavailable to the parent independently. In this undesirable model, the parent is passive, the follower; the professional is “the change agent”, the leader.

6.2 Handouts to parents

Every home visit includes the use of handout resource materials. It is noteworthy that there are two different versions of these. Each handout is a single sheet, usually double-sided, of information related to a developmental stage or a special topic, such as “Smoke Harms Babies” or “Don’t Shake Your Baby!” Each sheet gives information on points to note in the baby’s development, and things the parent can do to enhance that development. Handouts on special topics such as “Don’t Shake Your Baby!” also offer specific suggestions for situations requiring immediate action, so they don’t just consider the long term. The curriculum manuals specifically state that it is essential that educators use the handouts with every family, and that they should be “used as discussion tools” (ECD, 2000, p.PV10) rather than being handed to parents to read on their own.

The standard version of the material is a series called "Your Child", and is presented in language suitable for a reading age of 14 -16 years. The alternative version contains the same material presented in simplified language and larger print. "They can be used with families who are not able or likely to read the more extensive ... version." (ECD, 2000, p.PV10).

6.3 The conduct of the educator-parent relationship

Detailed guidance is given to parent educators in the manuals. This guidance gives strong emphasis to the need for educators to individualise the programme to accommodate diverse family needs. Specific definition is given to the role of the parent educator in using the personal visits to help parents achieve goals of increased confidence, increased knowledge, increased observation skills, opportunity to apply knowledge and foreshadow future developments. This role is defined as working with families principally to "maintain rapport and develop a relationship" and to "provide appropriate ... information" (ECD, 2000, p.PV1).

PAFT guidelines stress that the educator is there *principally* for the *parent*, not the child, although obviously rapport is necessary there so that the educator can do her work: playing effectively with the child is a significant part of her range of tasks. Above all, however, the educator's job is to increase the parent's (or parents') level of skill as specified above, and to this extent it is vital for educators to develop an open, trusting relationship with the adult.

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter has presented five separate perspectives on the series of interpersonal networks surrounding the parents in the PAFT programme. The first perspective was that of an outsider observing the home visit, the principal vehicle for knowledge transmission in PAFT. The key data followed this section: the extensive reflections of 16 parents involved in the PAFT programme in a large metropolitan centre in New Zealand in 2000, presented as a number of main themes arising from the research objectives.

Also important are the detailed insights, presented in the third section of this chapter, of the six PAFT educators who were also interviewed for this study. They are significant for providing a complementary perspective to that of the parents, because they represent the viewpoint of the practitioners attempting to enact organisational goals, together with their own personal convictions. It has been shown that there is substantial convergence between the goals of both groups, PAFT and its trained educators. Alongside these private viewpoints were the public ones aired at the educator re-training course run by ECD, at which an official stance was advocated for PAFT. Finally, the reference point for all those contracted to deliver PAFT, the new curriculum manuals revised and launched in June 2000, were consulted for policies or statements that encapsulated organisational values and recommended practices that reflected on the key questions underlying this research.

The central concern of this study was to explore the importance of various forms of interpersonal communication in parents' acquisition of knowledge about child development. All five perspectives obtained in this research have brought clearer definition to the need to acknowledge and work with the context that the informationally needy find themselves in, and to plan for an interactive, consultative style of information provision. This clearer picture emerging from the data will be described in the following chapter, which will gather together strong themes overall, and also reflect on any tensions, contrasts, or common threads that have emerged from the five data sources.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

"Parenting is relationship with knowledge as a guide" (Gaziano & O'Leary, 1998, p. 44).

A series of perspectives on the key communication component of the PAFT programme, the "home visit", was presented in Chapter 4. The most significant data in this study for the purposes of the research objectives is the series of reflections obtained from the parent participants in the programme, because they represent the receiver or "insider" perspective, which was the primary goal of the methodological approach. Second in importance are the insights of the PAFT educators, who could also be thought of as insiders in the sense that they have the closest possible view of the needs of the families they serve. They can be regarded as key informants, offering an organisational perspective combined with an understanding of the world of information poverty and how best to work within it. These two perspectives, although structured by careful research design, are mediated via the perceptions of the researcher who entered into the world of the participants as much as is possible in order to see things from their viewpoint.

Therefore this chapter initially focuses on the ramifications of the parent interview data, examining what they reveal of the experience of information need associated with new parenthood. These important "insider" data were

gathered together into five themes related to the research objectives, as discussed in Chapter 3 (refer pages 75- 78). The results of each theme are discussed in turn, and connections to presently available literature on knowledge gaps and the information poor as outlined in Chapter 2 are explored. Implications of the interviews with educators are interwoven wherever relevant rather than being treated separately. Communication benefits, other than those specifically connected with trust and interactivity between the educators and parents are also discussed, and the chapter concludes with consideration of what inferences can be taken from the data overall, in regard to knowledge gaps and information poverty.

Potential information provider use of these findings is also foreshadowed. These practical applications of the study are listed in more detail in the final chapter of the thesis.

The data from interviews with parents were analysed according to a matrix of five themes, drawing together the research objectives and the interview questions and providing a coherent structure for coding. These codes or themes were (1) belonging and support, (2) motivation, (3) situational need, (4) trust, and (5) other beneficial communicative aspects of the educator–parent relationship. The results of these themes in the data are discussed in turn below.

1 *Belonging and support in information need*

This theme was explored first with parent participants in PAFT so that any tendency among the group to be supported by neighbourhood networks, friends or family close by could be assessed. This sense of support is connected too with parents' sense of belonging in their neighbourhood and community. It was hoped that the extent to which the sample group was able or willing to rely on support and advice close at hand could be established. This factor, together with their motivations, would assist in theorising on information seeking behaviours, especially the role that interpersonal communication networks play in satisfying people's information needs. In the literature review, this capacity of the community to provide support was discussed in the context of "social capital" (Putnam, 1999), "community boundedness" (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996), or in the New Zealand setting, *whanaungatanga* or the extended family tradition within which individuals are nurtured. The extent to which a community or society invests in social capital is of interest in view of the increased vulnerabilities, privations, and potential for isolation in modern ways of living.

As shown in Chapter 2, researchers have been pointing out for more than two decades, beginning with Rogers (1976), that for example "the informal support network [*of families*]... deserves much greater attention ... the issue of whom parents turn to first, second and so forth is critical ... the process of obtaining information needs to be examined" (Hughes & Durio, 1983, p. 211). Even so, the degree to which people rely on interpersonal networks to satisfy their

information needs is still only sketchily understood. For example, Gaziano and O'Leary (1998), whose recent work was discussed in the literature review, report in their study of infant development knowledge gaps in interpersonal settings in Belfast and Minneapolis, that while they found face-to-face information dissemination had the largest effects of a range of transmission modes on knowledge differentials, that interpersonal networks of friends and relatives had less of a relationship with knowledge. They conclude their 1998 paper with a recommendation that "the interpersonal communication format should be studied more frequently than it has been" (p. 46). The results of the present PAFT study add a new snapshot to the album.

The sense of belonging in a community and the support people feel is available to them is relevant to this research to the extent that one of the key antecedents of this project is a tentative framework of characteristics of information poverty proposed by Chatman (1996). The first proposition in Chatman's model states that the information poor "perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them" (p.197). To the extent that this study has intended to build on this and other hypotheses in regard to the informationally needy, this first proposition was an important place to start. It underpins any investigation into how to effectively engage with individuals or groups who are marginalised: do they see themselves as connected to the public domain, or separate from it? If they are in some ways disengaged from community networks, such as social groups, support agencies and the like, they are very likely to regard intervention by the outside world and its agencies with suspicion.

Several characteristics of the group of parents in this study are interesting in this regard. Twelve of the 16 parent interviewees were full-time mothers at home with their babies. For nine of them, the PAFT baby was their first child, while five of the older mothers (aged over 32 years, the median age of the sample) had three or more children. More than 1/3 of the group were single parents. These factors, taken separately or together, can lead to stress for parents of newborns. For example, Durio and Hughes (1983) discuss “the isolation of many single parents with regards to a support network” (p. 211). For others, not necessarily just single parents, the experience of adjusting to the arrival of a first child can bring with it varying degrees of stress; so too can the experience of parenting several very young children, as was the case for some of the mothers in this study. Add to these factors a lack of the support of a partner, an issue with transport or a sense of being confined to the house, and it is quite possible to see the conditions for a type of isolation that could characterise the life and world-view of a parent. So it seemed, from the responses to questions on the belonging and support theme.

About 2/3 of the group reported views suggesting a degree of self-imposed isolation within their neighbourhoods. What was clear also was that almost half, seven of the 16 women, had difficulty getting out of the house because of various transport issues. Alongside an evident stress associated with adjusting to a new baby, was a type of defensive, or self-protective attitude, seen in several individuals who appeared to prefer to keep to themselves. In various ways, the new job of being a parent, the emotional and physical strains on a mother and her partner and family had a real impact on the new family’s

connection with the community. This appeared to ease over time, but the short-term impact was that a woman could “drift away” (Parent 4) from community involvements that might have once served her for support. New networks were needed. Durio and Hughes conclude in their 1983 study, “perhaps the individuals that single parents do consult can be utilised more effectively to deliver information” (p. 212) so to this extent it is useful to identify where support does come from.

While the PAFT parents had often acted on a desire for privacy and therefore preferred to keep to themselves, this is not to say that they were “devoid of sources that might help them”, as Chatman puts it in absolute terms. There was however a strong impression of self-containment. This represents a degree of support for the Chatman model in that she contends that individuals will avoid disclosing difficulties with important issues, a theme that characterised the respondents in a previous New Zealand study sponsored by the Massey University Research Fund that set out to test models of information poverty currently predominant in the USA (Sligo & Williams, 2000). In this case, people also showed a preference for sorting out their problems alone, but while Chatman’s information poor avoid disclosure for fear of risk, in both New Zealand studies the motivation was more to do with a desire to show they could go it alone. Given these characteristics in the present study, of isolation and an “I’d rather do it all myself” attitude, and thus the apparent irony of parents experiencing relative isolation even in densely-populated urban settings, where did the mothers tend to turn if they felt they really did need support?

Two alternatives to neighbourhood networks, which were avoided by 10 of the group of 16, were family members and other social groups. For one parent, isolation led to the seeking-out of other mothers in a like situation and creating a support network for child-sharing. A surrogate family based on friendship may have been preferred over a parent's own intimate family, with whom she might feel various vulnerabilities. One parent who was something of an exception in the way she viewed friendship networks stated that she didn't have time to talk to other parents and make friends, whereas a network of friends may have been a useful information channel for her to pursue.

The social networks important for many parents were of four types: a *whanau* based organisation, coffee groups, the local Playcentre, and close-knit groups of friends. In addition, some families, a little under 1/3 of the sample, were living in an extended family situation where the babies' grandparents also lived in the same dwelling. In this way, while a lack of interest in neighbourhoods was apparent, interviewees were being supported by family members or social networks mostly based on friendship. This tendency was also noted in the Sligo and Williams (2000) study. It was found that in this similar qualitative study of 20 subjects selected as information poor, participants felt that they had access to at least some support in the form of family and community agencies. Similarly also, these interviewees generally remarked to the effect that their neighbours were not important on an everyday basis; however they were less dogmatic about avoiding neighbours and keeping to themselves as were the PAFT participants.

While there was a sense in which the PAFT parent interviewees were insecure and anxious in their role, their response to the anxiety seemed to be to adopt a somewhat staunch attitude, reflecting a belief that they would rather manage by themselves and give the appearance of coping. This was exemplified in one parent's comment that "you don't want people to think that you can't cope" (Parent 1). However this finding is far from that of Chatman (1996), whose studies did not support the prevailing theoretical view that people obtain the information they need from informal networks close to them such as family and friends. The findings of the present PAFT study support this view somewhat, while Chatman's results showed a more definitive picture of lack of communication across the informational divide, "that information of the most critical kind was not being asked for or shared" (p.199).

The interview participants in the present study were asked to state to what extent they were comfortable about seeking advice from their preferred sources. There was no apparent unwillingness to seek advice, but one parent distinguished between advice and help:

I find it OK to ask for advice - my tough one is asking for help (Parent 6).

This viewpoint suggests a sense of vulnerability for her, in that "advice" could be perceived to be a more neutral thing, whereas "help" implies need, empathy, active intervention of some kind, possibly the exercise of judgement, and an expectation of reciprocity that might make a person feel even more diminished in their state of need. This parent's differentiation between the two also implies that advice (in itself a subjective construct of knowledge) is all very well, but it

does not of itself bring about change. “Help” is more practical and useful, perhaps.

The point about advice being a subjective construct is a useful one in regard to the nature of information, since it can be viewed in different ways, especially in connection with *knowledge*, for which it is sometimes erroneously used as a substitute as established in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. Chapter 1 defined information as data that have been systematised in such a way as they are made useful for a particular purpose, or “that have been organised into a form or pattern understood by a human receiver” (Sligo, 1994, p. 62). On the other hand, knowledge was defined as information that has been acquired and internalised so that it is meaningful for that person’s needs, and in addition can be thought of as “information with connotations of expert judgement, insight and understanding” (ibid.) Knowledge, in short, is best thought of as a higher order of information, which is a higher order of data. Buckland (1991) suggests that three principal uses of the word *information* have differentiated between information as process, as knowledge and as “thing”, and that information-as-process implies that people become informed in situations where information is relevant. An inference for the above parent’s differentiation between “advice” and “help” is that, in order for advice to have utility, it needs to be regarded as process, and information users need to be aware, as Buckland puts it, that “being informative is situational”.

This has been a premise underlying the present study, and the results presented in Chapter 4 appear to quite strongly support the situation-specific (Lovrich &

Pierce, 1984) or situational approach to bridging information gaps, discussed in the literature review. This point is examined in more depth in the next two sections of this chapter.

