Gender Diversity: Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives and Teaching Practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

At Massey University, Manawatū,

Aotearoa New Zealand.

Vicki Gifkins

2024

Abstract

Notions and understandings of gender are evolving and changing. Historically, gender tended to be viewed as a female/male binary. Increasingly, gender is becoming understood as a spectrum encompassing a diverse range of gender identities and expressions. Wide variations exist related to how gender diversity is understood in society. In this thesis, gender diversity is viewed as an umbrella concept for all genders, including binary and nonbinary gender identities.

As societal understandings of gender and gender diversity shift, implications arise for early childhood kaiako. Gender diversity is a relatively new concept in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE). An implication of this is that ECE kaiako are grappling with new and shifting gender concepts without Ministry of Education guidance or explicit curriculum support. *Te Whariki,* the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum, makes limited reference to gender. The document suggests kaiako have a responsibility to support equity and inclusion for children “irrespective of gender” and lists gender as an aspect of inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2017b). Guidance has been developed for the school sector through the *Relationships and Sexuality Education* guides but not for the early childhood sector (Ministry of Education, 2020a).

In addition to a lack of guidance and curriculum support, there are few Aotearoa New Zealand studies addressing gender diversity in ECE. The present study was designed to help address the research gap by investigating teachers’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences of gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices.

Researching gender diversity in ECE is important because during their early childhood years, children are developing their early concepts of gender. The ways children experience and understand gender in their early years can inform and shape their future understandings. The ways early childhood settings support children's concepts of gender can nurture gender concepts, whether these are binary, expansive, or somewhere in between.

Through their everyday play experiences and conversations with peers and kaiako, children are learning about gender and are exposed to ideas about gender. Gender concepts often arise as children engage in imaginary play, such as role-playing different family types or selecting dress ups to wear. Gender concepts also arise when children form or organise groups of peers to play with and through literacy experiences, such as book reading or singing songs. Potential exists for children to witness or experience binary gender stereotyping in early childhood settings. Potential also exists for challenging binary stereotyping and supporting children to develop more inclusive views of gender. For kaiako to be positioned to engage in gender-inclusive teaching practices, they may require access to knowledge of gender diversity, knowledge of gender-inclusive teaching practices, and support to implement inclusive teaching practices. A key aim of this study was to find out more about the ways kaiako understand gender diversity and to identify the teaching practices and support systems used by those kaiako who say they are supportive of gender diversity.

A qualitative, question-driven approach supported this exploratory two-phase study. In phase one, 431 ECE kaiako responded to an online questionnaire. In phase two, nine kaiako participated in in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. The data were

analysed through descriptive statistics, content analysis, and thematic analysis. While the survey sought to include participants with a range of views, the interviews were designed to focus on participants who reported as being supportive of gender diversity. My aim with this focus was to help lay the groundwork for positive attitudes and better understanding about gender inclusion.

Findings highlighted that kaiako held a wide range of views about gender. Kaiako relied on personal experiences and informal knowledge sources to inform their views of gender rather than professional knowledge. Approaches to supporting gender diversity in ECE varied considerably, with some kaiako seeing no responsibility to support gender diversity and others utilising a range of intentional teaching practices to support children's gender learning. Most ECE settings lacked systematic approaches and policies that addressed gender diversity in their settings. Processes for checking that books and resources were free of gender bias were ad hoc and dependent on individual kaiako with an interest in gender equity. Parents and whānau were seen as both enablers and barriers to supporting gender diversity in ECE settings. While a wide range of views about gender were shared, the majority of kaiako were supportive of gender diversity and aspired to engage in inclusive teaching practices.

For kaiako who were supportive of gender diversity, reading gender-expansive books and engaging in conversations with children were key teaching practices for supporting gender inclusion. Kaiako–child conversations were seen as a key practice for challenging gender stereotypes and mostly focused on breaking boy/girl stereotypes. Books were seen as the largest enabler for teaching children about gender diversity and supported kaiako to address a complex topic. Access to books was sometimes restricted or limited. Many

kaiako described using careful language with children and aspired to either be gender-neutral and avoided gendered terms like “boy” and “girl.”

Overall, this research offers a promising but still contested and constrained view of gender diversity and inclusion in ECE. One of the things most notable about the study was the high numbers of kaiako interested in participating in this research, which suggests ECE kaiako are interested in exploring and discussing gender diversity. Yet, many kaiako faced barriers implementing inclusive teaching practices, and opportunities for professional learning and development were rare. Implications from the study suggest a need for better guidance, systems, and policies to support kaiako to effectively implement inclusive practices.

Acknowledgements

He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata
What is the most important thing in the world?
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

This work has always been driven by a passion for equity and justice. It has not been my journey alone, but a journey shared with others.

Thank you to my wonderful supervisors, Associate Professor Tara McLaughlin and Dr Karen Harris. You had faith in me, guided me, gave direction, and kept me on the right track. This work would have looked very different without you.

Thank you to my husband, Andy, who so patiently supported and encouraged me every step of the way. Thank you to my two children who sparked my learning journey and prompted me to start looking at gender beyond the binary.

Thank you to each kaiako who completed the questionnaire and the nine interview participants who shared so honestly and openly.

Thank you to my amazing and skilled proofreaders, Steph and Linda.

Thank you to the Massey University Early Years Research Lab for your unwavering support.

Thank you to representatives from The Tindall Foundation, Inside Out, Te Ngākau Kahukura and others who provided support and encouragement at different phases of the research.

Finally, thank you to the Massey University Foundation, Paul and Megan Pausè, Graduate Women Manawatū, and the Massey Scholarships Committee for the support you gave me to complete this work.

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study investigated early childhood teachers' understandings, perceptions, and experiences of gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. The research focused on the range of beliefs and understandings kaiako held and teaching practices that support equity and inclusion. This study used a qualitative research design and drew on the perspectives of early childhood kaiako from a range of setting types, including privately-owned education and care, community-based education and care, kindergarten, playcentre, home-based childcare, kōhanga reo, and puna reo. The research was guided by interpretivism, constructivism, and critical theory. A pluralist approach was taken for this work because of my interest in this topic through multiple lenses. Blurring approaches enabled me to develop understandings and aspire to effect change through research. The study used a two-phase design. Phase one involved an online questionnaire that was sent to 2617 early childhood education (ECE) settings with a publicly available email address on the Education Counts website. The response rate was higher than expected with 431 early childhood kaiako completing the survey. At the end of the questionnaire, kaiako were asked whether they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. One hundred and thirteen kaiako indicated an interest and a sampling frame was used to select nine kaiako to participate in semi-structured individual interviews in phase two. This chapter introduces the research, my background, and describes the study's rationale, research aims, and key terms.

1.2 Researcher Background

My teaching background is in child care, kindergarten, home-based care, and playcentre. I currently work as a university tutor and research coordinator. Through my experiences as

a parent, I became interested in gender and gender equity. As I have learnt and reflected as a parent, I began delving into the ECE research base. I became aware of the limited amount of Aotearoa New Zealand research addressing gender diversity in ECE and became curious about the supports available to kaiako. It is my position that kaiako have a responsibility to view gender expansively and be inclusive of gender diversity for all children as they enact *Te Whāriki,* the Aotearoa New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, in their settings (Ministry of Education, 2017b). I entered this research acknowledging my position and my desire to strengthen effective and inclusive practice through research, advocacy, and raising awareness.

1.3 Background and Context of the Study

Gender is a social construct open to interpretation by individuals and groups of people (Lips, 2018). Gender can be viewed in a variety of ways, including as a male/female binary and as a spectrum encompassing a wide range of fluid identities that may change over time. Gender diversity is a term recognising a wide spectrum of gender identities, including girl/boy/man/woman, and nonbinary gender identities, such as gender nonconforming, nonbinary, gender-fluid, agender, bigender, cisgender, transgender, takatāpui, and intersex. *Te Whāriki* is an inclusive curriculum for all ECE children that recognises children's wellbeing is enhanced when their identities are supported (Ministry of Education, 2017b). *Te Whāriki* expects kaiako to facilitate children's learning and provide equitable opportunities for learning irrespective of gender in ways that support learner identity (Ministry of Education, 2017b). Gender concepts are hugely connected to identity. Over time, significant societal shifts have occurred in understandings of gender. Due to a lack of research, it is not known whether kaiako understandings have kept abreast with current societal shifts towards gender inclusion, diversity, and equity. The lack of research in this

area is a problem for the ECE sector. This study helps to bridge the research gap by presenting information about kaiako views, understandings, and teaching practices related to gender diversity and inclusion.

1.4 Rationale

The ways kaiako understand and perceive gender and gender diversity have a direct impact on children's learning experiences. The views and discourses held by kaiako influence the ways kaiako respond to gender stereotyping in children's play, engage in conversations about gender, and utilise teaching practices that are supportive or unsupportive of gender diversity (Chapman, 2018; Emilson et al., 2016; Li, 2023). Researching gender diversity in ECE can be deemed controversial given the range of perspectives held in society about gender. It is a sensitive topic. Yet, shying away from difficult conversations or research enables harmful views to remain unchecked and increases opportunities for exclusionary teaching practices.

There is limited Aotearoa research investigating how kaiako understand and support gender diversity in ECE (Smith & Gunn, 2015). Previous Aotearoa research included a national diversity survey that included a small number of questions about gender (Shuker & Cherrington, 2016), a small-scale research project investigating kaiako use of rainbow-inclusive picture books (Morgan & Surtees, 2022), a Master of Education thesis investigating the gender discourses held by eleven initial teacher education (ITE) students (Lyall, 2013), an investigation into how one kindergarten understood and responded to diversity and difference (Kelly-Ware, 2018), and a study of heteronormative discourses in ECE with 14 kaiako (Gunn, 2011). All these studies were either small-scale or contained a small gender focus within a larger project. Compounding the lack of Aotearoa gender

diversity research is a lack of guidance supporting kaiako to navigate a complex topic. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017b)*, He Māpuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2017a)*, National Education Learning Priorities (NELP*; Ministry of Education, 2020b), and *Our Code Our Standards: Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Education Council, 2017) all provide generalised expectations for inclusion, supporting children's identities, and the need for kaiako to be aware of unconscious biases and gendered thinking or assumptions. To support gender diversity and inclusion, kaiako need clear guidance and expectations, including examples of supportive practice. Because of the need to find out more about kaiako understandings and teaching practices related to gender diversity, the present study focused on including the voices of a wide range of kaiako across a range of ECE settings (i.e., through survey). Moreover, equally driven by a focus on supporting gender inclusion, the study also sought to elevate the views and perspectives of those who were supportive of gender and diversity and inclusion through interviews.

1.5 Research Aims

Given the limited research around gender diversity and inclusion in Aotearoa ECE settings and the importance of kaiako engaging in supportive and inclusive teaching practices to support gender diversity in their settings, it was important to discover more about the ways kaiako support equity through the lens of gender diversity. Kaiako self-reported on their understandings, beliefs, perceptions, and use of associated teaching practices. Teachers' perspectives and self-reports can provide information to better understand gender diversity and inclusion in ECE. Therefore, through teachers' self-reports, the specific objectives of this research were to:

- identify the range of knowledge, understandings, experiences, and perspectives kaiako held about gender diversity and how these views are formed;
- identify how kaiako describe their roles in relation to gender diversity;
- identify systems or procedures ECE settings use to support gender inclusion and diversity;
- identify the teaching practices and resources kaiako use to support learning about gender diversity.

1.6 Introduction to Key Terms

This research uses the following terms related to gender diversity, early childhood education, and social justice. Given that terminology evolves rapidly, the definitions are included to clarify their meaning in this research at the time of writing.

Agender: A gender identity that means without gender.

Bias: Perceptions, beliefs, or judgments about people that usually result in some people being treated unfairly. Biases can be conscious (an attitude that a person holds and is aware of) and unconscious (an attitude that a person holds but is unaware of).

Bigender: A person who identifies as two genders at the same time or changes between two genders.

Cisgender: A person whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Discourse: Systems of thought or knowledge that define how we understand a construct, such as children and childhood.

Discrimination: When people are treated differently and unfairly compared to others because of a personal characteristic, such as gender identity.

Gender: Gender is a socially and culturally constructed spectrum in which individuals identify. Gender identities are fluid and move beyond the male/female binary to include diverse gender identities, such as agender, bigender, cisgender, man/boy, woman/girl, transgender, and nonbinary.

Gender Binary: The belief that there are two genders: male and female.

Gender Diversity: An umbrella term for a diverse range of genders, including binary genders, such as boy/girl/man/woman, and gender identities that go beyond the binary, such as gender nonconforming, nonbinary, gender-fluid, agender, bigender, cisgender, transgender, takatāpui, and intersex.

Gender-Diverse Person: Someone who identifies as a diverse gender outside of the male/female binary.

Gender Expansive: Viewing gender as expansive and beyond the gender binary.

Gender-Expansive Teaching: Teaching practices that challenge binary thinking and stereotypes and promote expansive thinking about gender and promote inclusion.

Gender-Inclusive Environment: ECE environments where all kaiako use intentional and proactive gender-expansive teaching practices and resources with all children. Kaiako engage in conversations about gender, challenge stereotyping and discriminatory views, and avoid grouping children by gender.

Gender-Nonconforming Behaviour: Actions or behaviours that do not align with common gender stereotypes or norms. Behaviours can occur on a continuum from one-off or sporadic to regular and repeated.

Gender Nonconforming: A child who persistently and consistently engages in nonconforming behaviours may be described as gender nonconforming. This may include young children who have not yet identified as nonbinary or trans but express that they are uncomfortable using a gender identity assigned at birth based on their sex.

Gender Norm: Another term for gender role.

Gender Role: External components of gender, for instance, the ways gender is enacted or expected to be enacted often with similarities across cultures. Gender roles can be seen as limiting, restricting, or even harmful.

Gendered Language: Language about gender, including terminology, pronouns, and conversations about gender.

Intersex or VSC: An umbrella term used to describe differences in reproductive anatomy or variations in sex characteristics. Differences can be present at birth or may be developed in puberty.

Kaiako: Māori term to mean “teacher” commonly used in Aotearoa.

LGBTQI+: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and intersex. The “plus” refers to the many other gender and sexual identities not named.

Nonbinary: An umbrella term and gender identity for people who do not fit into the man/woman binary and may or may not identify as transgender.

Prejudice: Feelings or judgements held about someone based on their membership to a particular group, such as gender, ethnicity, or religion.

Sex: A classification of male, female, or intersex based on the biological anatomy or genitals that a person is born with. A person’s sex often aligns with their gender but not always.

Social Construct: A term for concepts that exist because of human interaction and are made real by human agreement.

Trans or Transgender: An umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity differs from the biological sex they were born with.

Gender Minorities: An umbrella term for non-cis gendered people that recognises the discrimination often experienced as part of a minority group.

Takatāpui: A traditional Māori word that has been reclaimed and adapted to encompass all Māori who identify with diverse genders, sexes, and sexualities.

Whole-Setting Approach: Involves ECE kaiako and leaders collectively working together to teach gender concepts, investigate practice, and reduce gender stereotypes with consistency.

1.7 Summary of Chapters

This thesis is presented in five chapters. The present chapter introduces me as the researcher and provides the research context. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to gender, early childhood education, relevant empirical research focused on gender diversity in ECE, and the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The research questions are presented at the end of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research design used to guide the research and outlines the two-phase approach: online questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews. Recruitment methods, procedures for data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations are discussed. Chapter 4 shares the findings of the questionnaire and interviews, which are presented through five sub-sections: kaiako views about gender, how kaiako understandings about gender are formed, systems ECE settings have in place to support gender inclusion and diversity, enablers and barriers to gender inclusion, and practices or resources kaiako identify and use to support learning about gender diversity. Chapter 5 addresses the research questions through a discussion on the key findings of the research in relation to the existing literature. Chapter 5 is presented in five sections: kaiako views of gender diversity, systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion, the role of whānau, conversations and language, and the role of books. Following this discussion, the strengths and limitations, practice recommendations, suggestions for future research, and conclusions are presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is presented in three key parts. The first is about context, theory, and concepts of gender. To set the context for the present research, I used literature to explore concepts of gender formation and development through multiple lenses. I examined the dominant early childhood discourses on childhood, play, and teaching as they relate to gender. The second part of the literature review focuses on empirical research related to gender equity, diversity and inclusion, and early learning. I begin by describing my search strategy for locating empirical research that address issues of gender equity, diversity and inclusion, and early learning. From the literature sourced, I discuss gender inclusion in early childhood settings and then focus on five empirical studies that specifically address gender inclusion in ECE. Of the five empirical studies discussed, three studies are international and two are from Aotearoa New Zealand. The literature used is predominantly from Western perspectives and studies of ECE and gender, with a majority of literature coming from international sources. The third part of the review locates more specifically in Aotearoa New Zealand. I describe the local educational and curricular context related to gender, available data on children's gender identities, and acknowledge the uniqueness of te ao Māori perspectives on gender. Taken together, my review of the literature highlights the need for more research related to gender diversity and inclusion in ECE and I pose a set of research questions to guide my study.

2.2 Part 1: Gender Theories, Concepts, and Early Childhood Context

2.2.1 Gender Theories and Concepts

2.2.1.1 Theories of Gender Development.

There are many theories about gender development. This thesis acknowledges and describes three different perspectives on gender development and how they relate to inclusive practice in ECE. Biological determinist views of gender focus on gender being created through nature and the idea that a person's gender aligns with the sex they were born with (Blaise, 2005). This view can be traced back to the fourth century through the works of Plato and Aristotle but gained momentum in the 16th and 17th centuries through the works of Hobbes and Locke (Ellison & De Wet, 2017; Miller & Costello, 2001). Research at the time focused on notions of nature, biology, heredity, and craniometrics as accounting for differences between men and women. Biological views tend to assert that gender is set and non-changeable, limited to the male/female binary, and that there are biological differences between men and women (Blakemore et al., 2009). A primary risk of biological determinist views being dominant in early childhood settings is that kaiako will see gender stereotyping and stereotypical behaviours for males and females as normal and expected (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Children and whānau who identify as gender diverse may feel unsafe to share their identities, have their identities ignored, or experience exclusionary teaching practices because they do not fit within the dominant male/female binary.

Socialisation theories emerged as a critique of biological determinism (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Socialisation theories can be traced back to the 20th century and continue to be relevant today (Lindsey, 2021). While biological determinism focuses on the impacts of nature in gender development, socialisation theories are concerned with the role of nurture

or treatment from others, such as friends or family members (Blakemore et al., 2009). Socialisation theories have roots in sociocultural theory (Lindsey, 2021) and have been advanced by gender researchers, such as Fagot (1992) and Butler (1990). Socialisation theories recognise there are differences between sex and gender (Hoominfar, 2021). Gender concepts are developed by learning to behave in appropriately gendered ways through interactions with others (Blaise, 2005; Blakemore et al., 2009; MacNaughton, 2000). For very young children, this means gender development occurs through relationships with family, friends, teachers, and community, and that children learn from their culture about what it means to be masculine or feminine (Lips, 2018). A main critique of socialisation theories is that historically, differing gender roles for men and women tended to be accepted, seen as a result of male dominance, and part of living in a patriarchal society where men held more power than women (Lips, 2018). Socialisation theories emphasise that people behave in gendered ways in order to conform with their cultural group. Within socialisation theory, the expectations of the cultural group can evolve along with the corresponding gendered behaviours and expressions.