2 Motivation and information seeking

The approach taken in this study has been to explore the "situation-specific" explanation of knowledge gaps rather than the "trans-situational" explanation. These offer different explanations for knowledge gaps, and the consequences of them for lower socio-economic groups. Lovrich and Pierce (1984), for example, building on Ettema and Kline's 1977 hypothesis that motivation can mitigate the effects of education in widening knowledge gaps, argued on the basis of their findings in a knowledge gap study that "the acquisition of ... knowledgeability reflects personal motivations" (p.430). This viewpoint in the literature argues for a much more significant role for "situation-specific" factors, in particular motivational attributes and the "instrumentality of the knowledge" (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984, p. 430) to the individuals concerned.

The trans-situational argument however places emphasis on factors that are inherent in the lower socio-economic condition, such as lesser ability to access information, and which will have their effect regardless of motivation. Dervin (1980) presents a catalogue of studies that have shown "significant relationships between interest or relevance and information seeking" (p. 99). She argues that, more importantly than enabling a predictive ability for observers of information disparities, which is no more helpful than "observer-constructed ideas of

demography or personality” (p. 101), a situational approach will lead to “full recognition of the need for user-constructed perceptions of situations” (p. 102).

In the present PAFT study, motivating factors were extensively explored. In the sense that participants were selected from a situationally-defined group, that is, parents of newborns or infant children, then their situation-specific motivations are likely to have been instrumental in information-seeking behaviours, and trans-situational factors such as education and family income are less likely to explain their response to lack of knowledge. It is argued in the final chapter of the thesis that the situation-specific argument has been shown in this study to be much more apposite than the trans-situational one for the purpose of understanding knowledge acquisition processes in the parenting context selected for the research.

Motivation is not necessarily to be equated with whether the parents referred themselves onto the programme. Seven of the 16 had done so, after hearing about it from others. These seven were proportionally more highly-educated than the nine who had been referred onto the programme by another professional: six of the seven self-referred parents had 6th Form Certificate of higher qualifications, while six of the nine referred by agencies had these higher qualifications. Classic knowledge gap theory would conclude that this is to be expected with better-educated individuals: they have the skills and knowledge, (and possibly the motivation) already to locate and access other useful sources. However, the facts of how the referrals took place are not the only evidence available in the data related to motivation. Extensive comments made by

parents regarding what they wanted out of the programme showed that demographic characteristics such as educational levels were not necessarily the only factors correlated with motivation.

What was found in the group of 16 parents was that while two subjects, one being relatively inarticulate, found it very difficult and perhaps perplexing to think and talk about their motivations, as if their approach to parenting was not a very conscious process at all, the majority had clear paths mapped out for their children in regard to success and achievement, and a role for themselves in accessing resources to facilitate this. While motivation to seek information through PAFT was linked a little to a desire to emulate the good job done by their own parents, what was most striking was that more than 1/3 of the group stated specifically that it was linked to a desire to break existing patterns especially of destructive or violent responses to family life.

Some parents looked on the PAFT information programme quite pragmatically in this sense: it was viewed as a resource for change. A question for reflection on this basis is, did the interactive PAFT approach to information need actually create the sense of agency, of the capacity to change one's situation, which is central to its philosophy as an information provider? In other words, were these parents strongly motivated already, or had they become so, or more so, since enrolling in the PAFT programme? For example, a baby's father, present for a short time in an interview, talked of the potential for violent behaviours towards infant children, and that a lack of knowledge was in effect a vacuum in which "bad things" could happen. PAFT had played an important part in giving

him and his partner strategies to cope with their feelings in responding to their year-old twins.

Another issue for following up is the long-term impact on knowledge acquisition of misinformation regarding the goals of the PAFT programme. One of the interview subjects showed she had an incorrect understanding of what her PAFT educator was there for. She appeared to have rather set her mind against her educator. Rather than PAFT being a mechanism for informing and empowering her so that she could continue to apply new knowledge and understandings to the upbringing of her family, which is the true PAFT agenda, she was frustrated by the service she was receiving. Overall however, if parents were not talking of a desire to change a cycle of parenting behaviours, then they were talking of wanting to get the best for their children, to maximise their chances in life. They were largely united in their desire to avail themselves of a service they felt had the power to change.

Wanting the best for your children is perhaps typical of many parents under any circumstances. So as a feature of the group this is unremarkable in itself, but it is quite evident that the experiences and thoughts shared in the interviews for this study were those of consistently very motivated people. This occurred across a range of socio-economic circumstances. People quite markedly different in other respects shared a drive to create advantage for their children. Thus it can be supposed that the situation of parenting as expressed in the views of the parents in this study has a number of inherent motivations. Education, personality, demography, cognitive ability (most of which were not

measured in this study but could be observer-constructed in the same way as motivation) seemed of little consequence for information seeking in the light of shared experiences connected with the situation that united these people through motivation.

3 *Situational factors*

The argument that situational relevance is an important factor in the information needs of the information poor has been presented in this thesis as one of two rival explanations for the presence and widening or narrowing of knowledge gaps. Situational relevance is the idea that “things that make sense are relevant” (Chatman, 1996, p. 202) and so situationally relevant information is “that which is useful in response to some concern or problem” (ibid.). Other researchers have tested and theorised along these lines, writing of the “situation-specific” approach (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984), of “situationally-bound” (Dervin, 1980) factors including level of interest, motivation, and importance to the receiver, which may have the effect of narrowing knowledge gaps between information rich and poor, and “situationality” (ibid). However, it has also been hypothesised by some theorists that “trans-situational” factors such as a lack of communication skills in less educated people, because these factors exist in all situations, will inevitably mean that knowledge gaps will widen (Ettema & Kline, 1977).

The findings presented in Chapter 4 analysed threads of comment in the interviews regarding the parenting situation. These lead to an impression that,

despite differing backgrounds, levels of skill and confidence, education, households and ways of life, these parents all found themselves at some level on a ladder of information deficit, and some felt more vulnerable about it than others. In other words, their need was not a matter of equivalent magnitude, so that they might all be characterised as classically information poor in Chatman's sense, but a matter of a variable scale. "Some people do need support. People relish that support," commented Parent 2, underscoring a viewpoint expressed quite strongly by the PAFT educators also that no matter what a parent's circumstances, their perception of need in that situation is acute, and their skill as educators is to engage with the family's need at the appropriate level and move the parents forward.

These sorts of views were epitomised by Educator C, who drew a parallel between the range of need she saw amongst parents, and Maslow's theory of motivation with its classic framework of a hierarchy of needs (McLennan, 1987). In the view of Educator C, while low-income parents could be "in survival mode", and her implication here was that they therefore would be unable to progress to higher-level needs until physiological and security needs were met, "you still see parents with struggles across the board ... that affects their parenting, so all types of stress affect parenting".

Severin and Tankard (1997) cite a useful development of Maslow's hierarchy for the purposes of knowledge gap theory, proposed by Weir (1995). His pyramidal model, very similar to Maslow's, also has five levels proceeding from survival and safety, to nourishment and sustenance, to knowledge seeking, enrichment,

and finally frivolity as the tip of the pyramid. Weir argues that an individual's information seeking "is determined by his or her place in the hierarchy" (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 290), and that the person cannot proceed up to another level until current needs are met. The consequence is that

Knowledge gaps occur when information is directed at people who find it irrelevant based on their relative position in the hierarchy (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p.291).

This explanation of knowledge gaps has promising applications to the current study. It seems an apt and plausible model in the light of common motivations of the parents in the study, their responses to the shared situation, and their lack of similarity in purely demographic terms. Weir's hypothesis not only fits the situational relevance argument, but it also validates the trend toward seeking and receptiveness correlating with situation-defined need in the findings based on both observation and interview, and the strongly held views of the trained professionals, the PAFT educators. They appeared to believe that all parents are entitled to information and support at an appropriate level related to different needs.

It is worthwhile highlighting in this context of a hierarchy of need (not that some levels are more worthy of input than others, but the needs are simply different) that the PAFT team at Organisation A took a consciously broad-based approach to whether or not families "should" be on the programme. While their contract specified a quota of a certain category of parent, beyond that the team appeared to be relaxed about any notion of entitlement or some people's need

being greater than others. There seemed to be an acceptance that all parents had been referred or had self-referred because of a need. Therefore all were entitled. At Organisation B, however, there appeared to be more expressed anxiety about this issue, perhaps because a directive had been given by ECD that a more rigorous application of criteria for acceptance on to the programme was to be used. In this way, subtle differences in team and organisational culture were having an effect on programme delivery at each research site in terms of the nature of the families represented.

The reality of being a parent was a situation that seemed for many of the broad range of parents in the sample to be challenging and demanding in a variety of ways – even frightening – and imposing an almost continuous need for new information with which to make sense of it all. So the situation itself drove an information-seeking response, certainly in the direction of relevance and utility. As shown in the earlier section concerning motivation, here was a group of people who were markedly focused on knowledge acquisition for the benefit of their babies. Their stories present compelling evidence in support of the situational relevance hypothesis in regard to knowledge gaps.

The willingness of a parent to seek out information that would support her in her need to solve problems and make decisions appeared to be affected by a complex series of factors. These factors included a desire to cope with the demands of the situation and master the skills, a desire to be seen to be coping, a desire to avoid censure, and the expectations of those around her that being a mother is a natural function and therefore she should just know what to do (and

enjoy it). Tied in with all of these was an issue of self-esteem and a need for reassurance that may be most easily obtained through social interactions with trusted associates. This need for social interaction was seen in the presence of a range of informal social networks such as family and friendship groups that appeared to support the parents where specifically community or neighbourhood ties were of much less significance.

Parent 6 felt that “a lot of parents out there do need help, but they don’t really know where to go.” If this is the case, and it was a viewpoint heard also in interviews with PAFT educators, then this would add another factor to parents’ sense of willingness to step outside of the strictures of social norms and the emotional impact that these might have on them: a lack of awareness of available sources. What begins to be apparent is a combination of factors held in balance for many parents in the study, so that they *appeared* not to need support. A conscious striving to cope and be self-sufficient was connected in some way with inaccurate assumptions from others, and lack of awareness of available sources, to increase parents’ sense of isolation (refer figure 3, page 201). However the view of Parent 6, that “people are not educated enough to know about that sort of stuff until they are right in the thick of it” seems plausible in the light of Dervin’s (1980) contention that individuals do not perceive a need for information until the urgency of their life situation creates the need for information with immediate applicability to their problems, “mov[ing] to inform themselves at the point of need, when old sense has run out” (p.103).

Figure 3 bears some relationship to six propositions about information poverty put forward by Chatman (1996), in particular her proposition 3, that “information poverty is determined by self-protective behaviours which are used in response to social norms” (p.197). This link between Chatman and the present study is evident in data on the “belonging and support” theme. This showed that while parents did avail themselves of family and to a lesser extent friends for support, overall there was a tendency towards self-sufficiency more than information-seeking from such sources. In addition, some parents were evidently selective in their receptivity to some sources, or stated that they did not want to hear other people’s advice. The receptivity issue is developed further in the context of the role of trust in knowledge acquisition, in the next section.

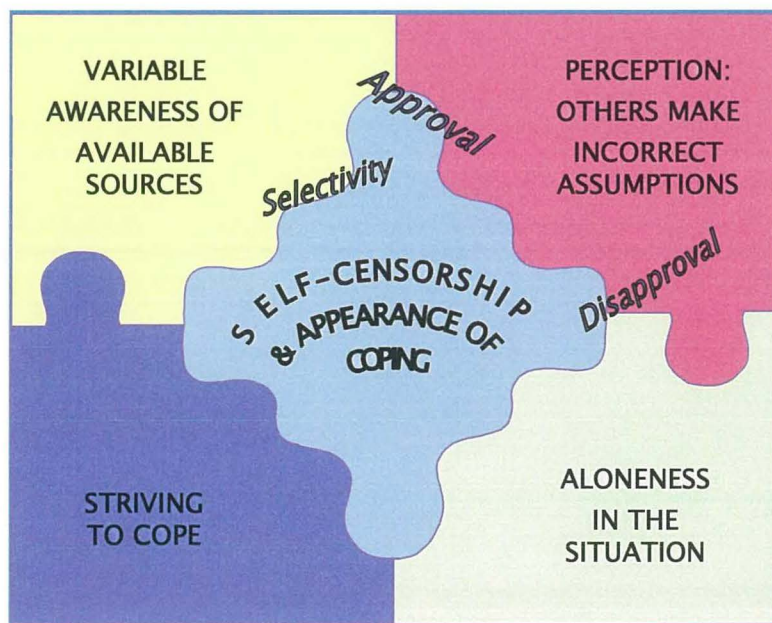


Figure 3: Factors in a self-sufficient response to need, seen in PAFT parents

Moreover, Chatman's "social norms" are reflected in this study in a tendency for parents to perceive a lack of empathy from those around them, and even a sense that faulty assumptions were being made, that they were in possession of sufficient information to be able to do the job unsupported. A sense of self-protection caused by a divergence in norms was evident in the disapproval shown by one parent's friends over a decision she had made in regard to immunising her child. The consequence was that she chose not to talk to them about it, thus increasing her isolation. Expressed approval or otherwise from others about a parent's course of action appeared in this study to be a powerful factor in the degree to which a parent felt able to consult beyond the family, leading to self-censorship and self-protective behaviours. In this regard the findings of the PAFT study support Chatman's view that people "withhold information to preserve ... autonomy" (p. 195) but the consequence of this is that they "cease to be receptive to advice or information" (*ibid.*).