Socialisation theories of gender are often dominant in early childhood settings where teaching practice and curriculum are heavily influenced by sociocultural theory, such as that of Vygotsky, and bioecological theory, such as that of Bronfenbrenner (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Recognising gender as an outcome of socialisation, however, does not necessarily mean kaiako will be positioned to recognise and confront binary thinking, especially if their personal views are also informed by biological determinism (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). A potential risk of socialisation theory in ECE is that kaiako will accept culturally embedded biological theories, not challenge binary thinking, fail to recognise or

respond to gender stereotyping, or fail to be responsive to children who are intersex or gender nonconforming.

A third view of gender is poststructuralism. Poststructuralists argue that gender is neither biologically determined nor socially constructed (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Gender is neither fixed nor set, going through a constant process of development and refinement by individuals as they resist or take on complex gender roles and positions. This view emerged in the 1990s through the works of post-structuralist thinkers, such as Davies (1989), Walkerdine (1990), and Weedon (1996), and is rooted in queer and feminist theories aiming to reduce gender inequities in society through abolishing patriarchy and heteronormativity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Lips, 2018). Poststructuralism discourse is now dominant in academia but has not commonly been accepted by ECE kaiako, who tend to rely on biological determinist and socialisation discourses (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). The potential of poststructuralist views in ECE offers kaiako and children freedom to think beyond the gender binary and expected gender roles to a space where children can take an active role in their own evolving gender development and kaiako challenge normative gendered and heteronormative behaviours to create more inclusive and open-minded environments (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

2.2.1.2 Gender Labels Over Time.

Aligned with the emergence of different views of gender development, the definitions and understandings of gender have shifted significantly in the recent years. In the 20th century, gender was commonly viewed and labelled as a set male/female binary with roles for men and women (Blakemore et al., 2009). Since then, a more fluid view of gender has emerged and gender terminology has expanded well beyond the male/female binary (Chapman,

2022; Hogan, 2014). Gender is becoming more commonly viewed as a spectrum or continuum of masculinities and femininities with many possible identity labels (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Halbeisen & Jaffé, 2022; Kelly-Ware, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2020a). Current gender terms include (but are not limited to) agender, bigender, cisgender, man/boy, woman/girl, takatāpui, transgender, and nonbinary (Inside Out, 2022). The terms "male," "female," and "intersex" now tend to be associated with a person's anatomy separate from gender but connected to gender identities (Fast & Olson, 2018; Inside Out, 2022; Lips, 2018). Whilst biological sex and gender align for many people, they can be distinctly separate concepts with different meanings. Definitions and meanings vary across individuals and groups of people, which is to be expected given that gender is a socially constructed concept. Gender identities are fluid and may change over time. Current understandings enable individuals to use the gender identity label that best fits or feels right to them (Blakemore et al., 2009; Fast & Olson, 2018; Lips, 2018). This study chooses to use the term "gender diverse" as an umbrella term for those who do not identify as man/woman or boy/girl. The broadening gender definitions and understandings since the 20th century indicate a significant cultural shift with implications for teaching.

2.2.1.3 Gender Identity is Developed in the Early Years of Life.

A child's gender is often something given to them by their parent(s) at birth or in utero with gender development continuing throughout childhood (Gansen & Martin, 2018). Sometimes, the gender a parent assigns their child is not the correct one. A 2011 survey of 3,474 transgender adults showed that 82% of respondents knew their gender did not align with their assigned gender before the age of 12 (Ehrensaft, 2018). Fast and Olson (2018) found similar findings in their longitudinal research exploring children's gender development. As part of their study, Fast and Olson interviewed 36 socially transitioned

transgender children aged 3–5 years old. Interview findings revealed the children knew the gender they were assigned as a baby was different to their present gender and were confident that their current gender would be the one they would have in the future (Fast & Olson, 2018). By the age of two or three, most children have fixed ideas about their gender identity (Blakemore et al., 2009; Gansen & Martin, 2018). Young children can and often do know definitively their gender identity early on and express their understandings in their play and everyday interactions (Blaise, 2005).

2.2.2 Early Childhood Context

2.2.2.1 Early Childhood Discourses.

Concepts of children and childhood are social constructs which have shifted considerably over time. Similar to understandings of gender, ways of thinking about children and childhood have been shaped by various theories and discourses. This part of the literature review focuses on implicit and explicit discourses about children, childhood, and their play. I have selected this focus because discourses are hugely powerful in their influence of how adults perceive and understand concepts of children and childhood. In turn, perceptions of children are strongly connected to how adults treat children and, potentially, teachers' approaches to gender inclusive ECE.

2.2.2.2 Childhood Innocence

Throughout history, childhood discourses have viewed children as innocent and requiring protection from difficult ideas or topics (Robinson, 2013; Smith, 2013). It is still common for children to be seen as innocent and in need of protection (Davies et al., 2023; Morrow, 2011). Childhood innocence is an adult-construction defined by adults and adults have the power to determine what is "difficult knowledge" not appropriate for children (Black Delfin,

2021). The innocent child discourse is frequently cited as a reason to avoid teaching children about gender diversity (Black Delfin, 2021; Blaise, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000; Warin & Price, 2020). Children are perceived as too innocent or vulnerable to be exposed to views beyond the gender binary and social norms. Perspectives such as gender diversity being, “too complex,” or “not age appropriate for children” are frequently cited.

Te Whāriki, the mandated Aotearoa New Zealand ECE curriculum, holds a vision for children to be “competent and confident learners and communicators” (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p. 5). It is common for kaiako to state that they view children as competent and confident. In their study of 50 ECE philosophy statements, Gould and Matapo (2016) found 78% of philosophy statements identified children as “capable” and “confident.” Gould and Matapo noted that while a majority of their settings espoused “capable” and “confident” children, they highlighted that children can only be capable and confident within the range of experiences and opportunities provided by kaiako, with tensions for children who do not conform to capability expectations. For example, children are unlikely to learn complex language terminology if those terms are not spoken and role modelled to them.

Delaune (2019), who exmanined the moral concepts in *Te Whāriki* through Iris Murdoch’s philsophical lens, expressed that while kaiako are encouraged to view children in line with *Te Whāriki’s* competent and confident philosophical vison, in reality each kaiako holds their own moral stance, which they may be unwilling to change without more specific curriculum guidance. Delaune stated a known weakness of having a broad curriculum open to interpretation is that kaiako use their moral stances to inform decision making. In early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand, the innocent child discourse conflicts directly

with the aspirations of the early childhood curriculum and is complex for kaiako to navigate. This tension can be exacerbated when kaiako work from their own opinions and values.

Davies et al. (2023) noted that concerns about disrupting the innocence of children stopped kaiako from engaging in complex conversations about gender, challenging gender stereotyping, and teaching gender topics. Through a lens of protecting innocence, teachers avoided teaching children about gender diversity, and conversations about gender were limited, leaving children without access to important information. Related to supporting gender diversity and inclusion in ECE, the innocent children discourse was cited as a barrier to addressing gender topics in numerous early childhood studies (e.g., Balter et al., 2021; Davies et al., 2023; Kelly-Ware, 2018; Smith et al., 2023).

Despite the ongoing presence of the innocent childhood discourse, there are increasing challenges and criticisms to this perspective that have been raised in the social childhood studies field (Sarmento et al., 2018). For example, there have been calls for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to protect children. Children generally have little say on decisions that affect their lives, such as where they live, who cares for them, and where they attend education. Adults working with children have a responsibility to keep them safe whilst promoting their agency, honouring their competence, and promoting social justice. There can be tension for ECE kaiako between the need for kaiako to protect children and support children's rights to agency. The protection of rights and wellbeing does not suggest that children are incapable of grasping complex topics or high-level concepts about the world they live in. Children are capable of engaging in expansive, complex thinking when provided the opportunities to do so. It is important ECE kaiako

examine and, if required, shift their discourse beliefs that influence gender-focused pedagogy because the discourses kaiako hold about children and childhood wield enormous power in the lives of children.

2.2.2.3 Play and Teaching.

Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood education is founded on a deep commitment to children's play. Play is defined for this study as a freely chosen and intrinsically motivated activity that is flexible, pleasurable, and involves active engagement (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2016; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Lifter et al., 2011). Through play, children have opportunities to explore ideas, express their knowledge, and experiment with objects and materials (Edwards, 2017). Play is recognised to have many benefits for children's learning (Lifter et al., 2011; White et al., 2009). The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki,* states that play is every child's right and that children should be exposed to a range of play opportunities and experiences, including spontaneous play, planned play, risky play, imaginative play, quiet play, play with others, and solitary play (Ministry of Education, 2017b). The curriculum expects kaiako to value play, be knowledgeable about implementing a play-based curriculum, and support or extend play using a range of pedagogical strategies (Ministry of Education, 2017b). Given the emphasis on play in the early childhood curriculum, it is no surprise that kaiako hold strong discourses about children learning through play. Two common discourses that are relevant for the present study are free-play and intentional teaching through play.

2.2.2.4 Free Play.

The free-play approach, sometimes referred to as child-centred or child-initiated play, dominates ECE narratives. In their analysis of 50 ECE philosophy statements, Gould and

Matapo (2016) found child-centred play was a dominant discourse mentioned in 70% of philosophy statements. Within a free-play discourse, play is sometimes seen as sacred and belonging to children with minimal need for kaiako input (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Weisberg et al., 2015). Free-play approaches emerged from Piagetian theories of child development and developmental stages (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Within New Zealand, free-play approaches often focused on kaiako setting the play environment with inviting materials and then stepping back while children played, only intervening if conflicts arose (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Weisberg et al., 2015). Free play provides children with opportunities to explore materials, play with friends, and have fun (Edwards, 2017). In some free-play approaches, the role of the kaiako is minimised and often limited to providing an environment for play and ensuring play can occur or continue.