The findings of the study also support, to a limited extent, Chatman's proposition 4, which states: "both secrecy and deception are self-protecting mechanisms due to a sense of mistrust regarding the interest or ability of others to provide useful information" (*ibid.*). Elements of this were seen in a range of interviewee responses indicating that they sometimes ranked sources and the advice available from them in terms of the value of what they had to say. While professionals such as family doctors were sometimes highly regarded, other parents also revealed negative experiences with medical professionals that had left them guarded and negative. Some expert sources were thought of as untrustworthy, intimidating, or sometimes "blasé".

A clear example among several in the PAFT study of a process in which a gulf can open up between agency and user was Parent 7, who had felt compelled to approach a large children's hospital not only because her baby was disabled but because the child appeared to be having fits. The hospital told her there was nothing wrong and sent her home. Whether she had real cause for concern was a matter for the medical professionals to determine; nevertheless the factual consequences for a mother of feeling that her word was doubted were that she had lost confidence in her own mothering, and in the official channels, and at the time of her interview was unwilling to approach the expert institution for fear of being disbelieved. Chatman was of the view that this type of distance between outsider (the mother) and insider (the professional) can have a long-term impact, and that a single negative experience with one professional can lead people to feel distrust for all professionals in that group (Wilson, 1983, cited in Chatman, 1996).

Yet in some way, knowing that friends were going through the same unsettling and even frightening experience was reassuring for those deficient in information. In this way, networks of other mothers going through the same stresses appeared to form of their own accord, and became an important coping mechanism in the search for relevant parenting knowledge.

Many new parents seemed to share a feeling of floundering in a strange new world, where they were expected to just be able to get on and be mothers. The parenting experience, however, as related by the group of PAFT parents, seemed a high-stakes game that was difficult to win. The parameters of the

parenting game seemed in many ways to be determined by other people's assumptions and expectations. In attempting to play by these rules, even though they might be enormously proud of their child, parents found that their self-esteem hinged on the expressed approval of family, friends and society at large, and so they experienced a sense of a bond with those others who were struggling with these issues too. Parent 13 thought

you seem to make new friends – it's kind of like joining a club ... and anybody with children around about the same age, you seem to bond with.

This may be because a circle of friends unconnected with one's family is a safer place to share concerns and fears, and find new ideas, than to expose oneself to judgement in ways that some parents in this study showed an anxiety about. Yet while parents may be vulnerable to normative pressures and tend to be self-protective (factors that, according to Chatman's propositions, could make them difficult to establish trust with and thereby build a process of change) the pride in the baby and its achievements mentioned above could be regarded as a window into the parent's world of informational need that PAFT is also able to use to gain entry, a "motivational potential" (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984) that can be used to build parents' sense of a stake in the knowledge acquisition process.

The situation of need that was the context of this research resulted in a state of anxious coping for the participants, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. This was accompanied by the seeking of social groups with supportive norms, and while it is not possible to state a causal connection between the two findings, it is clear that the parents sought informal social contacts as a means of obtaining a

range of viewpoints in regard to parenting topics. The women appeared to want to share problem solving principally in a social way because they shared a situation or context of need, and they wanted to talk about it. In this way we can begin to see support for a viewpoint being explored in this study that information need and responses to it are defined more by situations than by demographic characteristics such as education. A variety of parents sought other information networks such as social groups or playgroups to meet their information needs, not just the well-educated.

Thus the results of this study present a strong case for a motivational basis to information seeking and the effect of information on the users. This finding is of special significance to organisations and programmes seeking to overcome information deficits: “leaders have the potential to mobilise perceptions of self-interest” (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984, p. 431), and whether one agrees that this should happen for small-scale programme effectiveness reasons, or because larger-scale “democratic polity” depends upon “the capacity of the lower SES segments of the public to demand and receive policies responsive to their interests” (ibid.), obtaining people’s commitment through an understanding of their motivations seems vital.

A problem-solving approach adopted by almost 1/3 of the parents in the PAFT sample was clear. They talked of needing to solve their parenting problems by listening to what a number of people or agencies had to say, and then responding to the particular need on the basis of an intuition. PAFT was viewed as part of this range of sources in the problem-solving process, and parents are

supported in this approach, incidentally, by the PAFT philosophy of getting parents themselves to "define *[the]* personal meaning of *[the]* problem and change," so that the "parent designs *[the]* plans for change" (ECD, 2000, p.1.1). In so doing, PAFT is affirming for parents the validity of the inner voice that was their true arbiter in regard to knowledge that has functionality. Thus these parents did engage in an information seeking response (Kuhlthau, 1991) to their situation, unlike Chatman's outsiders (1996), and in this sense the PAFT parents were not displaying an important characteristic of the information poor. The educators echoed the information as process (Buckland, 1991) concept by talking in their interviews in various ways about being facilitators and providers of choices. In these ways there seems to have been an effective concurrence between parents' needs and information seeking behaviours, PAFT organisational and philosophical goals of change agency, and the practitioners' views of who should have primacy in the knowledge acquisition process.

Despite all this, there is apparently a lingering sense for parents as represented by this sample, that although they want to exercise choice and be problem solvers as explored above, there is, somewhere, such a thing as "the right advice" (Parent 6). It is as though "advice" in the parenting context has a universal truth; that, applied to all situations of need, it will be efficacious, like a medicine. Behind the thinking and talking in the interviews was a feeling that professionals can bring information to you, like items in a doctor's bag. It is possible that these ideas are connected with a sense in which, in becoming a parent, one joins an ancient institution in which there are rites and incantations that can bring order to one's existence, and that novices may be initiated into it

by elders who have acquired valued knowledge, thereby receiving enlightenment.

In the context of the PAFT information programme, such a notion of what “the right advice” can do is naïve on the part of the parent, although the desire for it is understandable. “Rightness” is as perceived by the user of information; it has no intrinsic, objective truth. It is argued by some that meanings are *in* people (Dervin, 1980) and that knowledge becomes true when it has utility for a person, whereas Parent 6 feels that the truth is like a tangible thing possessed by someone, and it can be handed over, as in a transaction. The parent’s role, according to this view, is therefore to perfect her skills in locating the parcel of information, or else in ascertaining who to believe. Parent 6 may be slightly misguided, but does touch on the concept that situational need can motivate in knowledge acquisition, and while contradicting herself by concluding “I just go with my gut feeling” (as opposed to “the right advice”?) she also highlights the importance to parents of “the inner voice”.

The discussion of results in this section has shown a group in which some parents are self-starters, endeavouring to help themselves; others seek “the right advice” through trustworthy channels, or gravitate to others like themselves. All share a readiness to be receptive to information that comes from a trusted source, although they do exercise strong judgements over rightness and trustworthiness. They view themselves as needing information because of the situation they are in, and data from both parents and educators has supported the concept of situational relevance in knowledge acquisition.

4 Trust in knowledge acquisition

What became apparent about the parent participants in this study in Chapter 4 was that this was a group of people often quite isolated and at times they chose to be so. They were strongly motivated to maximise their children's chances and saw PAFT as the vehicle for that; but they felt subject to expectations and assumptions from others, and showed anxiety about this, sometimes choosing to appear self-sufficient. It seems likely therefore that they would be responsive to a highly personalised approach as embodied in a programme like PAFT, especially if they had referred themselves on to the programme, and if the educator was perceived to be experienced, wise and capable. The results presented in Chapter 4 showing that PAFT educators appeared to be widely trusted by their clients are in this sense to be expected. The majority of the group, 13 of the 16, valued the relationship they had with their PAFT educator very highly. There was a sense in which this trust existed because the educators represented a reputable programme; in addition, parents do have the right to ask for a different educator if things don't work out with the first one. The trusting relationship as revealed in this research will now be discussed in more depth.

It was found that the parent educators fulfilled a role that could be characterised as a friend of the family. This was the outcome of both careful matching of the educators to families by the programme coordinator, so that there was as far as possible a suitable match made between personalities, and the long-term relationship and hands-on beneficent interest the educator took in the life of

the family. It was clear from both observation and interviews that the relationship amounted to rather more than the simple delivery of a number of prepared lessons.

The friendship aspect came into play because educators seemed prepared to go beyond the call of duty. In the case of one educator and two of her parents who were interviewed, there was extra special care and effort being put in, for example the educator was making a point of adding extra visits as a morale booster, and providing transport if it was necessary to get a mother out of the house to a PAFT group meeting. It is worthwhile noting also that the educator had made a point of getting on well with the mother of one of these parents, with whom the young woman lived; and observation of a home visit revealed that she had a particularly caring and loving relationship with the young baby as well. In this instance, the information provider as embodied in this individual was interacting in some sense with the whole family context. This was echoed in other less needy families also: a different educator was described as being "very in tune with our family" (Parent 2).

PAFT recommends this closeness, as pointed out at the end of Chapter 4: the curriculum quite clearly discusses the importance of including fathers in the home visits if possible, and "any individuals who are major caregivers of the child, e.g. grandparent" (ECD, 2000, p. PV 1). The intention of the programme is that a strong "connection" be developed between the professional and the family, "building the relationship which is the key to the success of the PAFT programme. A partnership is formed that is very powerful". (ibid.) This is

clearly a professional relationship in the mould of interactivity and collaboration, rather than simply supplying information. The guidelines go on to suggest a key reason why a relationship is necessary:

Parents will not care what the parent educator knows until they know the parent educator cares (p. PV 1).

While this cute antithesis is too facile for the purposes of an academic argument, there is an element of truth in it, and it adds to the evidence gathering in this thesis in support of the hypothesis that knowledge acquisition and sense-making happen best where a truly interactive, interpersonal, responsive communication climate is fostered between source and receiver. It was pointed out in Chapter 2 that Chatman's (1996) propositions regarding the information poor asserted that trust was a significant component in the insider-outsider relationship. This theme was present in the literature almost twenty years ago, with researchers signaling clearly "to more effectively deliver ... educators will have to increasingly rely on the development of procedures that can be integrated into parents' ongoing information and support system (Hughes & Durio, 1983, p.212). More cogently, Gaziano and O'Leary (1998) argue for the viewpoint "that parenting is relationship with knowledge as a guide" (p. 44, citing Pearson 1991, 1996). While they are here referring to the relationship between parent and baby, and "knowledge" equates to professional input of some kind, the maxim could also be called into service to characterise the PAFT educator and parent relationship. If it was to be used in this way, it is interesting that it so closely resembles the metaphor used by Educator C in defining the role she plays in the lives of parents, reported in Chapter 4, that

parents are on a walk, and she tries to find a point along that path at which to fall in step beside them.

One of the factors in parents' receptivity to new knowledge appeared to be the extent to which a professional (in this case, the PAFT educator or Plunket nurse) was like the parent herself – whether she was young and had been recently or was at the time of interacting with the family, a parent of young children. This finding echoes an observation made of the information poor participants in the Sligo and Williams (2000) study, in which information poor interview respondents appeared to make judgements over the utility of information provided by agencies and organisations on the basis of whether or not the persons offering it appeared to be unacceptably different from themselves. Chatman (1996) also contends, based on her own and others' studies, that various qualities of trustworthiness in the information source, such as honesty and being "effective communicators of the need for change" (p. 196), are significant in the responsiveness of the information poor.

So what were these qualities that made PAFT parents more receptive to the educators? They talked of honesty (being "upfront"), so that issues could be addressed by the educator in an open way, but at the same time educators were appreciated if they had an easy ability to reassure and praise parents for what they were doing right. This was valued because it increased people's confidence. Strong interpersonal skills such as being "good talkers and listeners", being friendly, cheerful and good-natured were all spoken of as very appealing qualities. Observation showed that educators were usually welcomed

as friends; parents talked of them in this way. These findings seem to support Chatman's contention cited above. Altogether, the parents appreciated educators who reliably continued to carry out a reassuring monitoring role, giving a sense of security to the parents who felt that the educator was a trusted observer and guide. The presence of trust in the relationship enabled the educator to "challenge a little bit", in the view of one of those interviewed. If this is the true value of trust, that it allows parents to have their comfort zones tested a little by skilful educators, then this challenging is likely to be where effective knowledge acquisition comes from. So being effective as the professional in this context is not just about being friendly and low-key. The skill appears to lie in the educator earning sufficient trust that she is then "in a position to make a difference".

Whaka whanaungatanga, a process described by a very experienced Maori educator as being a full picture of the family situation and needs of the Maori parent and baby, was raised in discussion with the researcher, and seemed a call for the importance of taking the family's world-view, and culture, into account in order to involve them in decision-making and therefore ownership of the need for and responsibility for change. It was strongly suggested by this educator who had worked for years with Maori families that the structured, western-style approach to knowledge as represented in the curriculum, being packages of handouts and pre-ordained visit plans, was unsuited to Maori needs. She expressed the hope, however, that new flexibility built into the programme might allow her to coax Maori families to stay with PAFT.

Approval of educators was not universal in the group. Three parents volunteered guarded criticisms, although in the context of overall approval. One parent felt she was not receiving what the programme, in her estimation, should have been delivering. Her dissatisfactions were decisively expressed, and while she believed her educator was someone she would stop and chat to in the street if they were to meet outside the PAFT context, the relationship certainly involved secrecy and deception (Chatman, 1996) in that the educator had not been made aware of the parent's criticisms. Therefore this was not an open and trusting relationship, and the parent was not benefiting in the way she should have been: her information needs were not being fully addressed. She also felt frustrated at not being able to voice her criticisms openly, because the organisation involved did not provide an anonymous process for evaluation of educator performance. Had this been the case, her concerns might have been voiced and then addressed by the team coordinator, who could have alerted the educator concerned, or the whole team, to be aware of the need to clarify what the programme was actually intended to achieve. In other words, a confidential process could have assisted the team to be more effective.

This parent's dissatisfactions should be placed in the context of her misunderstandings about the purpose of the programme, remembering that she thought it was designed to coach her son. Drawing an inference based on the two observations, one of dissatisfaction and consequent lack of informational benefit, and the other being misunderstanding, and a tentative conclusion could be drawn that the ill-informed client is unlikely to learn much from the

programme. At the very least, such a person could be unreceptive, if not hostile.

Another parent expressed mild irritation over her educator's handling of her two year old son, disapproving of the use of a baby voice. She felt it important that the child be spoken to in a non-patronising way. While in this instance the irritation was no more than that, and had apparently not interfered with the parents' overall appreciation of the value of the programme, it is a salutary criticism for educators to be aware of in their handling of rapport-building with families.

Finally, a third parent had remarks to make about confidentiality, which she felt had been breached by discussions she had overheard between other PAFT staff, apparently in a public context, about other families and their private concerns. The consequence of this for Parent 11 was that she took a pragmatic stance, viewing her educator as a useful resource person "bringing her knowledge" more than in a personal relationship sense, and preferred to keep it on that level: "I will utilise the information L. gives me." Like Parent 10, she had the idea that the educator had a clear function: "like a tutor ... quality time for N" (Parent 11). Whether or not this is a desirable client response is for PAFT teams, or other provider groups, to assess in regard to their own function, team goals and values, and so on. However in the context of this research, in which clear benefit has been demonstrated in the commitment of parents to the information programme where relationships with their educators are strong, and therefore receptivity and learning are enhanced, it seems likely that an erosion of trust as

in this example will alter the nature of the outcomes for the family. The erosion of trust had not yet become cynicism in the case cited, but it is not difficult to imagine that this could occur.

5 *Communication benefits in the PAFT model*

Parents noted that many aspects of the “home visit” arrangement, monthly over the course of three years with their own mentor/instructor, were extremely worthwhile. This highly personal approach, which invites the parents to be fully engaged in the learning process, is likely to be more effective than simply exposing new parents to a set of printed handouts or a book, and leaving them to it. A simple example of the communication benefit in this process is that the predictability and routine of the visits meant that parents could at the very least think of questions to ask at the next visit, and in some cases would write them down in readiness. Thus there is the potential for an effective ongoing dialogue that loops back and forth across an extended time period, and this continuity encourages and reinforces information-seeking behaviours.

5.1 A ripple effect

A ripple effect was noted in Chapter 4 in connection with the impact of knowledge acquired from PAFT, and it was observed in several forms. It was found as a pattern occurring within families, where newly acquired knowledge was both being passed on to other family members because it involved useful parenting strategies, and new interpersonal skills were being practised by

parents as well as being taught to children. Two cases showed this: one parent talked of teaching her child assertion, now that she had learned to utilise it herself; another had learned to be more interactive with her child.

The term “ripple” has been used to describe what was noted, because it appeared that the information brought to a family by the PAFT educator caused an impact, somewhat in the way that a stone does when being thrown into a pond: it does more than sink. The PAFT information had its initial impact in a close circle around the parent within a family context, but it was possible also to observe a wider circle moving out from the nucleus. In general terms, the ripple effect noted in this study is a discernible impact of information, moving beyond the original context in an informal way to other contexts and applications associated with interpersonal networks. This effect is distantly related to the idea of a “snowball” effect in interpersonal networks as it is used in the context of purposeful sampling for research within a population. Patton (1990) uses a snowball metaphor to describe a method for obtaining a sample: *[it]* “gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new ... cases” (p. 176) through following up on the contacts of informed people.

The ripple process that was noted, discussed in more detail below and summarised in Table 3, is evidence of interpersonal networks in use, as defined by Margaret Higgins (in Sligo, 1990) in her paper on network analysis. She states “networks are formed by the ties between individuals” and that they form “when individuals need information, when they have ideas to impart, when they need help to solve problems or, quite simply, when they need friendship and support” (p. 169). In the PAFT study, networks were called into service by

parents for all of these reasons, but in an informal way rather than formally, “when the connections are made through the requirements of the position in the organisation” (p. 170).

Since this study did not set out to conduct network analysis as such, no discussion can take place of such interpersonal network features as specific units of interaction, the numbers of people involved in particular groups, the frequency of communication, to what extent it reflected the original PAFT information, and so on. These are signals for future research; in this context, it is sufficient to note that an effect of PAFT interactions between the basic dyad of educator and parent was noted, and is discussed below.

- *Ripples in the social – spatial dimension*

A ripple effect was seen within PAFT families, as explained in 5.1 above, and was also seen in the form of PAFT knowledge moving beyond families and into communities. Firstly, some parents talked of having heard about the programme through the enthusiastic recommendation of friends who had been involved in it. PAFT activity in the community, then, had spread at least in part by word of mouth, and appeared to have created receptivity in potential users by virtue of its reputation. This is interesting in regard to diffusion of information within a community: it is evidence in support of studies conducted in a development context in which, when people were asked where they had heard about a new idea, “the mass media were almost never reported. Interpersonal channels with

peers totally predominated in diffusing the innovation" (Rogers, 1973, p. 228). Network analysis more specifically would need to be conducted to follow up the PAFT finding in future research.

Secondly, movement of knowledge was occurring in the PAFT study with parents actively distributing copies of highly regarded handout material, or sharing with other parents verbally what they had learned that month. This networking was informal, in the sense of being unconnected with the formal processes of the organisations concerned, and possibly grew in directions of need. This may be the strength and advantage of informal networks as a means of diffusion of information, and again would need to be followed up in a more specific study of the behaviour of PAFT networks.

These social linkages were being actively fostered by the PAFT educators, who also established supportive networks in the form of mothers' groups. In this new context, more interactions would presumably be widening the impact of new ideas. One of the educators shared the belief in her interview that PAFT should let knowledge "drift" in the community, a figure of speech that underlines the idea that knowledge only has an existence, as distinct from information, when linked to relationships. This individual was concerned to challenge the idea that knowledge can be owned by an organisation, in the sense of a curriculum to which only some lucky people may have access. She may have been pointing out that once parents receive the knowledge, it becomes theirs, their own construct, to do with it as they see fit. Finally also, educators made use of other networks such as professional agencies with which

they were in contact professionally to find alternative means of assistance for their families should this be necessary. The ripple effect in all of these ways involves social linkages in a spatial sense.

- *Ripples in the temporal dimension*

This relational ripple effect is underscored as a finding of the present study by the ongoing dialogue between the parents and their educators that was noted above, looping back and forth over time, because the dialogue has a retrospective and a predictive element. Interviewees talked of preparing themselves with questions for the next educator visit, so the time period involved was likely to be 1–2 months, since parents might also ask questions they had thought of since the previous visit. In addition, parents commented that they would continue to apply the knowledge they had acquired in the future. Anecdotal evidence available here was imprecise, but nevertheless Parent 13, for instance, stated “the ideas are just going to be carried on always”. Clearly this is not measurable in this case (although it could be tested specifically in a very long-term longitudinal study of a group of PAFT parents and their children) but the parent’s comment represents her perception of enduring change brought about by her newly-acquired knowledge. A ripple effect in knowledge acquisition through interpersonal linkages thus also had a temporal dimension in this interviewed group.

Importantly also, the temporal dimension incorporates the educators’ interpersonal communication behaviours. They took advantage of parents’

willingness to anticipate the next visit and ask questions; indeed it was observed that parents not only anticipated, they did so with excitement. Therefore educators reinforced previous learning by inviting parents to recall incidents or developments since the previous visit, one month prior; they reinforced through summary and repetition of ideas used within the session, and reference to previous activities or developments from unspecified prior occasions; they foreshadowed what changes parents should expect and notice in their child over coming weeks or months. Retrospective and predictive communication behaviours were rooted in the educators' awareness of their value as reinforcement for effective knowledge retention.

Table 3 summarises the spatial and temporal impacts of knowledge in the families and communities of which the sample for the current study was a part:

<i>Dimension in which "ripple effect" occurred</i>	<i>Type observed</i>	<i>Variations of types</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Spatial, or social-structural	Knowledge is actively handed on within a family	Adult to adult	Passing on tips for handling children's behaviour
		Adult to child	Teaching/modelling assertion
	Knowledge is actively handed on beyond family to community	Active distribution of PAFT knowledge	Photocopying PAFT handouts; sharing new PAFT ideas at a playgroup
		PAFT sponsored networks	Regular meetings of teenage/young mothers
		PAFT reputation spread by word-of-mouth	Recommendations heard from friends
	Temporal	The PAFT relationship is predictive, current and retrospective	Parents' expectation that knowledge will be available in future
References are made to past and future visits and developments		Educator communication behaviours	Repetition, summary, foreshadowing
		Parents' recollections and observations	"Oh, that's just like when..."
		Parents believe they will continue to apply knowledge in future	"The ideas are just going to be carried on always".

Table 3: Impact of knowledge acquired in the PAFT sample group, in space and time.

Thus it is possible to set up a framework containing a web of connections forming around the nuclei of PAFT interactions. Most importantly, relational linkages were made in a number of ways in this group, which embed PAFT messages in user-constructed systems of meaning. Dervin (1980) describes this view of the source-receiver relationship as “inherently a creative process” (p. 93), arguing “information is a construction, a product of observer and observation” (p. 91) and citing Conant (1979) as stating “information is associated with the *relation* between message and receiver” (Dervin, 1980, p.91). While it might be more valid in the context of definitions of information and knowledge established early in this thesis to substitute the term *knowledge* for the term *information* as used by Dervin, above, her emphasis on user-constructed systems of meaning lend weight to the viewpoint that receivers in the PAFT context were making use of the information they acquired in ways that made sense to them, and that this sense was obtained through connections with other people.

5.2 Variety of channels

Discussion of informational benefit on a micro level in the PAFT programme should also include the use of a range of channels, in particular the complementary use of written materials in each home visit. In Chapter 4 it was noted that 15 of the 16 parents valued the textual material used as an integral part of the programme very highly, for a wide range of reasons. Also important was the two-level readability feature of the handout material, so that it was available in a standard and a simplified version, enabling better access to the

information by a wide range of parents at different literacy levels. This was another matter over which educators needed to exercise skill, because it was thought important that parents not feel offended by any apparent assumptions being made.

One call from a parent interviewee for improving the use of the paper-based channel was a suggestion that parents be provided with something like a workbook that they would be asked to fill in, so that they would be more actively involved in thinking about the printed handouts. Most parents reported filing the handouts in their PAFT folder; it is possible that this was an end of their handling of them. For ongoing reinforcement and retention of information, the users of it would need to be more engaged with the material.

The same parent who suggested the above idea also would have preferred to receive all the handouts as a bound book at the start of the programme, so that

You can actually read on ahead ... anticipate maybe ... I would rather I think be looking forward [*than back*] (Parent 1).

It is interesting in the light of this suggestion to reflect also on the views expressed by an educator in a separate interview, who felt it important to stop parents always looking ahead to the next stage:

I think one of the challenges is keeping ... letting parents appreciate where their child's at right now. And sometimes they don't. None of us do... but it's pulling them back – so I remember in particular one parent that wanted the stuff ahead

all the time, and I'm - that was one effort that I was - to pull them back and involve them right here and now, and that's a skill! So that they - are not always looking to tomorrow, they're looking at today a bit better. (Educator C).

However this viewpoint should not be taken as being in conflict with reference made in section 5.1 to the way educators consciously used reinforcing strategies such as summarising, linking and foreshadowing, all in various forms, and all based on an expectation of continuity. Therefore they would focus parents' attention to a certain extent on what developments to expect in the short-term future, and then these points could form the basis of discussion at the next visit. In so doing educators invited reflection, and fostered an observant attitude and an active engagement in the process of learning. For example, open questions were used to feed this process. Educator C's comments above are not inconsistent with this future orientation: she was simply acknowledging the need to skilfully balance a range of strategies in order to cultivate observation skills on the one hand, but on the other to contain parents in the "here and now" so that they could fully value it, and "not always look to tomorrow".

An hour-long PAFT session was, as observed in 13 home visits, a very active, "hands-on" style of learning. Parent 13 noted that "when you see things done it can kick in a little bit differently than sometimes something might be said, and that will 'sit' better." The combination of a tactile or kinaesthetic learning style, with auditory and visual styles, is likely to suit different individuals' learning needs, while for others the combination simply works well as reinforcement. For one interviewed and observed parent, because the home visit demonstration

involved simple, everyday items and objects being used often in unexpected ways as toys (such as clothes pegs and a plastic milk bottle), there was likely to be interest and memorability value in the novelty, especially if the educator skilfully referred to what was happening in the light of the topic for the visit.

Therefore a planned, careful and conscious use of instructional strategies involving verbal and non-verbal elements and based on an understanding of different learning styles was something both valued by and beneficial to the participants in this study. This appears to have been a strong feature of the PAFT approach to knowledge acquisition, and educators showed in their practice that they were not simply in the business of information dissemination, but of enabling active learning. This judgement is based on parents' reflections and observation of interactions in the study. Other information providers could find valuable applications of these instructional strategies for their own purposes.

6 *Dialogue in knowledge acquisition*

The role of dialogue is linked with the second section of this chapter concerning the role of trust in knowledge acquisition. As one of the educators put it, "trust is the basis of any change", and trust is the basis of dialogue between the parent and educator. Trust and dialogue are central to the concerns of this study, since it sought to understand and assess the significance of interactivity in effective transmission of knowledge, especially in the light of Dervin's (1980)

critique of the hypodermic model of mass communication, and her contention that “communication campaigns must become receiver-oriented” (p. 105).

To begin, the reader should consider that in advocating a “strengths model”, PAFT takes a clear philosophical stance, and encourages educators to develop a supportive and empowering approach rather than moving in on families as an expert from the external world, imposing solutions without engaging the family in the process. In this sense the philosophical basis of the researched world of this study has been that the individual receiver has primacy in the communicative relationship between organisational source and receiver. The programme is fortunate to have, at least in the group of educators interviewed for this study, highly committed frontline staff who showed a dedication to the needs of the parents in their charge in their comments and their observed work. They also brought relevant and useful experience to their work, from professional backgrounds in health and education. In this sense, and within the framework of definitions established in Chapter 1, they are an embodiment of knowledge (being a user construct) rather than information (being data that has the potential to be informative).