The passive role for kaiako in free play can be detrimental to children's learning and is at odds with sociocultural or ecological theories of child development (e.g., Vygotsky or Bronfenbrenner) that are highly regarded in ECE (McLaughlin et al., 2016). Edwards (2017) maintains that although play creates valuable learning opportunities for children, free play does not constitute teaching by itself. Kaiako must be actively involved in children's play. Play on its own can be limiting and repetitive. A risk of only embracing a free-play discourse is that it can silence or marginalise some learners whilst privileging others (Gould & Matapo, 2016). Maintaining a passive role in play can limit the space for kaiako to challenge children's opinions, points of view, or ideas under the guise of respecting children's play and opinions (Prioletta, 2023). This is problematic if children's play or views include behaviours that are stereotyping, discriminatory, or prejudicial and are left unchallenged or unresolved. Children need play to make sense of their worlds and kaiako presence is important so kaiako can respond to stereotyping, discrimination, or

prejudice if they occur and provide support for children's play to be inclusive and expansive.

2.2.2.5 Intentional Teaching Through Play.

Intentional teaching through play is an emerging play discourse which is gaining momentum through the work of Aotearoa New Zealand ECE researchers, such as Cherrington (2016), McLaughlin et al. (2016), and others who have contributed to shaping the meaning of this approach to ECE (e.g., Batchelar, 2016; Hargraves, 2019). Intentional teaching has also been explored by Australian researchers such as Leggett and Ford, (2013), Lewis et al., (2019), and Thomas et al., (2011). Intentional teaching, a term first coined in America by Ann Epstein (2014), refers to how kaiako engage with individuals and groups of children in thoughtful, planned, and purposeful ways. This approach requires kaiako to use their knowledge, judgement, and expertise to both provide planned (and playful) learning experiences and respond intentionally to spontaneous situations within play and everyday routines. Intentional teaching is a term that has become widely accepted in Australia, America, and Aotearoa New Zealand, and was embraced in the 2017 update of *Te Whāriki* through the specific description of kaiako responsibilities. *Te Whāriki* 2017 makes clear the main role for kaiako is to support children's learning and development through "thoughtful and intentional pedagogy" (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p. 59).

Intentional teaching through play focuses on kaiako taking an active role in children's play and using a range of teaching strategies to support children's learning, recognising that children learn through play experiences with kaiako and other children (Cherrington, 2016; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2016). Kaiako must take an active role in children's play and

learning, carefully utilising teaching strategies, relationships, and social interactions (Edwards, 2017; Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Intentional teaching is grounded in socio-cultural theories of development, including the work of Vygotsky (McLaughlin et al., 2016). Intentional teaching requires kaiako to shift their lens from thinking predominately about children's learning to considering both teaching and learning (Cherrington, 2016). Intentional kaiako are dynamic and demonstrate flexibility and reflection while working with children, utilising a wide range of teaching strategies across a variety of play types (Cherrington, 2016). Intentional kaiako consider effective and responsive teaching strategies to use with a particular child, group of children, or situation (Epstein, 2014).

The switch from an entirely free-play approach to combining free play with intentional teaching is highly contested (Greishaber et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2011). The use of the word teaching and what teaching means in ECE is not always well understood (Leggett & Ford, 2013; Lewis et al., 2019). Intentional teaching must not be confused with images of didactic instruction in the minds of teachers, parents, or the public (Hargraves, 2019). Yet, misunderstandings about intentional teaching are anecdotally cited across the ECE sector, with increasing examples of structured small group lessons or explicit teaching of pre-academic content. Differing interpretations of teaching and intentional teaching have implications for how supporting children's learning about gender and gender diversity is understood. For the purposes of this study, intentional teaching represents thoughtful and responsive practice in which kaiako can challenge stereotypes, promote new thinking, and create gender-expansive learning environments in age-appropriate and playfully-located ways.

2.3 Part 2: Empirical Research

Literature to inform my research has been drawn from a range of sources, including a focus on writings about theory and discourse, policy and practice reports, informed opinions, and empirical research related to ECE, gender, and gender in ECE. This section of the literature review focuses on my processes to explore the research base related to gender diversity in ECE. The search process resulted in a range of relevant sources for the present research. However, only a subset of these were empirical ECE studies. For the purposes of this literature review, a narrative review across the studies to explore facilitators and barriers to gender-inclusive ECE environments is presented, followed by a review of five specific ECE gender studies that were identified as most relevant to the present work and described in detail.

2.3.1 Search Strategy

The review is informed by comprehensive literature searches in EBSCO Discovery Service (EBSCO), Scopus, and Google Scholar. Most literature came from EBSCO, which includes (but is not limited to) the databases ERIC, PsycInfo, Medline, Index New Zealand, Scopus, Web of Science, and Academic Search Premier. Search terms included gender (spectrum OR rainbow OR LGB* OR nonbinary OR inclus* OR divers* OR nonconformity OR identity) and ECE OR “early childhood education” OR preschool* OR kindergarten* OR playcentre* OR “kōhanga reo” OR home-based OR “early learning.” Across the three databases, 3629 results were screened by title and abstract using the following inclusion criteria: empirical research within the past 10 years, written in English, ECE focused, focused on gender diversity or gender-expansive teaching practice (as opposed to binary studies looking at boys and girls or research on men in ECE). The search and screening process resulted in 33 empirical ECE studies related to gender.

The 33 studies that informed this review were mostly international, with 10 studies based in the United States, nine in Aotearoa New Zealand, four in both Australia and Canada, and the remainder from Europe. Half of the studies were undertaken between 2011 and 2019 with the remaining half between 2020 and 2023, suggesting an increase in research focused on gender diversity and inclusion in ECE in more recent years. Studies tended to focus on either teachers or children, with 19 studies focused on teacher actions or teaching practices, seven focused on child actions or gendered play, four focused on both teachers and children, and three focused on documentary or artefact analysis. Most studies involving children focused on older children aged 3 to 6 years of age. Most studies were small-scale, involving fewer than 20 kaiako.

Findings across the studies suggest kaiako are willing to support gender diversity and inclusion but are lacking support, guidance, and knowledge, and face barriers, including a fear of backlash. These 33 studies, along with other relevant grey/non-empirical literature, were used to inform the narrative review of facilitators and barriers to inclusive environments presented in the following sections.

2.3.2 Facilitators of Gender-Inclusive ECE Environments

Gender-inclusive ECE environments involve all kaiako utilising a whole-setting approach to teaching gender through the use of intentional and proactive gender-flexible teaching practices. These practices include using informed and careful language, gender-inclusive resources, and having the knowledge and confidence to engage in complex conversations about gender. It is important that whole-setting approaches, involving all kaiako and leaders, are used to teach gender concepts, investigate practice, and find ways of

reducing gender stereotypes. Whole-setting approaches help maximise impact and ensure changes to practice are sustainable long term (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023; Smith & Gunn, 2015). Children are generally good at recognising unfairness or stereotyping but they may not take the next step to challenging inequity without proactive kaiako support. Feminist research has shown that play-based learning can be oppressive and harmful to children, perpetuate gender inequalities, and be a site for stereotyping and discrimination, emphasising the crucial role kaiako hold in play (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Prioletta, 2023). Kaiako hold an important role supporting children's gender learning. This role requires kaiako to actively join children's play, a teaching approach that is in direct opposition to common ECE narratives about "not interfering in play" or "honouring the sacredness of free play." Whole-setting approaches create clear expectations and help ensure kaiako–child interactions do not remain at a surface level.

Careful use of gendered language is a key aspect of creating gender-inclusive ECE environments. Careful language includes avoiding the overuse of the words "girl" and "boy," avoiding using gendered pet names, and not dividing and labelling groups by gender (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023; Tzannetis, 2022). Careful use of language does not mean gender terms are never used, because gender is an important part of identity (Blakemore et al., 2009; Gansen & Martin, 2018). However, gender-inclusive kaiako do not presume or label children's individual genders without conversations with children and whānau (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). Moreover, kaiako need to support and respect children's self-identification of gender.

Supporting explorations of gender is particularly important for children who may be challenging gender norms, exploring gender constructs, or behaving in gender-

nonconforming ways (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). When kaiako come across children who reject the gender identity which corresponds to their sex, kaiako should respond with an open mind, recognising that gender nonconformity may be a developmental and temporal part of learning about and exploring gender or could continue long term (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). As part of supporting gender exploration, child and whānau pronoun choices should be respected and pronouns should be discussed in informal conversations (Vasquez et al., 2022).

Whilst kaiako should not presume or label children's genders without engaging in whānau conversations, kaiako should remain abreast of current and changing gender terminology (Holford, 2020) and role model a wide range of gender terms, including gender nonconforming, nonbinary, gender-fluid, agender, bigender, cisgender, transgender, and intersex. Teaching children a wide range of terminology beyond the boy/girl binary helps normalise gender diversity and supports children to be open-minded and inclusive of minority genders.

Resources, books, and activities that represent a diverse range of genders can enable children to learn about gender concepts and support children to explore their ideas about gender in ways which are inclusive and non-stereotypical (Piper, 2018; Smith & Gunn, 2015). All children deserve access to authentic and accurate representations of role models that reflect their gender identities to support inclusion (Adam & Harper, 2021; Tzannetis, 2022). Books are a particularly effective tool for transmitting societal values and teaching about gender diversity. Several studies have highlighted that kaiako found reading books about gender to children made it easier to address complex topics (Adam & Harper, 2021; Doyle et al., 2015; Vasquez et al., 2022).

Books need to be carefully selected for appropriate content and messaging. Existing books in the setting should also be checked for gender biases or stereotypes (Tzannetis, 2022). Having a range of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive books, resources, and activities in ECE settings can help reduce stereotyping and is essential for promoting gender inclusion (Adam & Harper, 2021; Tzannetis, 2022). Books and resources alone are not enough to promote inclusion. It is the actions of kaiako, as they help children engage with the resources, which makes the most difference. For example, there is a large difference between reading a book about gender and using the book as a conversation tool to unpack key messages with children. As kaiako support children to learn about gender and act in non-stereotypical ways they are helping to create equity (Gunn et al., 2004).