The fact that the communicative relationship took place and developed within a domestic setting means that at the most elementary level, the dialogue as observed in this study occurred against a background of familiarity, creating important conditions for trust and rapport. PAFT literature talks of the “personal visit ... the heart of the PAFT programme” (ECD, 2000, p.PV1), clearly elevating interpersonal communication to a position of top priority. The

educators reflected this priority as well. In different ways they emphasised the importance of the relaxed approach, the interactive relationship, and a sense of relief to some families that the educator was not a crisp, authoritarian type of professional but a friendly, ordinary person like themselves.

Furthermore, parents talked of the importance for them of the unhurried, conversational nature of the home visits. Thus the development of an effective climate within which receptivity could be fostered was linked also to a social aspect of the interactions. Yet most educators were aware of a duty to transfer knowledge, and therefore the need to avoid a temptation to simply socialise. For this reason there was a sense in which they fostered a relaxed style, but the interactions were a somewhat heightened form of friendly chat, being carefully planned and structured to achieve pre-determined learning outcomes. Under best conditions, meaning that there were no external distractions such as illness or major stress for the parent and child, and there was conscious and effective management of communication strategies by the educators, dialogue rather than discussion took place. The distinction is made here in the sense defined by Brown and Keller (1979, cited in Hanna & Wilson, 1991, p. 95) in which dialogue is “a communication event in which each participant understands himself or herself as both speaker and listener. Dialogue can be characterised ... [*as*] fundamentally empathic”.

Again referring to its philosophical foundations, PAFT defines its educators as being “agents” (causing a process to be set in motion) in a strictly collaborative way that provides an avenue for parents to take charge of and internalise the

need for change. This organisational view was echoed in the thoughts of the educators themselves, who saw themselves, for example, as validating the experience and knowledge already present in the parent, working with this rather than imposing an agenda largely defined by the external world. In this sense the programme is fundamentally about engaging with individuals through their unique needs, world-views, situations, motivations, and strengths, and could be seen as a prototype, in Dervin's terms, of "user-constructed perceptions of situations" (p. 102). The beliefs underpinning the use of a mentoring type of interpersonal relationship as the building block of change fall easily into the situationality definition:

... predicting and understanding how people use information and cope with events must be based on their perceptions of how they see the situations they are in (Dervin et al, 1980, cited in Dervin, 1980, p.101).

A further part of the underlying philosophical thrust of the PAFT programme is the principle that over the long term, PAFT parents will become actively engaged in responding to their families' needs, and even become more active members of their communities, such as in local schools. A series of follow-up studies conducted in the US to evaluate the impact of the programme on randomly-selected families, beginning with the 1985 pilot, confirms that this has occurred in the US: "PAT parents demonstrated high levels of school involvement, which they frequently initiated" (Pfannenstiel, 1995, cited online, 2000) and took an active role in their child's schooling. Educator C responded to this idea enthusiastically, feeling an empathy with a programme "that would help support *[parents]* all the way through, and *[so they would]* not leave it to the system".

Again, what seems apparent is that study of one-to-one human interactions at the micro level, or “the mechanisms of information processing and behaviour formation”, can be linked “with the processes of societal change and development” (Pan & McLeod, 1991, p. 149). In other words, what PAFT initiates within the nucleus of the family evidently has an impact beyond that context.

On the societal level, it is interesting to reflect on the comments of one of the educators that women need advice about babies in a common sense, motherly way. This view represented a concern that PAFT has a responsible position and it should fulfill a role, as far as it is able to, left vacant by the changing nature of families in contemporary life. Women often do not have ready access to older women in their family who could offer them the wisdom of their experience, and this is an outcome of increasingly fragmented family structures. The PAFT educators were talked of by parents as fulfilling a type of motherly or aunty role, so it may be that the information provider agency in this instance is the basis of a new type of “family” network.

Another important facet of the dialogical platform of the programme is the role played by parents’ perceptions. One educator referred to the fact that some parents will look on her as “The Professional”, in the sense of someone to trust and who should be heeded, whereas others will take the view that because she is “A Professional” she is someone to be indifferent to because she comes from a world unlike their own. In these cases, parents may decide that what the educator has to say does not apply to them; or they may take a more pragmatic position, wondering “what can I get out of this person?” (Educator E). This type

of response is similar to Chatman's "sense of mistrust" (1996, p. 197) in her information poor subjects. In the PAFT study, this perspective was reflected clearly in the case of one parent in the study, and elements of a distant attitude concerned mostly with the utility of the service were noticed at times with some others.

Although this perceptual barrier was not a strong feature of the sample, the fact that one of the educators reported it as being something with which she was familiar suggests that PAFT professionals do encounter people reasonably regularly who fit the classic Chatman (1996) model of information poverty. Chatman's second proposition (p. 197) states "information poverty is ... influenced by outsiders [*sic*] who withhold privileged access to information"¹. Her contention is that informationally needy people live an existence defined by "expected norms of behaviour" so that they "define those things that are important to pay attention to and those things that are not" (p. 194). In this way, certain interlopers from the external world, such as professional people, are regarded with suspicion. The PAFT parents, observed, interviewed and talked of by educators, did exhibit this tendency to a degree. Adding to this type of attitudinal barrier are cultural barriers that educators need to be able to handle or resolve, such as when families of different cultures approach matters like discipline of small children differently to that dictated by the norms and laws of mainstream New Zealand society. Conflicting values may be an issue

¹ Chatman appears to use the terms "insiders" and "outsiders" inconsistently in her paper, so that while she intends that the reader should think of the informationally marginalised as "outsiders" and those in possession of powerful knowledge as "insiders", in the above quotation it appears that she uses the terms in reverse.

where a family's cultural traditions are at variance with the teachings of PAFT, derived from Western beliefs about child-rearing and appropriate behaviours.

The educators do have a number of keys with which to unlock a distant parent's interest, however, in a way that most other information programmes would not be able to do. Other barriers need to be taken into account in the PAFT context, though, such as family tensions, money worries, health and so on, and for these reasons the educators learn to engage with the whole context of need. Yet there are openings to the world of the family, despite the barriers. Earlier discussion has explored the almost natural receptivity parents have to the professional because they are proud of their child, and delight in being told what they are doing well. It was also reported that parents value a written record of these achievements, and they receive one every month. Considering that parents can feel very vulnerable over whether they are measuring up to norms imposed on them by the external world, officialdom needs to find a window, an access point, into a meaningful dialogue with parents that moves away from norms, engaging with them where they are in reality. Pride can be this window, together with the affirmation that parents feel as an outcome of regular reinforcement of what they are doing well. These positive feelings are intrinsic motivators that educators can use to gain a co-operative response.

In respect to potential barriers creating a classic "insider/outsider" perception, it is useful also to recall that PAFT gives a clear philosophical message to its educators in the curriculum manuals briefly referred to in the final section of

Chapter 4. Here it was mentioned that PAFT advocates a “strengths model”, as opposed to what it calls a “deficit model” of the organisational relationship as embodied in the educator’s work with the parent. The key to short-circuiting a potential for the educator to be seen as an interloper lies in affirming that the parent already possesses valuable knowledge and expertise. This allows the educator to strengthen, to supplement, to be complementary, rather than impose knowledge that creates a distance by underlining what is lacking. The insider/outsider and strengths/deficits dichotomies are returned to in the final section of this chapter.

Educator F talked of the continuity of dialogue as a spiraling process. She was referring to the type of predictive and retrospective communications that are possible when the participants are confident of the long-term, discussed earlier as a “ripple effect”. Spirals and ripples are both circular processes, but a spiral has an extra dimension: movement to another level. Educator F’s choice of the spiraling image was contextually appropriate. This is because one third of the parents as well as the educators talked of “breaking the cycle” and “changing cycles [*being*] pivotal to the educator’s role”, but PAFT first principles also centre on a belief that educating parents is about lifting them to a changed state, ideally autonomous if they are not so already. A type of transformation is the goal. Another educator believed it possible to even change the cycle in regard to people’s valuing of the written material – “you can change that”. A belief was also expressed by some educators that parents are owed a level of information that they can cope with *now*, but accompanying this recognition of the now should be an expectation that parents can and will grow to a new level.

Educator E looked for a “shift in behaviour”. These views are connected with the PAFT philosophy of growth to a state of change. In many ways, then, it has been shown that processes of movement, change, agency (remembering that educators used analogies such as catalyst, planter of seeds and “growing families”) and transformation characterise the impact of the informative dialogue in PAFT, as represented in Figure 4. An extra dimension is required to stretch the unchanging cycles upwards into spirals.

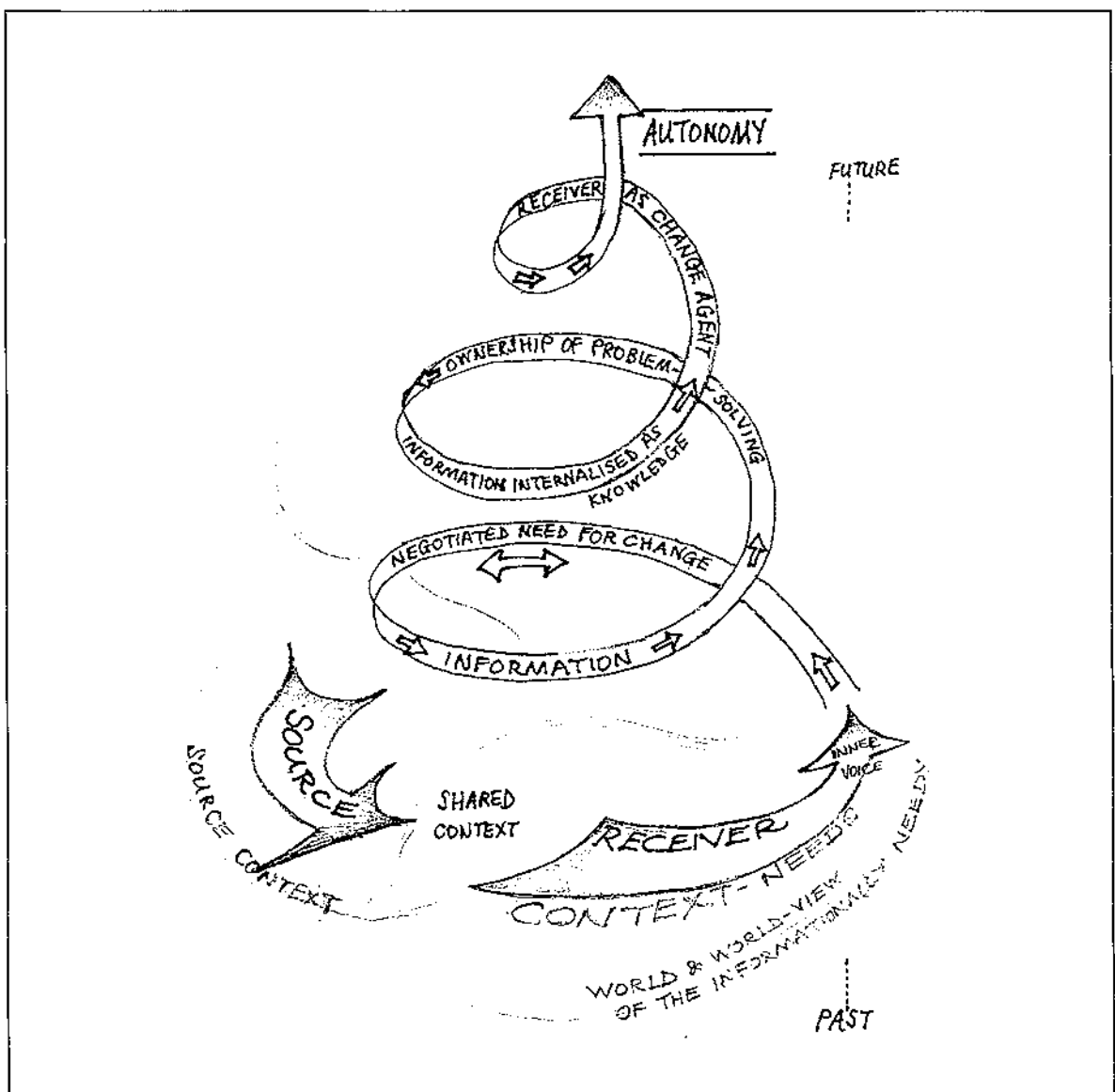


Figure 4: A three-dimensional model of knowledge acquisition

7 *Implications for Information Poverty*

It has not been possible to generalise in any conclusive way on the basis of demographic characteristics in this research in connection with the experience of information need or the particular experience of parenting a newborn, partly because of the small size of the sample. If such a correlation had been evident, the study might have given support to classic knowledge gap findings. In fact, while some tendency seemed to emerge in the group of parents for younger first-time mothers and the Maori and Pacific Island mothers to be less secure in their role, there were exceptions that made the trend dissolve away, especially because the sample size was small. For example, a single Maori mother of four children was very strong in her aspirations and parenting practices; her older age and experience may have been explanations for this. A young single parent living at home with her own parents was also strong in herself and her approach to bringing up her son. Other examples cancel out any simplistic conclusions; it has not even been possible to state that the older mothers with more children cope best with new babies. Young women with one child did also, for a range of reasons. Those mothers with less education were not necessarily less resourceful in information seeking. The important trends are those noted in the first six themed sections of this chapter.