2.3.3 Barriers to Gender-Inclusive ECE Environments

Literature over time has consistently shown that a lack of gender knowledge and confidence is a significant barrier stopping kaiako from engaging in complex conversations about gender, challenging gender stereotyping, and teaching gender topics (see Blankenheim et al., 2022; Chofla, 2016; MacNaughton, 2000; Smith & Gunn, 2015). Before gender issues can be addressed in ECE settings, kaiako must first notice gender in the setting (Blaise, 2005) and in order to notice gender, knowledge is required. When kaiako understandings are informed by theories of sex and gender development and associated terminology, including gender nonconforming, nonbinary, trans, intersex, boy, girl, and gender-fluid, kaiako are more likely to provide effective support to children. Knowledgeable kaiako are less likely to ignore gender or deem it too difficult or complex to address in conversations with children and are more likely to act against gender-

stereotyping in play to ensure discrimination, inequity, and gender divisions are not reinforced within play (Gunn et al., 2004; Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023; Prioletta, 2023; Warin & Price, 2020).

Kaiako need access to professional learning and development (PLD) focused on gender to develop their knowledge and inclusive teaching practices (McCray, 2020). Blankenheim et al. (2022) and Smith et al. (2023) all found that gender-focused PLD had an almost immediate impact reducing prejudice and increasing kaiako confidence. Along with gender-focused professional development, kaiako must engage in regular reflection on teaching practice through gender-based lenses to support the identification of biases and discover new ways to increase equitable approaches (Gunn et al., 2004). When kaiako are well informed about gender topics and issues, they are able to support ECE settings to become places of social transformation and gender equity instead of spaces where subtle sexism or gender inequity are present (Doyle et al., 2015; Gunn et al., 2004).

Kaiako with strong knowledge of gender and gender issues are well placed to address discrimination when it occurs in children's play and are well placed to encourage children to explore gender in non-stereotypical ways (Gunn et al., 2004; MacNaughton, 2000). It is crucial that explicit attention is given to gender stereotypes to ensure diversity is appropriately addressed (Blaise, 2005; Gunn et al., 2004; MacNaughton, 2000; Warin & Price, 2020). Kaiako have the unique positioning to help share and guide children's experiences and beliefs of gender (Faragó, 2023; Gunn, 2015). Children need to be supported to engage in discussions about gender from the beginning of their education and for kaiako to actively teach about gender identity and family diversity (Doyle et al., 2015). Encouraging a climate of diversity helps all children to flourish (Gunn et al., 2004).

2.3.4 Select Studies of Gender Diversity in ECE

This section of the review will explore five pertinent studies on early childhood teachers' perspectives of gender (Chapman, 2018; Kelly-Ware, 2018; Lyall, 2013; McCray, 2020; Sodano, 2019). All five studies are master or doctoral theses completed since 2013 and focus on teachers' or student teachers' knowledge of gender diversity and associated teaching practices. The studies were selected from the range of research because of their focus on kaiako views, perceptions, understandings, and knowledge of gender diversity. Two studies are from Aotearoa New Zealand and one each from Australia, Canada, and United States.

Sodano (2019) undertook a qualitative, exploratory master's thesis exploring Canadian early childhood teachers' perspectives of teaching gender diversity. Seven teachers were introduced to a range of innovative books and toys that address gender diversity. Through focus group interviews, teachers were asked their thoughts on the resources and if or how they would use them in their early learning settings. Findings revealed that all seven teachers were open to teaching gender diversity and agreed that gender was a topic that should be taught to increase awareness and understandings of individual differences and promote inclusion. Teachers were more comfortable with the idea of using children's books to present concepts about gender as opposed to other resources, such as transgender stacking Russian dolls. Teachers said they felt uneasy teaching gender diversity without clear guidelines about what specific content to teach and strong leadership support. Teachers feared upsetting parents and had concerns about accidentally using the wrong terminologies. Sodano's study showed that teachers were open to teaching gender diversity topics but only with a layer of

protection added through clear topic guidance and leadership support. Sodano noted that it was clear that without appropriate support, teachers were less willing to engage in conversations with children about gender that may leave them open to upsetting parents. This fear of backlash was listed as a significant barrier to engaging in gender-inclusive teaching.

McCray (2020) undertook a qualitative doctoral dissertation exploring 12 American educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children in their settings. Ten prekindergarten educators, one administrator, and one curriculum specialist participated in the study. It was a requirement for educators to have previously participated in at least one professional development session focused on gender development, gender diversity, and antibias curriculum in ECE. Through the use of interviews, the study aimed to explore educators' perspectives of their professional development experiences and focused on their developing capacities to support positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender-nonconforming children. Results revealed that professional development experiences had not specifically focused on supporting transgender or gender-nonconforming children and educators were unfamiliar with the terms "transgender" and "gender-nonconforming." Eleven educators did not understand the term "gender nonconforming" and their definitions of "transgender" varied widely from someone who identifies as the opposite sex to the sex assigned at birth, to someone experimenting with their identity or not comfortable in their body. Educators felt they needed professional development focused on effective ways to support gender-nonconforming or transgender children and provide a high-quality education. Whilst this study found that educator knowledge was limited and identified the need for focused professional development, McCray noted that there was also a strong

desire from educators to engage in the research in order to provide better support for gender minority learners.

Lyall (2013) held focus group interviews with 11 Aotearoa New Zealand initial teacher education (ITE) ECE students to explore their perceptions of gender. Lyall's qualitative master's thesis focused on investigating the gender discourses held by ITE students and the resulting impact and implications on pedagogy. Lyall found that students' gender discourses were conflicting, confused, and uncontested with contradictory statements made and a reliance on personal beliefs as a source of information. There was wide variation in language used beyond the gender binary. In this study, better developed gender discourses were recognised in that just under half of the students recognised and reflected on childhood gendered norm experiences, which led to more nuanced views of gender and better developed gender discourses. These students recognised that parenting, education experiences, toys, clothing, media, and societal discourses all influenced their understandings of gender. The two oldest students (35+ years of age) were classified as having the most complex understandings. Just over half of the students were able to define the terms "sex" and "gender" in ways that recognised gender as fluid, socially constructed, and located within the individual.

Conflicting or less developed gender discourses were seen by Lyall (2013) in that over half of the students believed that gender norms had little influence on their childhoods and were classified by the researcher as holding simplistic or undeveloped views of gender. Just under half of the students did not define "sex" and "gender" well and used language that appeared confused and conflicted with their earlier statements. Lyall noted that there appeared to be a connection between a lack of knowledge and a lack of nation-wide focus

on gender in professional practice and state policy. This study found wide variation in ITE students' understandings of gender, experiences of gendered norms, and use of gendered language.

Kelly-Ware's (2018) doctoral thesis investigated the ways children and kaiako respond to diversity and difference; explored how kaiako experiences, beliefs, and values impacted teaching about diversity and difference; examined children's working theories about diversity and difference; and looked at the role of parents in diversity-focused assessment through action research. The action research was undertaken in one Aotearoa New Zealand kindergarten with children and kaiako as participants. The study found that children used working theories to make sense of their worlds with limiting and normalising discourses about fairness and friendship, sex and sexuality, ethnicity and skin colour, and gender (Kelly-Ware, 2018). Kaiako responses to children's limiting and normalising discourses varied based on the subject and perceived risks of the topic. There were times when kaiako allowed gender norms or stereotyping to go uncontested in children's play. Kelly-Ware (2018) found that children tried out new gender identities in play. However, peers did not always respond inclusively and instead upheld binary gender discourses. The researcher expected kaiako to proactively challenge binary ideas and bring about new thinking but this only happened occasionally. Individual teaching philosophies, conscious and unconscious gender discourses, and the relationships kaiako had with children all impacted the ways kaiako chose to respond. Kelly-Ware (2018) noted that notions of childhood innocence and the need to protect children from difficult discourses also presented a barrier to kaiako appropriately supporting learning. Data revealed that there were times when kaiako responses (or lack of responses) perpetuated problematic discourses, perpetuated the status quo, and ignored discrimination.

Chapman's (2018) Australian qualitative doctoral thesis explored 12 ECE teachers and two curriculum developers' views on gender development, the role of the teacher, and gender content in the national curriculum: Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Through focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, and artefact analysis, Chapman (2018) found that participants expressed a wide range of views on gender development, gender and sexuality discourses, and how to support gender-nonconforming children. Teachers and curriculum developers expressed a clear desire for professional development, guidance, resources, and policy to support gender equity and inform teaching practice. Chapman (2018) found that gender was hardly covered in the EYLF framework, leaving teachers to interpret what inclusive or best practice looked like, with many teachers relying on their own views, lived experiences, previous teacher education, or centre philosophies to guide practice. Chapman (2018) found that many settings did not have a centre-wide approach to gender and that gender-based teaching practices were variable across teams and dependent on individual teaching philosophies. Data showed that colleagues had conflicting views and employed varied approaches regarding gender. Chapman (2018) recommends whole-setting approaches to ensure environments are consistently supportive.

Chapman (2018) reported that there was strong will to appropriately support gender-nonconforming children and eagerness to support children's exploration of gender but children were often seen by teachers as "too innocent" to discuss gender with, and gender was seen as a "taboo" topic in ECE settings. Gender-nonconforming behaviours were sometimes viewed as a "problem" to be fixed as opposed to an exploration of gender identity. At times, children's agency was in direct conflict with families' wishes or

expectations, for example, some fathers did not want their sons to wear dresses. Findings from this study suggest that teachers' views on gender predominantly arise from their own lived experiences and values. Teaching practices were variable across settings, and teachers did not feel supported by the EYLF framework to teach gender.