It has been shown throughout Chapter 5 that the most useful basis for generalising about knowledge gaps in this instance is a group of factors arising from situational need. These women tended to be reluctant to *show* a need for assistance, but had established contexts for themselves in which they felt able

to share problems, and these contexts were friendship networks where trust was a given. The ramifications of this for organisations working within this or similar cultural contexts are that people *can* have a tendency to avoid making their need for information overt, but are accessible through social networks. These apparent characteristics are less marked than Chatman's (1996) absolutes. They are however useful evidence of the need for organisations to know their target audience well, to interact with them in as direct a way as possible, and to foster group contexts in which knowledge can be shared. Even the most isolated parent in the study, Parent 14, who lived in a drug rehabilitation centre and had little contact with a regular family or neighbourhood in the normal sense, benefited a great deal from the regular interest shown in her baby by PAFT. Perhaps parents like her need the social aspect of the programme more than most.

Another finding was that anxiety associated with situational need makes individuals vulnerable to value judgements and the assumptions of other people, which can have the effect of increasing their reluctance to show a need. Institutional insensitivity was highlighted by the stories of a small number of participants in this research but nonetheless information providers should be aware of the vulnerabilities of those they might wish to reach, and plan to minimise unwittingly hardening an insider/outsider rift. The insider/outsider dichotomy has not been especially helpful to the objectives of this study. The aim here was to step into the gulf and find out what works to bridge it, especially by exploring the importance of trust as signalled by Chatman (1996) and the effectiveness of an actively fostered interpersonal relationship between

professional and client. The assumption of distance between source and receiver perpetuates and mythologises the notion of information poor as outsiders.

Of great interest and use for the purposes of this study is the fact that the insider/outsider concept is paralleled in the PAFT documents by a “strengths/deficits” framework. This appears to offer a way to avoid the distrust and distance that Chatman believes are the fundamental issues to overcome in changing the state of need of the information poor. Because the PAFT strengths model necessitates the bringing together of the world of the source and receiver, or insider and outsider, it denies the power of perceptual distance, and validates the receiver’s perspective. In a “deficits” situation, the receiver (parent) is passive, and the knowledge of the source (educator) is unavailable to her independently. This is a similar concept to Chatman’s information poverty. PAFT offers an alternative stance.

In this frame of reference, the PAFT “strengths model” would make a useful starting point as a fresh model of information deficit (rather than poverty). Adapting the PAFT strengths model, it could be re-framed as in Table 4:

	INFORMATION STRENGTH	INFORMATION DEFICIT/NEED
View of situation, need for change	Individual defines need for change and shares it with the professional	Professional defines situation through careful observation
	Individual sees self as active player in the situation and need for change	Situation externally caused & separate from individual
Source-receiver relationship	Professional relies on individual's personal knowledge	Individual relies on professional's knowledge
	Professional supports individual with expert knowledge as a consultant & enabler for change	Individual is passive; professional is the leader & expert
	Professional's knowledge & relationship strengthens individual's ability for change	Specialised expert knowledge separates professional from individual
Nature/process of change	Individual with the support of the professional, is the change agent	Professional is the change agent
	Individual with the professional, defines personal meaning of problem & change	Professional is given power to create individual's meaning of problem & change
	Individual designs plans for change with professional's input	Change is initiated by professional & individual follows professional's plans
	Change is a naturally occurring process directed by individual with support of professional	

*Table 4: A user-defined model of information strength and information deficit
- adapted from PAFT strengths model (ECD, 2000, p. PVI1)*

The question for organisations and their professional agents then becomes, how can we shift the individual who operates within a context of deficit into the context of strength? The issue is no longer that there is a distance between the

two worlds and that this is a given, based on certain immutable facts. The issue is now one of approaching the individual through their situation; that the problem of knowledge gaps is in fact one involving a continuum; and that information need can be seen as a hierarchy, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs discussed in section 3 of this chapter (Weir, 1995, cited in Severin & Tankard, 1997), so that all individuals are at some point in a progression of information-seeking skill.

Thus the situational approach taken in this study has made it possible to integrate various theories, for example, those of Chatman and of Weir as in the previous paragraphs. In addition, theories connecting motivation and utility of information in closing knowledge gaps are supported by the situational approach taken in this study. The parents were seen to be seeking information on the basis of strong motivation, and their situation gave them a need for useful, timely and relevant advice. In these ways the study contributes empirically to the situation-specific argument about knowledge gaps. The consequences of these findings for organisational users are that self-interest, and utility of information for the individual and her family, are key planning and development considerations for effective knowledge transfer.

Above all, this study has demonstrated the applicability of a receiver-focused information programme in the manner of Dervin (1980). PAFT has been shown through the stories of 16 parents and six professionals as a programme in which the trusting relationship brings with it many communication advantages. The findings demonstrate that knowledge gaps can be effectively overcome by

interpersonal networks, and not only through a one-on-one relationship. The advantages appear to spread more widely into the community.

On the basis of evidence and argument presented so far, the lived experience of information need is best understood from a specific situational perspective, and in this way it does have some identifiable characteristics. These are best explained by Weir (1995, cited in Severin & Tankard, 1997) in his hierarchy of information need. This hierarchical view argues that knowledge gaps exist when information is directed at people who find it irrelevant depending on their position in the hierarchy. This model is a useful reference point for the sample in the present study, since it could explain why such a demographically diverse group of people could be benefiting in different ways from the PAFT programme. PAFT is designed to cater for people's information needs with individualised programmes, and therefore, using Weir's hypothesis, no PAFT parent should find the information irrelevant since educators know parents and families so intimately. The exceptions are those individuals (one in the present study) with whom the professional has not clearly communicated and trust and openness are therefore somewhat compromised.

Finally, the findings of the present study are most applicable in organisational settings. They are evidence of the workings and effects of interpersonal communication in the provision of information to target groups. Unlike trans-situational perspectives, which offer distant frameworks within which to understand the receiver, the situational perspective provides an opportunity to identify need, design information programmes and evaluate the effects on a

human level and within a known situation. These are findings for practitioners as much as for theorists. They validate a re-framing of information poverty as a continuum of deficit to strength, and the involvement of the individual in defining the parameters of change is proven in this study to be effective in shifting people along that continuum towards a position of strength relative to where they began.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study was exploratory, aiming to advance understanding of the role played by interpersonal communication in knowledge acquisition. Taking its cue from signals in knowledge gap and information poverty literature, that the information user's context of need and interactivity between source and receiver should be examined more closely, the study took an in-depth look at the way the PAFT information programme works to overcome lack of knowledge. The basic structural unit of the programme is a three-year relationship between trained educators and parents of newborn babies; the mechanism for knowledge transfer is the "home visit", a highly personalised strategy for creating individualised learning for each parent enrolled in the programme. The exploratory intent of this research was focused on examining to what extent this was an effective model for information campaigns, and why it was effective.

The objectives were achieved in a number of ways. It was found that the dyadic mode of interpersonal communication between educator and parent was on the whole a very effective means of transferring knowledge, for reasons such as that it was ongoing, friendly, personalised and involved a combination of communication channels, and most participants reported observable benefits. Parents were also found to be resourceful in seeking information from other interpersonal networks: not so much within their neighbourhoods, but from social or friendship groups of other parents.

Therefore groups were also reported to be important in knowledge sharing in regard to parenting. Moreover, the study found that trust was a vital ingredient in parents' acceptance of informational sources. PAFT was almost exclusively reported in favourable terms, often to the detriment of other sources such as health professionals. PAFT educators regarded trust as a prerequisite for change.

The nature of the objectives of the project as stated in Chapter 1 was such that the work took an implicit theoretical approach, by building into its design an assumption that interpersonal communication is likely to be significant for knowledge acquisition. This assumption places the work firmly in the area of communication research that has focused, or called for a focus in the future, on the receiver or insider perspective, and the validity of the situational frame of reference in which close knowledge of the user's needs and perceptions is a given. The situational approach has proved to be very useful, in that the research methods used (principally in-depth interviewing and also observation) provided close-up snapshots of situation and insider, which were appropriate and necessary given the goals of the research. It also permitted reflection on extant theories, as discussed in the previous chapter, and gave a detailed picture of a group of informationally needy individuals in a local setting which will be useful for a growing body of New Zealand knowledge gap research.

1 Key Findings

1.1 Interpersonal networks

The data from the PAFT study showed a safety net of informational support being accessed by parents through other means, despite a degree of isolation in a neighbourhood sense, and a tendency to appear to cope. While an overall preference was seen in the group for self-sufficiency in a neighbourhood sense, the parents were being actively helped by their own close families, and sought out other networks principally where others in a like situation could be found, such as coffee groups and Playcentres. It is likely, on the basis of responses in this study, that parents are more comfortable seeking out ideas and information in such a setting, and that information seeking occurs on a basis of trusting relationships.

For this reason, the current PAFT practice of facilitating mothers' groups such as for younger parents, especially where regular and long-term contacts can be maintained, is recommended as an important adjunct to the home visits. These visits focus on a one-on-one relationship between educator and parent, and could in some circumstances allow the "I can cope by myself, here in my own house" (with the help of PAFT) response to embed itself. There is the potential here for other sources and networks to be perceived by a parent to be unnecessary.

Little commitment to formally organised group activities was evident in the interviewed group. (These are different in nature to the regular young mothers' group mentioned above: group activities are such events as picnics

and outings.) One parent had joined the programme with the express purpose of meeting other younger mothers like herself, but her desire to do so had not been fulfilled in the almost three years she had been involved. She had not found the group meetings particularly interesting; meanwhile she had discovered Playcentre, and her social support needs were being met that way. Many other factors were involved in mothers appearing to accord the group activities a low priority. A principal one was an issue with transport. Another was an overall degree of difficulty in simply getting out of the house with a very young child. Shyness was another. Determination and confidence are necessary for people wishing to interact socially with strangers.

Possibly large, busy group activities such as trips to a farm are less likely to allow introductions and conversations to take place; in addition, continuity seems important to parents, and a regular group of familiar faces is likely to be difficult to achieve except in the type of special group mentioned above. This young mothers' group was spoken of with enthusiasm and appreciation by the young woman concerned. The topics for each month's guest presentation were discussed and agreed to by the mothers themselves. It appeared to have provided a most important element of social and emotional support, as well as relevant information, to the mother concerned. In this connection, the PAT (US prototype of the PAFT programme) videos would be a very useful focus for a series of group meetings.

In this regard, the PAFT focus on the educator to parent, or educator to family relationship is a two-edged sword. It was clearly seen to be the key element in knowledge acquisition for the studied group for reasons to be

reviewed shortly, but it is logical too to wonder whether the exclusive, nurturing closeness of it could undermine the other important PAFT goal of fostering autonomy. A highly skilled educator is able to manage this tension between being a resource for the family, and being a resource for change, which are conceptually two different things. Educators spoke of the difficulties this tension imposed, and much of it was connected with the motivations and expectations of the parents. In this sense, it is of fundamental importance for PAFT or other providers of an information programme to define their role very clearly for participants at the outset. One case in the present study showed the way inappropriate expectations of the programme can undermine effective knowledge acquisition. This parent was also a reminder to organisations of the importance of confidential evaluation. For valid evaluation and analysis of outcomes against any measure, programme participants must be allowed to give their feedback without fear of the consequences.

1.2 Information poverty

A model of information poverty (Chatman, 1996) and rival explanations for the existence of knowledge gaps (Lovrich & Pierce, Ettema & Kline, Gaziano, Dervin) provided a conceptual framework for the development of the objectives of this study. Chatman's propositions about the characteristics of the information poor in her studies were used especially as a reference point for the findings about parents exhibiting a need for information in the PAFT programme. Theories explaining why and how knowledge gaps may narrow, in particular the group of studies supporting "situationality" as an explanation of how people acquire knowledge, were used to help structure

the investigation of factors involved in the PAFT parents' knowledge acquisition.

The study developed a hypothetical position, particularly a result of signals in the literature that the role of interpersonal networks had been thus far neglected, that interpersonal communication over an extended period facilitates a provider–receiver relationship that can effectively reduce information poverty. Exploratory in nature and intent, this study aimed to assess to what extent this hypothetical position was the case in the chosen contexts, and to refine the hypothesis through a process focusing on situational factors, and an “insider” or end–user perspective.

Aspects of Chatman's propositions about the information poor were somewhat supported in the study. For example, although the parents involved in the research did not perceive themselves as being “devoid of sources that might help them” (Chatman, 1996, p. 197), and had often chosen to keep to themselves within their neighbourhoods, there was a sense in which they were somewhat disconnected from support networks through a desire to appear to be coping. This is consistent with Chatman's findings that people avoid disclosing problems, but her subjects tended to do so through fear of risk rather than as a matter of pride, which seemed to be the case with the New Zealand subjects.

It should be pointed out in this regard that the volunteer participants in the present study were not a homogeneous group in the way that Chatman's subjects were. Chatman's were groups such as janitors and aging women in a retirement home, and her reference point was more specifically, at least to

start with, the connection between economic poverty and information poverty. In this study the volunteers represented a much broader range of backgrounds, educational levels, family structures, economic status and so on. The specific connection in this case was that between the parents' *situation* and information poverty. While there was an expectation at the outset that most of the PAFT programme participants would be in the lower socio-economic status (SES) groupings, this did not prove to be so. The range of SES was broad. The uniting factor was a need for information clearly and strongly associated with *situation*.

For these reasons, it is argued that because the term "information poverty" brings with it emotive loadings, such as victim status, powerlessness and impoverishment in a broad sense, and certainly a link with socio-economic poverty, "information need" may be a more appropriate term. Information poverty implies an outsider's view of individuals who suffer from a lack of something they should have, as defined by the external world. Since information need is a more neutral description, and is experienced by all people at different times and in different situations, it may be a more useful term. It would permit scholars and practitioners to interpret need through a situational perspective, which may be more appropriate depending on the goals of the information provider.