The five studies discussed highlight that despite wide variations in understandings of gender, teachers were willing to support gender equity and engage in gender-focused professional development. Life experiences and individual philosophies and values commonly underpinned teachers' knowledge and approaches to teaching gender. This is problematic when teachers' beliefs are informed by biases or outdated gender views and likely contributed to teachers allowing gender stereotyping to go uncontested in children's play. Barriers to teaching gender inclusivity were a fear of backlash from parents; uncertainty about what content to teach and how to teach it; a lack of clear guidance from curriculum documents, policy, and leadership; a lack of terminology knowledge; and a need to "protect" innocent children from complex or difficult topics. The studies emphasised that addressing these barriers and implementing whole-setting gender teaching approaches would create more inclusive environments.

What is also notable about the studies is the targeted focus on a small number of teachers in specific ECE teaching contexts. Of the five studies discussed, the largest sample size was 12 kaiako. There is a need to more systematically understand the perspectives of ECE teachers and particularly ECE teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. My searches identified only nine empirical studies about gender diversity in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the time of writing of my thesis, I was aware of only one other piece of ECE gender diversity research occurring in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gunn, 2023). To further set

the context for my research, the next section of the literature review explores key aspects of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context that are relevant to the study of gender diversity and inclusion.

2.4 Part 3: Aotearoa New Zealand Context

2.4.1 Aotearoa New Zealand ECE Context

Aotearoa New Zealand ECE settings embrace play-based pedagogies and learning through play. Child-centered or child-led approaches are common where children's interests are used as a vehicle for learning and children's right to autonomy and choice in play is prioritised. In some settings, child-led learning has been interpreted as children needing access to free play with minimal kaiako interaction (Meade et al., 2012). In the free-play or child-led discourse emphasis is placed on the importance of adults respecting the sacred nature of children's play by not interfering, challenging thinking, or extending learning (Brownlee & Crisp, 2020; Prioletta, 2023). As noted earlier, this approach can be problematic when children's play actions may be perceived as discriminatory, stereotyping, racist, ableist, or otherwise harmful. Studies have shown that while children are not likely to be intentionally interacting in damaging ways, harm can occur through play and kaiako often do not respond, or respond in surface ways, to stereotyping, exclusion, or discriminatory interactions (Kelly-Ware, 2018; Nguyen, 2021; Prioletta, 2023; Wohlwend, 2018).

Gender has been a focus in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education for over forty years. In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers focused on curriculum play experiences and issues of stereotyping for boys and girls with a focus on ensuring both boys and girls were free to learn across the whole curriculum (Gunn et al., 2004; Gunn, 2008; Hogan,

2014; Meade & Staden, 1985; Slyfield & Sturrock, 1993; Smith & Inder, 1993). This legacy lives on today with studies continuing to focus on equity of experiences for boys and girls (Kahuroa, 2013; Smith, 2017; Swit, 2019). Given we live in a society in which girls and women experience fewer privileges than boys and men (especially so for girls and women with other intersections of diversity), it remains important to focus on ensuring educational equality or equity for both boys and girls (Prioletta, 2023). Studies that focus solely on the experiences of boys and girls, however, have the potential to perpetuate binary thinking and can exclude people of diverse genders. Moreover, the long history of focusing on fair experiences for boys and girls means many kaiako feel gender equality is "done" or "achieved." As such, some kaiako feel that gender no longer needs to be a priority in ECE and there may be resistance to extended conversations about gender and gender diversity (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020; Piper, 2018).

Tracking through the progression of the ECE curriculum and guidance (or lack of guidance) provided in curriculum support resources related to gender gives insight into what kaiako have been supported to consider. The following section outlines the changing views and guidance around gender.

2.4.1.1 Curriculum.

The 1996 version of *Te Whāriki: The Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum*, used the terms "boy" and "girl" five times within the contribution strand but nowhere else in the document (Ministry of Education, 1996). This could be interpreted as a strong focus on gender equality of access and participation for girls and boys in line with literature at the time. Equality of participation was emphasised through phrasing such as, "Both infant girls and boys are encouraged to enjoy challenges" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 67) and

“Adults expect and encourage boys and girls to take similar parts in caring and domestic routines” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 67). The word “gender” was mentioned 13 times with a focus on teaching children about non-stereotypical gender roles and occupations. For example, “In talking with toddlers, adults do not link occupations to gender, for example, by assuming that doctors are men or that nurses are women” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 67). The 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* emphasised that irrespective of their gender, all children had the right to fully participate, use resources that reflect their gender, and feel positive about their gender. Some points in the document seem to be gender expansive, such as expecting kaiako to provide books and resources that reflect children’s genders. Expansive thinking is contradicted elsewhere through the use of binary language, such as supporting children to make positive judgments about “their own gender and the opposite gender” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 66). The gender lens of the 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* (1996) was very much in line with the literature and societal values of the time, focusing on equal participation opportunities for boys and girls and challenging gender stereotypes.

The updated 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* states that gender is a part of inclusion for all children and that children should “experience an environment where there are equitable opportunities for learning irrespective of gender…” (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p. 24). This language is very similar to the 1996 version. However, the terms “boy” and “girl” are not used, which is a significant shift from the 1996 version of *Te Whāriki*. The term “gender” is only mentioned eight times in *Te Whāriki* 2017 and is focused on encouraging children to interact with children of other genders; kaiako selecting books, games, and toys for infants that depict genders in a variety of roles; kaiako accepting toddlers’ explorations of gender; and kaiako using language and resources that reflect each child’s gender

(Ministry of Education, 2017b). In some ways, gender is presented as a vague concept, in which the meaning of gender and what it encompasses cannot be clearly derived across the statements.

Moreover, gender does not appear to have been deeply considered across the age ranges of children in the updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017b). For example, kaiako are only expected to support toddlers' explorations of gender without mention of this same consideration for infants or young children. Books that depict genders in a variety of roles are mentioned for infants and no other age ranges. Gender guidance seems quite narrow, focusing predominantly on interacting with other genders, learning about gender roles, and reflecting children's genders. This is not a gender-expansive view encouraging teaching across the gender spectrum or deepening children's worldviews beyond their own lived experiences. My own assessment of the two documents is that consideration of gender in *Te Whāriki* has progressed since the 1996 version but the 2017 version does not provide clear expectations for kaiako to teach children about gender across all age ranges and is quite limited given the modern literature and increasingly expansive societal values about gender.

2.4.1.2 Guidance for Kaiako.

Overall, there is a lack of guidance focused on supporting gender inclusion and diversity in ECE and how kaiako approach and address gender inclusion and diversity through teaching and play. As noted, *Te Whāriki* broadly mentions gender and provides limited support for specific teaching approaches. *He Māpuna te Tamaiti* (Ministry of Education, 2017a), a guide for supporting social and emotional competence in ECE, and *Our Code Our Standards: Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching*

Profession (Education Council, 2017) also outline some broad expectations for kaiako. *He Māpuna* states that the conversations kaiako have about children's behaviour often illustrate unconscious biases and gendered thinking. *He Māpuna* emphasises the need for kaiako to be aware of their biases, regularly checking that gendered thinking, low expectations, and deficit theories are not influencing kaiako responses to children's behaviour.

Registered kaiako are required, by the Teaching Council, to promote children's wellbeing, protect them from harm, and respect their identities (Education Council, 2017). The Teaching Council also calls on kaiako to examine how their assumptions and beliefs impact on learners with different genders (Education Council, 2017). *The National Education Learning Priorities (NELP)* for early learning require kaiako to ensure settings are free from discrimination and provide a safe, inclusive culture where diversity is valued and LGBTQIA+ learners and staff feel they belong (Ministry of Education, 2020a). *Te Whāriki, He Māpuna te Tamaiti, Our Code Our Standards,* and *NELP* all allude to the need to be inclusive of gender diversity without providing specific guidance to support kaiako. As a relatively new resource, *Kōwhiti Whakapae* provides information for kaiako to notice, recognise, and respond to children's learning (Ministry of Education, 2024b). While *Kōwhiti Whakapae* provides a few additional points for kaiako to consider, it is not sufficient or comprehensively focused on gender diversity and inclusion. Moreover, as an optional resource, it is not clear how many kaiako are accessing or using it. The combined guidance suggests that engaging in inclusive and responsive gender teaching practice is an expectation of the education workforce, yet there is little Aotearoa New Zealand ECE guidance for kaiako or research about practices kaiako are currently using (Smith & Gunn, 2015).

In contrast to ECE, schools receive detailed guidance on approaches to teaching gender through their *Relationships and Sexuality Education* (RSE) guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020a). However, at the time of writing this thesis, the New Zealand Government has planned to remove and replace the RSE guidelines in 2025. The current RSE guidelines provide clear definitions of gender and explanations of expected teaching approaches. Steps are outlined to promote the inclusion of gender-diverse learners and the benefits gained when all learners are taught about gender diversity. The guidelines recognise that all young people have a right to learn about the complexity of human relationships, including gender identity (Ministry of Education, 2020a). The RSE guidelines make it clear kaiako needed to provide support to children questioning gender norms and binaries (Ministry of Education, 2020a) and provide specific guidance on what that support may look like, including not grouping children by gender and providing unisex bathrooms.

As noted earlier, the Government plans to remove and replace the RSE guidelines. It is likely the replacement guidelines will not include gender guidance and explanations for kaiako. The repeal of the current guidelines will remove the Ministry of Education's official endorsement of them, however, the RSE guidelines were always presented as optional, and schools had the choice of whether they were adopted or used to guide policy and practice at local schools. The overall lack of clear guidance in the education and ECE sectors continues.