This thesis has presented evidence showing that it is more valid from a provider perspective to approach knowledge gaps through a situational framework, and to avoid generalisations based on trans-situational characteristics such as SES and education. Motivation arising from the parenting situation was seen to be a more powerful factor than education in

the participants' information seeking. It has been shown that parents from different social strata and walks of life, education, ethnicity and domestic situations responded in similar ways to their situation as parents. Commonalities have included individuals' perception of their need, motivations, the seeking of interpersonal networks, a problem solving approach, a flow-on effect into other interpersonal relationships, and benefit from the PAFT mentoring. It is the contention of the writer that information need is a symptom related to situations, and it can be characterised by a sense-making response, a view supported empirically as stated by Dervin (1980) citing numerous studies:

Study after study showed significant relationships between interest or relevance and information seeking and use ... other studies have shown a strong relationship between the presence of receiver uses for information and actual information seeking and use (p. 99).

Neither situational need nor sense-making is attributable to particular social groups *per se*; a more fruitful research approach in future would be to pursue the situational perspective.

Therefore, Chatman's propositions to do with secrecy and deception, and fear of exposing true problems, while somewhat borne out in this study, were less likely to apply since the interviewees had usually chosen to participate in PAFT or were strongly motivated to do so because of situational need. They were almost exclusively motivated or very motivated. What was borne out was the tendency for need and anxiety to be masked, so that an appearance of coping was cultivated. In the PAFT study, however, it

was more likely that this appearance was cultivated as a mask for family members such as mothers-in-law, or others who knew the parent less well.

The limited support for Chatman's model may be so partly because the New Zealand sample was not selected strictly on SES characteristics, as explained above, but also because different cultural characteristics apply in this setting. The individualistic nature of New Zealand society as a whole is somewhat reflected in the findings of this study, in the sense that there was an impression of stoicism, a "go it alone", "do it yourself" approach, and a kind of self-imposed isolation of women at home with their babies. This was, however, only in the neighbourhood context. There was certainly a need for social support, and this response is commented on a little further on.

The implication of this finding, that it is possible that New Zealand women have a tendency to try to appear to cope with very young children, is that professionals dealing with new parents need to be aware that parents may feel under pressure to appear happy and fulfilled in their role regardless of the reality. There are many possible reasons for this, but the one that emerged clearly among the interviewees in this study was the assumptions of other people. Another possible factor is the predominance of idealised images of parenthood (especially motherhood, and newborn babies) in the media, and in a more general sense it is in society's interests to present and cultivate a favourable mythology in regard to parenthood.

1.3 Trust

The relationship between the educator and the parent and family was of central importance in knowledge acquisition in the parenting context. The parents almost all spoke highly of their educators (interestingly, called “parenting consultants” in New South Wales, where the programme is called Parents As Teachers, as in the US) and regarded them as friends of the family. The title of parenting consultant used elsewhere imparts a sense of the person’s expertise, elevating the role somewhat above that implied in the simple term “educator”.

Educators spoke of the role as being a powerful privilege, but also a humble position, both perceptions deriving from the fact that over such a long and close association they come to know the family intimately and are entrusted with many secrets. Trust was viewed by educators as being vital to the process of receptivity, effective learning and long-term ownership of problems and personal growth in the parent/family. Educators felt that, having established rapport leading to trust, that the trust created the conditions for transfer of knowledge; moreover it enabled them to “challenge a bit”, creating an impetus for change.

The parents spoke of a variety of qualities in educators that led to the establishment of trust, such as being “upfront”, and boosting a parent’s confidence through recognising positive achievements. These qualities are similar to those stated by Wilson (1983), cited in Chatman (1996) to be the characteristics of a trustworthy source. These are found in “a person who is honest, careful about claims, and disinclined to deceive” (p. 196). These

matters are important because single experiences to the contrary can lead the person on the receiving end to scepticism and distrust of professionals.

For these reasons it is important to highlight some barriers to trust that were uncovered in this research, which providers should be aware of if they want to maximise the opportunities they have with their clients, participants, whanau, or whatever they choose to call the group they are there to serve.

Barriers included

- ◆ parents' poor understanding of the purpose of the programme;
- ◆ educators appearing to be too interested in "small talk";
- ◆ educators using an overly "baby" style of interaction with a toddler;
- ◆ parent overhearing an organisational policy of confidentiality being contravened;
- ◆ a difficult transition to a new educator - it was hard for parent to build a new relationship.

It was pointed out in Chapter 5 (section 4) that a programme such as PAFT needs to provide a confidential feedback process so that participants can sense that they have a meaningful role to play in evaluating the service and shaping it for the future. At the time of the study, this was not the case, and it appeared to have prevented one person from openly expressing her concerns and criticisms. While this thesis has argued for the advantages of a process of interaction between source and receiver, it is also clear that the interaction must go beyond one-to-one interpersonal dialogue if the provider organisation is to truly reflect the needs and perspectives of the

client group. If feedback from receivers as a group is not accurately or fully reflecting what they really think, then the programme could run the risk of becoming entrenched in its own “outsider” view of insiders’ information needs. If this issue has not already been addressed, it is recommended that it be made a matter for urgent attention by the organisations concerned. The PAFT model has a great deal to recommend it, but its providers need to continually re-focus on effective two-way processes that truly take into account the insider’s definition of need. From a broader perspective, it could be argued that such a successful interactive model, which cuts the problem of access out of the picture by engaging directly with users on an individual level, could all too easily be open to promotion of an organisational agenda. Clearly this is a risk to be avoided.

1.4 A ripple effect

On a social processes level, the study documented the impact of information entering small-scale social systems. Knowledge was being actively transmitted by some of the interviewed parents to their friends who had no involvement in PAFT, because of its perceived relevance and utility, beyond the individuals for whom it was specifically intended. This appeared to be a natural consequence that the interviewed PAFT educators seemed very happy to facilitate, especially in the sense that they presented themselves as people with a sense of vocation who wanted their work to assist meaningful social change. It is also worth noting that PAFT information was regarded as covetable by other parents, because it was quite clear from many comments made to the researcher that it was difficult for parents to gain access to the programme, and that informal discussion among friends was creating a

ready “market” for PAFT that ECD would find it impossible to meet. Some parents who had received benefit from the information themselves by being lucky enough to have been enrolled onto the programme through meeting selection criteria then became informal agents of the programme, distributing information to acquaintances and thus disseminating it more widely.

Other types of communication impacts were documented in the previous chapter and provide evidence of the capacity of interpersonal communication to initiate small-scale social effects. Depending on one’s personal values, or the organisational values of the programme concerned, this finding is noteworthy. For the Organisations A and B, it is likely to be gratifying, since PAFT aims to improve the futures of babies and their families out of a concern that society can do better in providing support. If there are additional beneficial flow-on effects, the organisations are likely to feel they have done their job well. For another hypothetical organisation using a similar model of information provision, but perhaps having a more proprietorial concern for copyright, or being concerned that only deserving cases should benefit, or being particularly concerned to target the programme, and so on, wider distribution of handout materials might not be so pleasing.

2 Future research

2.1 Community boundedness

Given the finding of various flow-on effects through interpersonal linkages in the PAFT information programme, it is desirable in future for network

analysis to further explore the transmission of acquired knowledge and the patterns of its spread. The role of opinion leaders, the number of persons involved in a parent's friendship group, the frequency of their communications, the extent to which various parenting topics are discussed, whether a key parent's recent PAFT home visit content has been relayed to others and in what form, could all assist in documenting whether informational networks are important in a wider community sense. Given the apparent interest shown in the literature in Chapter 2 in the notion of "community boundedness" (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996, p. 192) or social capital, it would be beneficial to establish to what extent this is a reality rather than a comfortable myth.

Viswanath and Finnegan (1996) note that if a topic is of sufficient importance to a community then knowledge disparities will not be so much in evidence. They also use the phrase "community boundedness" (p. 192) to describe the way in which a group of individuals may be considered to be part of a community even if it is not geographically defined, but defined by some other characteristic: "communities without propinquity" (ibid.). Using this idea as a basis, it could be suggested that the parents in this study form a community of sorts, connected by some aspects of their recent experience, and motivated by interest in their "topic" which is of pressing "situation-specific" (Lovrich & Pierce, 1984) importance and for which they require functional information.

On the one hand, the documentation of what has been termed a ripple effect (in the context of this study only) could be viewed as evidence of a "bricks into buckets" (Dervin, 1980, p. 96) conception of information, or the idea

that sources throw messages, receivers either catch them or do not, and the messages have a measurable impact. It could further be argued that this evidence runs counter to the idea of knowledge as a user construct, which has also been reasoned throughout this thesis, beginning with definitions in Chapter 1 and substantial reference throughout to the insider or user perspective. However it is possible to marry the two concepts. The marriage hinges on the fact that this study and the interpretation of its findings have taken an “individual-level” (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996; Gaziano, 1995) approach, in which the participants were drawn from a relatively homogeneous group and although they were not from a single community, they were experiencing a common situation, and the desired research perspective was to focus on this situational factor. Information seeking was not a result of conflict over an issue or of media effects: in other words, the study did not approach the concept of information need from a “macro social” (Pan & McLeod, 1991, p. 153) perspective, in which a bricks into buckets effect might be noted.

Yet the methods used to obtain insider insights, the thick descriptions recorded, the data analytic methods, and the fact that all of these spring from objectives that focus on individuals’ lived experiences of knowledge acquisition, mean that both the subjective details of situational perceptions and evidence of movement of information within social contexts have been observable. The analytic limits imposed by sample size, and the fact that measurement of changes in knowledge over time was not the purpose of the study but rather the part played by individual level interactions, have meant that micro-level impacts of knowledge within small-scale systems (family and social groups within relatively small geographical areas) have been

documented. This needs much more specific attention, since it was not planned for in the research design for this study, to assess its significance.

2.2 Assessing a causal relationship

The study has explored a model of information transmission that discourages passivity in the receiving process, and is an illustration of the scholarly viewpoint that communication theory and practice have moved towards “assumptions that place the control of outcomes of communication situations in the hands of receivers” (p. 93), away from “the hypodermic metaphor” (Berlo, 1977, cited in Dervin, 1980, p. 93), and settling on questions such as “whether individuals or social systems are conceived of as being the locus of enactment” (Pan & McLeod, 1991, p. 150).

However, a useful additional outcome of the exploratory process of the present study has been that a small-scale impact on interpersonal networks has been observed, and it seems possible that this is a benefit of a receiver-focused, individual level information programme. Whether or not this is a case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* is a useful lead for future research. A broader study of a larger number of PAFT parent participants (or participants in a similar community information campaign) would be necessary to establish more clearly whether PAFT typically has this type of impact, why, and what are the mechanisms of the process.

In addition, a strong feature of the parent participants in the research was motivation, and the extent to which this was attributable to PAFT itself, or was a characteristic of the parents that drew them to the programme in the

first place, is another case of “if this happened after that, did it happen because of that?” This could be researched in more depth through further interviewing focused more on motivational factors in regard to PAFT.

2.3 Hypothesis testing

The key findings of this research, being on two different conceptual levels (individual effects and a social networks effect), have achieved to some extent a linking of levels of analysis (Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996; Pan & McLeod, 1991). Pan and McLeod advocate a “multilevel perspective” (1991, p.147) in mass communication research, so that linkages are consciously explored between the micro or individual level of analysis and the macro or social systems level, and better understanding can be reached of, for example, the influence of social change on individuals, as well as the impact of communication behaviours on social change and organisational outcomes. In other words, they suggest, the “cross-level linkages” (p. 147) of macro to micro level processes, and micro to macro level, since they tend to be omitted or not tested in research, are a major and essential challenge to researchers. The findings of the PAFT study have demonstrated links from motivation and situation, to individual level effects and increased interpersonal communication, to an implied flow-on effect to social networks: a micro to macro process of knowledge acquisition. Pan and McLeod contend that this type of research is necessary to advance theory:

We agree ... that explication of the micro-to-macro relationship has been a major challenge to social science research ... Linking the two poles of the micro-macro continuum in this fashion requires construction of theories

linking the mechanisms of information processing and behaviour formation with the processes of societal change and development. (p. 149).

Cross-level theorising in the context of the current study could now move to link the two conceptual levels of analysis mentioned above, to a tentative hypothesis that

factors of situational relevance and information need drive individual level information seeking, and the processes of knowledge acquisition and use occur as a result of the engagement of individuals in networks of interpersonal communication.

Given the highly specific nature of the context of the PAFT study, and also the in-depth approach with a small sample, this tentative hypothesis should be tested with a further group or groups.

3 *Limitations of the study*

3.1 Selection & voluntary participation

Volunteer participants were integral to this project, concerning itself as it did with exploring information neediness, and the place of trust in professional relationships aiming to build receptivity, as well as in general inviting interviewees to reveal sometimes quite personal information about themselves. People are not necessarily going to be keen to divulge these private worlds concerning matters of access to and capabilities with information. Selection outcomes were therefore likely to be affected by the care with which the researcher had to tread in seeking participants.

For example, sensitivities regarding several issues of ethics and access in this case meant that truly random sampling was never a possibility:

- ◆ The consequences of carefully considering the ethics of a non-Maori researcher working within a Maori organisation were that access and selection of subjects at one of the sites in particular was a matter of the goodwill of the PAFT educators rather than a matter over which the researcher could exercise scientific control. This is not to say that undue influence or bias came into play.
- ◆ Acceptance and “buy-in” had to be obtained from the teams of PAFT educators before any data-gathering could begin, and had to occur as part of the several approval processes required for the project to proceed. All parties had to be convinced of a “what’s in it for me?” outcome, and this is less apparent in this type of exploratory work than other types of research such as evaluative or action research. Once agreement was given, educators brought their own understandings of selection to the process. This was difficult to have any control over also. Becker (1998) talks of a “hierarchy of credibility” in this type of research situation:

Very often social scientists don’t study the full range of phenomena because the people who run the organisation we are studying define some of what should be included in our sample of cases and topics as not requiring study. They assure us that if we need to know anything beyond what they have outlined as “the problem”, they can tell us about it and there is no necessity to look further (p. 90).

This was a concern in the early stages of establishing relationships with key informants, because it was felt to be important not to allow them to dictate the project. However with time, a good understanding developed between the researcher and the educators so that access to suitable volunteers was not an issue of concern.

The resulting group of participants represents a wide range of ages, education levels, community types, and an appropriate range of ethnicities given the composition of the New Zealand population. The women who volunteered were presumably positively pre-disposed towards the idea of being research subjects, as they were fully informed of the purpose of the project beforehand. Also, it may be that to a certain extent those with positive views of PAFT wanted to participate where any who felt negatively may not have wanted to volunteer. For these reasons it is possible that the data obtained was weighted in favour of positive reports about PAFT. Finally, the sample size of 16 parent volunteers was not large, but this limitation was offset by three factors:

1. The interviews were each very extensive and produced depth in a number of cases rather than shallow detail on a wider range of cases. This was felt to be appropriate given the research objectives.
2. The concepts of trust, dialogue and interpersonal interaction have two participants involved: parent and educator, receiver and source. Both perspectives were explored, and this broadened the participant group to 22 interviews in total. Each of the perspectives reflected comprehensively on the other, and this was very useful for the purposes of the project; and

interaction as an entire process was explored, not just the receiver's end-user perspective. This was very desirable should there be any differences between the views of the receiver and source, so that issues could be noted and followed up.

3. Volunteers came from two different sites, therefore variations and contrasts could potentially be noted.

3.2 Observation

As mentioned in Chapter 5 in discussion of data obtained from observation of home visits, an impression of few interactions with the parent and child in home visits in the case of one educator may have been attributable to the observation method itself. These limitations have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3, in the limitations of the methodology.

4 Recommendations to provider organisations

As a result of the close observation of the PAFT communication campaign model made possible by this research, and the analysis and discussion of the findings presented in this thesis, the following recommendations are made regarding effective delivery of PAFT or similar programmes aiming to bridge information gaps:

4.1 Social groups for parents

More emphasis should be placed on facilitating the formation of groups that meet regularly at a venue for the purpose. It was evident in this study that

parents sought solutions to parenting problems in social contexts. They needed to feel comfortable with a group that they trusted. While there was a tendency for parents to avoid making their needs overt, they were accessible through social networks. This recommendation could also offset the potential problem of parents becoming reliant on the one-to-one relationship with the educator.

4.2 Programme evaluation

Evaluation of the programme by participants who have developed a relationship with an educator or similar professional should be conducted independently and confidentially. In this way, the client would feel that they could offer a frank assessment of the experiences they have had on the programme, rather than being concerned that any negative feedback they might wish to provide could affect the service they receive in the future. This issue seems particularly significant in the PAFT programme, the basic functioning unit of which is the close relationship between parent and educator, and the fact that the parents need to feel that the trust that exists in the relationship remains untouched by the organisation's interest in evaluation of the service. Also it is vital that the parent feels she or he has a genuine stake in the programme, that their feedback is valued, and that there is safety in the evaluation process.

4.3 Video resources

In view of the finding that the combination of different channels appealing to different learning styles is valued by parents, further linking of visual with auditory and cognitive processes is recommended through investing in the

US-produced videos that can accompany the programme. In the US, the videos narrated by well-known television personalities are used routinely for group meetings and discussions; in New Zealand, they are not readily available to such an extent. Educators commented during the research for this study that they thought they should be much more readily available.

4.4 Monitoring of educators: ongoing training

Educator skills need to be monitored and supported by regular training in the following areas:

- *Interactivity and dialogue* as the basis of home visits with parents. Care needs to be taken by all educators and those responsible for the quality of their performance that this key element of the PAFT informational vehicle is developed to a high level, as required by the PAFT curriculum guidelines. Skill appeared to vary considerably in the home visits observed: refer to section 1 of Chapter 4.
- *Assumptions about parents*. Educators need to be conscious of the dangers of assuming too much in regard to how well parents are coping, for example. If the comments of one of the parents are to be taken as an indication of how keenly clients can feel their educators' judgements of them, then their attitude to the PAFT process can become soured if they feel incorrectly perceived.

4.5 The impact of *Ahuru Mowai: Born to Learn*

Attention should be paid at organisational levels to anecdotal evidence of how the emphasis of the new curriculum on neuroscience content has

affected PAFT practice, if at all. This could be conducted at annual re-training and at other opportunities as they arise. Alternatively, more formal process of evaluation could be undertaken such as independently facilitated focus groups of educators and parents.



This study set out to document and explore the actual practice of an information programme that appeared from an outsider's viewpoint to be a prototype of effective user-focused information provision.

PAFT was found to be a very effective model in the researched context. This was observed with parents at both research sites in a number of different ways, presented in detail in Chapter 4. This study extends currently available empirical evidence on overcoming knowledge gaps, providing insider experiences to add to theory and sketchy models of information poverty, and a useful framework for institutions and agencies to consider using where they need to engage informationally needy people in a process of autonomous learning. The study took as its starting point a lack of research into the importance of interpersonal communication in knowledge acquisition. It aimed to respond to indications from researchers in the knowledge gap field such as Cecillie Gaziano, who has stated in recent times "the interpersonal communication format should be studied more frequently than it has been" (1998, p. 46), especially in health communication where "classes, as well as one-to-one communication" (ibid.) are often used without any real data on the implications for knowledge gaps.

To this extent, the findings of the PAFT study provide a number of leads regarding the effectiveness of the one-to-one mode of knowledge transfer to follow in future research. In addition, the study draws overdue attention to the topic of parenting, which Gaziano points out has not been the focus of much knowledge gap research. It is an important topic with ramifications for the long-term “knowledge society” future, because

parenting behaviours such as ignoring children’s education needs ultimately help to perpetuate the cycle of low knowledge levels, low education levels, poverty, and neglect (Erickson & Egeland, 1996, cited in Gaziano, 1998, p. 46).



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Glossary

ahuru mowai	warm and sheltered haven; womb
awhi	support, embrace, aid, help
awhina	help, assist, provide relief
hapu	tribal sub-group, clan
iwi	tribe, people
kuia	older woman regarded as wise; matron
tangata whenua	local people; usu., in context, Maori people, indigenous population
taonga	precious thing, treasure, property
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination; absolute sovereignty
whakamā	shy, embarrassed; feel ignominious; loss of mana
whanau	extended family, kin; give birth
whanaungatanga	relationship; kinship
whenua	earth, land, body, afterbirth

Appendix One

The following page is a generic example of several information sheets designed for use with different groups participating in this research, and in different contexts. For example, the form was adapted for informing parents in regard to observation of home visits and in regard to interviews. Each version was adapted in content to suit the different research contexts.

The version shown on the next page aimed to achieve a simple explanation of the purpose of observation of the home visits for parent participants, without misrepresenting or glossing over the project, and to create a friendly approach. The version for the educators used slightly more complex language.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS AT HOME VISITS

Tena koutou *Kia orana* *Talofa* *Fakaalofa lahi atu*
Malo e lelei *Taloha ni* *Ni sa Bula Vinaka* *Talofa lava*
 ☺ *Greetings!*

Hi - I am a student from Massey University, Palmerston North. I am doing a research project based on PAFT. My work is being checked by two Massey University lecturers: Margie Comrie and Frank Sligo.

What is the purpose of this study?

I am studying what is the best way for people to learn about educating their babies. I am interested in the Parents As First Teachers programme because of the way it is based on personal contact between an educator and the parent in the baby's home. As you are a participant in the PAFT programme, I would be interested in visiting you with your educator so I can understand better the importance of person-to-person contact in parents' learning about baby education.

What you can volunteer to do

I would like to come to your home with your educator so that I can sit in the background and observe how the session works. I would occasionally write notes but I would not participate or interrupt in any way. Your involvement is strictly confidential - **your name will not be used at all during this study.**

If you agree to take part in this study, the service you currently receive from Parents As First Teachers through Organisation X will not be affected at all. You have the right:

- to say you don't want to take part
- to ask questions about the study at any time during the session
- to withdraw from the study at any time
- to read a summary of the findings of the study when it is finished



If you would be happy to have me present at your next home visit, let your educator know and I will see you then.

If you have any questions at all, please phone me, or my supervisors:

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Thank you for thinking about taking part!



Appendix Two

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
2. My questions have been answered, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
3. I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and I can choose to not answer any particular questions.
4. I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used in any way during this study.
5. I agree do not agree to the interview being taped.
6. I also understand that I have the right to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.
7. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Group 4

What kind of experiences do you recall of caring for younger members of the family on a regular basis before you had your own baby? Do you feel this was an advantage to you when you had your baby?

If you didn't have any or much experience in this way, how has it affected you now as you care for your own child?

Group 5

To what extent do you find it easy or difficult to ask others for advice about your baby? Can you remember a time when you needed reassurance or advice, and tell me about it? Why do you think you find it easy/difficult?

Group 6

Do you think people have an instinct for baby and childcare, and their development – does a certain amount of this knowledge come naturally?

Tell me about your feelings on this when your baby first arrived. How much help/advice did you need when your baby was born? Do you think this is true for other people? Can you tell me about your first PAFT visit, or an early one – what do you remember? How were you settling in with your baby at the time? How did you feel about having an educator come to your house?

Group 7

Do you feel that new parents are vulnerable at all to strong views coming from other people about what to do and not to do? (Well-meaning family, friends can have ideas that conflict with professionals, and even they differ from one another.) For example, opinions from different people on how to breast-feed, whether older children should be smacked, and so on. Can you tell me about a time when you have found yourself confused over what is the best thing to do with your baby, because you heard different things from different people? Who do you listen to in the end? Who is most trustworthy?

Group 8

How do you respond to this idea: that the key to PAFT's effectiveness is the trusting relationship between you and your educator? Your child and the educator?

Is it just the information that's important, or the relationship, for you?

Is the relationship more important for you, or the baby, or both?

Would PAFT have been as beneficial to you if you'd had a series of different educators?

Group 9

What have been some of the benefits of having your PAFT educator come to you? For example

- convenience – travel
- social contact
- confidence, reassurance
- picking up health concerns
- other reasons?

Group 10

If it had not been for PAFT, how do you think life would have been different for you and your baby?

Group 11

Tell me about the printed information you get each time you have a PAFT visit. What do you do with it? Do you find yourself referring to it later? Is this soon after the visit, or some time later? On what sorts of occasions would you tend to do this? e.g. for quiet reflective reading while the baby is sleeping, or when you're in the middle of hassles with the baby and you're desperate for ideas on what to do? Can you tell me about a specific time when you did refer to the material, and why you were doing this?

Group 12

As above, for the demonstrated play activities – do you usually, or often, or not often, try these activities after the PAFT educator has gone? To what extent do you find they make an impression on you? – why is this? Is the verbal explanation, or the printed material, or the discussion more memorable – or all three equally?

Can you tell me about your last PAFT visit – what do you remember was the focus of the session? Have you tried to apply the information or ideas since then?

Group 13

Do you feel that PAFT has equipped you to be independent in your child rearing, and to go out and seek information and support for yourself in the future? Can you tell me why this has happened? – what is it about the PAFT programme that has had this effect for you? Where will you go for information in relation to the development of your child in the future?

Group 14

Aside from the educator visits, can you tell me about any other ways in which being on the PAFT programme has benefited you? For example, friendships, social gatherings.... Describe these and your experience of them. Have these been important in any way for picking up information about your child's development?

Group 15

In an overall sense, what role has PAFT played in your development as a parent? For example, has it made you more independent and confident that you can find the strategies you need to be an effective parent?...has it taken its place alongside a number of different influences on you?... has it been more important than that?

Group 16

If we place PAFT alongside a range of sources you may have found helpful in learning new ways to help your baby develop, and think about how effective they have all been for you, how would you rate them?

[1 = very ineffective, and 5 = very effective]

friends	1	2	3	4	5	
family		1	2	3	4	5
magazines		1	2	3	4	5
books		1	2	3	4	5
TV programmes		1	2	3	4	5
Playgroup or similar		1	2	3	4	5
Professionals		1	2	3	4	5
PAFT		1	2	3	4	5

Demographics

What is your age

Or age group? Under 15__15-19__20-24__25-29__30-34__Over 35_

Highest educational attainment?

SC__ 6FC__ Bursary__Trades cert.__Dipl__Bach. degree__Postgrad__

Appendix Four

EDUCATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Lead-in discussion)...

1. **Time/experience with PAFT:** How long have you been a PAFT educator?
2. **Background experience:** What background do you have in EC education terms? E.g training from working in a day-care, teaching, Playcentre etc.
3. **Attraction to the PAFT work:** What drew you to PAFT? Did you know about it, see an ad. in the paper, hear it recommended...
4. **Rewards of being an educator:** What do you enjoy about the job?
5. **Challenges of being an educator:** What do you find difficult?
6. **Educator-family relationships:** How would you describe the importance of the long-term relationship you develop with your families? What role does the personal relationship have in terms of the effectiveness of the programme?
7. **Parents who are more difficult to work with:** In your experience, are there some parents who are more difficult to work successfully with? Are there any factors that can be barriers to effective learning by parents? Can you tell me about a case where this was an issue?
8. **Communication skills for educators:** What communication skills do you need to have to be a good educator?
9. **PAFT curriculum & handout materials:**
How well supported are you by the PAFT curriculum materials? How do you like working with them? How important do you think the printed handouts that you give to parents are?