2.4.2 Aotearoa New Zealand Societal Context

2.4.2.1 Aotearoa New Zealand Children's Gender Identities.

There is limited information about Aotearoa New Zealand children's gender identities in early childhood. Gender data gathered through research surveys tends to focus on teenagers and adults (cf. Fenaughty et al., 2022, 2023; Veale et al., 2019). Up until 2023, Statistics New Zealand only gathered biological sex information (Statistics New Zealand, 2024). At the time of writing, 2023 census gender data were not publicly available but will encompass a much more expanded view of gender, including nonbinary identities. The most recently available data, from 2018, showed similar numbers of children aged 0–4 and 5–9 categorised by sex as "male" or "female" (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). The Ministry of Education undertake an annual ECE Census that gathers children's "gender" information (Ministry of Education, 2024a) but they only gather basic sex information. The gender census data comes from children's enrolment forms and the Ministry of Education-provided enrolment forms only have space for whānau to select "male" or "female" and do not include "intersex" or nonbinary identities as options (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Gender data are available for children participating in the *Growing up in New Zealand (GUiNZs)* longitudinal study. Researchers asked 4500 12-year-olds about their gender identities. Findings showed the cohort was rich in gender diversity with nearly 10% categorised as nonbinary or transgender from their question responses. Participants were asked to place themselves on a scale indicating whether they see themselves as a boy, a girl, or somewhere in between and responses were compared to their sex assigned at birth. Based on question responses, 8.2% of respondents assigned female at birth were categorised transgender or nonbinary and 1.5% of respondents assigned male at birth were categorised transgender or nonbinary (Neumann et al., 2023). Categorising

participants using nonbinary and transgender terminology was a new lens on previous analyses with the *GUiNZs.* When the cohort were in early childhood, a binary approach was used. The researchers commented that analyses that only focus on differences in outcomes based on biological sex differences obscure gender diversity in the research base (Neumann et al., 2023). While we do not have access to gender identity data for children attending ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, progress is apparent through shifts like those Neumann et al. (2023) made in their study with 12-year-olds and the 2023 Statistics New Zealand census changes. If the Ministry of Education improve their ECE enrolment form to be more gender inclusive, a more accurate representation of children's genders in early childhood could be provided.

2.4.2.2 Heteronormativity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a country dominated by heteronormativity, where many people still view gender and sexuality through binary and heterosexual lenses (Smith & Gunn, 2015). People who identify as gender diverse are a minority and more likely to experience oppression, discrimination, or prejudice (Smith & Gunn, 2015). People who identify as nonbinary or trans also experience higher rates of psychological distress than cisgender people, including suicide attempts, substance abuse, bullying in school, barriers accessing healthcare and participating in sports, and discrimination (Tan et al., 2022; Veale et al., 2019). These negative impacts are mitigated when inclusion is supported. While gender diverse people are a minority, there is an increasing range of advocacy and support groups for gender diverse children and peoples, including but not limited to the work of Inside Out, Te Ngākau Kahukura, Gender Minorities Aotearoa, NZ Parents of Transgender and Gender Diverse Children, and Ara Taiohi. Shifting social attitudes and understandings is slow progress, yet increasing efforts across health, education, and other social spaces

suggest a commitment to gender diversity and creating gender-inclusive environments that protect and nurture the wellbeing and identities of all individuals.

2.4.2.3 Te Ao Māori Gender Perspectives.

Historical Māori perspectives on gender differ from the predominantly Western views outlined in this literature review. The following is my emerging understanding of Te Ao Māori perspectives about gender, gained from the literature and with the support of a Māori advisor. An important disclaimer is that as a Pākehā researcher, I cannot fully understand these perspectives in their original form and I acknowledge that Te Ao Iwi views of gender will each have a unique and nuanced history that may not follow the generalised version I have described below. I recognise that I am benefitting from the work of indigenous researchers and respect and acknowledge their work.

In pre-colonial times, a person's gender was not strongly tied to their identity (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Green, Manawaroa, et al., 2023; Kerekere, 2017b; Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021; Oliphant et al., 2018). Whakapapa, mana, and mauri were much more important aspects of identity and societal roles were not strongly connected to a person's genitalia (McBreen, 2023). While people were somewhat categorised by gender and some tasks were seen as mostly for one gender or another, most work was shared without gender role constraints (McBreen, 2023; Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021). Women were leaders, men were nurturers, and sex was not stigmatised. Sexual interactions could be recreational or reproductive, monogamous or non-monogamous, and with same-sex or opposite-sex partners (McBreen, 2023). Whakapapa, tikanga, tapu, and noa guided relationships and interactions (Mitchell & Olsen-Reeder, 2021). Language in te reo Māori was, and still is, less gendered than in English, with the term "ia" representing "he" and "she"

simultaneously and “tōna” representing he and her (Green, Pihama, et al., 2023; Kerekere, 2017b). There are no historical terms for gender minorities or for people who either adhere to, or break, those norms (McBreen, 2023). Labels were not needed, and categories were not important for understanding people, as all were valued (Green, Manawaroa, et al., 2023; Oliphant et al., 2018). The term takatāpui meant an intimate companion of the same sex. Kerekere (2017b) states that same sex relationships were accepted as normal and beautiful.

Colonisation introduced the gender binary, Christian values, and heteronormativity (Doyle, 2023). The impact on Māori views of gender was enormous. Inclusive perspectives were lost to colonisation and no longer seen as “tika” (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Kerekere, 2017b). Language was changed, waiata lyrics censored, and gender fluidity removed from society (Doyle, 2023). A gender binary was introduced that stifled the roles of wāhine Māori, coerced tāne, and was in direct opposition to the Māori world view (Doyle, 2023). Expressions of gender beyond the binary faced rejection and violent repercussions from colonisers (Doyle, 2023).

Since the 1980s, work has been done to reclaim and expand the term takatāpui from colonisation but colonial trauma remains (Doyle, 2023; Green, Pihama, et al., 2023; Kerekere, 2017b). Takatāpui, in modern times, is defined by Kerekere (2017a, 2017b, 2021) as an inclusive term that embraces all Māori with diverse sexualities, sex characteristics, and genders, recognising wairua, whakapapa, mana, and identity. Through a Māori world view, gender diverse people can be seen as “spiritual and magical beings who can change gender and form” (Kerekere, 2023, p. 81).

Today, many Māori use the term takatāpui to express their gender and/or sexuality. Takatāpui weaves together Māori and LGBTQI+ identities as one (Doyle, 2023). The combining of identities can be powerful and affirming. Doyle (2023) explained that prior to hearing the word takatāpui, he had not connected with common LGBTQI+ terms as none had accurately captured his essence or identity. Doyle stated “[t]akatāpui changed this experience for me. The fact that the word takatāpui recognises the mana of our cultural identity and our whakapapa as Māori is something that has no equivalent in western notions of gender, sex, and sexuality” (2023, p. 77).

Research to explore current and historical Māori views on gender, gender inclusion and diversity, and implications for health, education, and other social sectors is ongoing. This research has been undertaken by indigenous researchers through kaupapa Māori methodologies, working to support structural and social change to health and wellbeing of takatāpui and Māori LGBTQI+ communities (cf. Green, Pihama et al., 2023). To date, I have found no specific studies or literature that address gender diversity and inclusion for tamariki Māori in ECE.

For the present research, it was important to include Te Ao Māori perspectives and research within my literature review as a foundational aspect of the Aotearoa New Zealand context with potential implications for ECE. A deeper exploration into takatāpui and current and historical Māori views on gender is beyond the scope of this thesis and my role as a Pākehā researcher. Nonetheless, protocols for ensuring the perspectives of those who identify as Māori in the present research are described in the Methodology section.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This literature review has examined different views of gender and recognised that understandings have changed over time and that wide variation exists in understandings of gender diversity within ECE. Gender is a social construct with a rapidly evolving terminology. Kaiako knowledge and access to appropriate PLD is key in ensuring that teaching practices align with evolving understandings. Without a strong knowledge base, kaiako are more likely to let gender discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping occur within their settings. Informed kaiako are able to enact whole-setting approaches, addressing a complex topic with children. The lack of clear expectations in Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum documents is yet another barrier supporting kaiako to engage in gender-inclusive teaching practice. However, international research has shown that with support, ECE kaiako are able to begin addressing gender diversity in their everyday teaching interactions.

There is a dearth of Aotearoa New Zealand ECE research focused on gender diversity. This study aims to address the lack of Aotearoa New Zealand ECE gender research by exploring kaiako understandings, experiences, and perspectives of gender and their gender-focused teaching practice. The following research questions were used to guide the present research:

1. How do Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood kaiako describe their knowledge, understandings, experiences, and perspectives of gender diversity?
2. How do Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood kaiako describe their roles in relation to being responsive to gender diversity?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design used to explore kaiako perceptions, understandings, and experiences of gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. Interpretivism, constructivism, and critical theory guided the collection and analysis of questionnaire and interview data. Content analysis, thematic analysis, and descriptive statistics were used to develop descriptions of how kaiako described their gender beliefs and teaching practices. The following sections outline the purposes of the study, research world view and design, participant recruitment, questionnaire and interview design, analysis methods, ethics, limitations of the study, and researcher bias.

3.2 Purpose of the Study

This study investigated how early childhood kaiako perceive, understand, and experience gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. The research further sought to explore the ways kaiako supported equity through the lens of gender diversity by identifying the teaching practices and support systems used by those who were supportive of gender diversity. Previous research suggested kaiako knowledge, beliefs, and access to PLD were key components of ensuring teaching practices aligned with evolving understandings of gender; challenged discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping; and enacted whole-setting approaches to promote inclusion (Chapman, 2018; Kelly-Ware, 2018; Lyall, 2013; McCray, 2020). Because there was little Aotearoa New Zealand research exploring gender diversity in early childhood education (ECE), this study explored kaiako beliefs about gender diversity and their associated teaching practices through the following research questions:

1. How do Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood kaiako describe their knowledge, understandings, experiences, and perspectives of gender diversity?
2. How do Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood kaiako describe their roles in relation to being responsive to gender diversity?

To further break down the key ideas related to kaiako perspectives and practices, the following sub questions were used to guide data collection and analysis:

   a. What views do kaiako hold about gender?
   b. How are kaiako understandings of gender formed?
   c. What systems do ECE settings have in place to support gender inclusion and diversity?
   d. What enablers and barriers do kaiako identify to supporting gender inclusion and diversity?
   e. What practices or resources do kaiako identify and use to support learning about gender?

The overall intent of this study was exploratory to better understand teachers' perspectives, knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. Information about teachers' current views and practices has the potential to inform future research, policy, and practice. Moreover, the focus on practices and systems that are supportive of gender diversity has the potential to enhance gender-expansive pedagogical practices to support inclusion of children and whānau who identify as gender minorities.

3.3 Worldview

This research was guided by interpretivism, constructivism, and critical theory. I took a pluralist approach to this work because I am interested in exploring this topic through

multiple lenses. For example, interpretivism supported the importance of ensuring research findings were interpreted and understood in relation to literature, social contexts, and historical contexts. Interpretivist research recognises individual beliefs, and societal views are inextricably connected (O'Donoghue, 2018). An interpretivist perspective is particularly relevant for individual gender views, which commonly develop through social interactions and experiences in connection to dominant societal gender discourses (Lips, 2018).

As a researcher and ECE kaiako, I also bring my own conceptions of gender diversity and inclusion. Therefore, constructivism lent insights into how I mediate my role in the construction of knowledge. Constructivism focuses on exploring participant perspectives and views the researcher in an active role for constructing meaning through understanding participant beliefs and experiences (Mertens, 2020). Kaiako were able to share their perceptions, understandings, and experiences to inform this research, yet it was my role across the range of perspectives to make meaning and identify trends.

Finally, critical theory focuses on how research can be used to challenge, create change, and reveal conflict and oppression (Moon & Blackman, 2014, 2017). Through exploring inclusive teaching practices and disseminating findings, this study hopes to increase kaiako awareness of gender-expansive teaching and improve teaching practice. From the outset, I have been aware of my desire to research as a form of advocacy and transformation for inclusive practice while honoring the reality of ECE kaiako perspectives.

Overall, I view myself as a pragmatist who is blurring approaches to develop understandings and effect change through research. Utilising multiple research paradigms

is becoming more common in qualitative research, particularly the merging of constructivist and critical theory paradigms as has occurred in this study (Mertens, 2020).

3.4 Research Design

Qualitative methodology was an appropriate choice for this research given the study was investigating dynamic human behaviour and aimed to develop rich descriptions of how early childhood kaiako perceive, understand, and experience gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. A question-driven approach supported this exploratory two-phase qualitative study. Question-driven approaches begin with research questions and appropriate methods are selected to answer the questions (Punch & Oancea, 2014). In education, questions often arise from practical and professional issues or problems (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

To answer the research questions, data were gathered through phase one questionnaires and phase two individual semi-structured interviews with early childhood kaiako. The phase one questionnaire was designed to generate a broad understanding of kaiako perspectives and teaching practices. Phase two was designed to create deeper understandings from a smaller number of kaiako to provide depth and insights beyond those found in questionnaire data. This study was not designed to be representative of all kaiako but to provide a snapshot of existing beliefs and practices. I held no set expectations of what phase one data would reveal and maintained an exploratory focus. As phase one came to an end, preliminary findings suggested a wide range of views and a larger than expected potential interview pool. For these reasons, and in consultation with supervisors, phase two was given a focus of more in-depth exploration with those who were supportive of gender diversity.

3.5 Participants

ECE kaiako from across Aotearoa were invited to participate in the research. Eligibility was open to all kaiako currently teaching or employed in a licensed ECE service to capture a range of kaiako perspectives supporting the credibility and authenticity of the research (Billups, 2021). Questionnaire recruitment occurred through email invitations sent to early learning settings. The questionnaire link and flyer were emailed to all licensed early childhood services with a publicly available email address on the Education Counts website. The questionnaire was sent to a total of 2617 settings after duplicate email addresses were removed from the listserv. At the end of the questionnaire, kaiako were asked whether they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview.

A total of 431 kaiako completed the questionnaire and 113 kaiako expressed interest in participating in the phase-two in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling, which is common in qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Purposive sampling was in line with ethical considerations (see Section 3.8) and enabled me to screen participants' questionnaire responses to identify those who were supportive of gender diversity and inclusion (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020). A process to screen participants' questionnaire responses related to their understandings of gender was developed to ensure potential interview participants held views in line with the focus of the study on gender inclusion and inclusive practices. Screening involved identifying interview participants that were unknown to me; held a relevant teaching qualification; recognised gender and biological sex as different; viewed gender as a spectrum; and viewed gender as something that develops across a lifetime, may change over time, or is fluid.

Screening by gender understandings resulted in 58 possible interview participants of the 113 that expressed an interest. In consultation with supervisors, it was determined that up to 10 was a feasible number of respondents to interview for this master's thesis research. To enhance a diverse representation of views within this potential pool of participants, participant-reported ethnicity was used as part of the purposive sampling design. Three ethnicity categories were created: Māori (n = 2), NZ European/Pākehā (n = 42), and other ethnicities (n = 14). Some kaiako in the other ethnicities category also identified as NZ European/Pākehā but were not recategorised. Because *Te Whāriki* is a bicultural curriculum and because of my commitment to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, both kaiako Māori were selected for interviews. The remaining eight interview spots were shared proportionally between the NZ European/Pākehā (n = 6) and other ethnic groups (n = 2). Participants in the two groups were allocated a number and selected using a random number generator. Prior to being invited to participate, the ten selected participants were checked against setting types, regions, and ages taught to ensure diversity across the sample. Of the ten selected kaiako, nine accepted the invitation and proceeded to be interviewed. Through nine interviews it was not possible to have every demographic group represented, nor were participants selected to be representative of all ECE kaiako. Generalisability was not the intent of this study as the study aimed to explore a range of perspectives about gender diversity and provide depth of understandings not able to be found in questionnaire data.

3.6 Data Collection

This exploratory two-phase qualitative study used questionnaires and semi-structured individual interviews. Phase one was an online questionnaire asking kaiako about their

gender beliefs and teaching practices and phase two involved individual interviews with a small selection of early childhood kaiako to deeply explore a range of perspectives about gender. The decision to use two methods of data collection helped ensure breadth and depth of data.

3.6.1 Questionnaire Design

The phase one questionnaire was written in Qualtrics, distributed electronically, and open for a period of 3 weeks. Kaiako were able to self-report their understandings and experiences of gender diversity. The questionnaire included a mix of 35 open and closed questions across five areas: demographic, general gender beliefs, beliefs about teaching gender diversity, gender-diversity-focused teaching practices, and interview recruitment. Open questions enquired about kaiako beliefs and practices. For example, “Briefly describe what an ECE environment that is inclusive of gender diversity looks like for you” and “How do you believe children form their gender identity?” Closed questions asked specific questions about actions kaiako take and views kaiako held and participants were able to select the relevant answer. For example, “Are gender and biological sex the same or different? Same or different.” Closed questions were included in this qualitative study because of their ability to use category responses to capture viewpoints and perspectives proportionally across respondents. An electronic questionnaire using the Qualtrics platform was selected for ease of access by participants, quick turnaround time, and the higher response rates generated as opposed to mail-based questionnaires (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A: Online Questionnaire with Consent Information.

According to Johnson & Christensen (2020), a well-designed questionnaire enables participants to self-report their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours in measurable ways. Care was taken to ensure the questionnaire aligned with Johnson and Christensen's principles of questionnaire design, including the use of clear questions and familiar language; avoiding double-barreled, leading, or loaded questions; ensuring ease of use; and piloting the questionnaire prior to distribution. The questionnaire was written specifically for this study in adherence with these principles and was designed in collaboration with two thesis supervisors and external advisors. The questionnaire was piloted by the Massey Early Years Research group that I am a member of.

3.6.2 Interview Design

Semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews were selected for phase two. This approach allowed for flexibility in the questions asked, enabling the interviews to be tailored slightly to each respondent and deep responses sought using tailored probing questions. At the same time, consistent use of key questions ensured the integrity of the research was maintained, allowing for meaningful comparison across data sets (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow for a more natural conversational flow than structured interviews, providing flexibility to both skip previously answered questions and/or ask follow-up questions to gather rich data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth individual interviews were appropriate because they allow space for exploring personal or sensitive issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The topic being discussed was of a sensitive or potentially controversial nature with likely prejudices (Blankenheim et al., 2022), so in-depth interviews allowed participants to respond as deeply as was comfortable for them whilst still providing scope for rich depth and breadth of data.

Rigorous interview procedures were essential for supporting the gathering of rich data. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011). The interview protocol ensured consistency across interviews. The interview protocol was written for this study in line with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) and Schensul and LeCompte's (2013) in-depth, semi-structured interview guidelines and was designed in collaboration with two thesis supervisors and external advisors. Questions were grouped by related topics because Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) emphasised the importance of grouping questions together logically to support interview flow. The questions were written in simple language that participants were likely to understand as recommended by Rubin and Rubin.

The full protocol included processes for opening and closing the interview, informed consent, and 13 questions about gender diversity in ECE with optional probing questions consistent with a semi-structured interview design. Interview questions were grouped in two topic areas: 1. General gender beliefs and 2. Teaching practices and experiences supportive of gender diversity. The protocol was piloted with an early childhood kaiako prior to being used and participants were provided with the 13 main questions prior to interviews. All nine kaiako were asked the 13 main questions and a selection of probing questions. The interview protocol questions and probing questions can be found in Appendix B: Interview Questions.

3.7 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics for closed questions and content analysis for open questions. Interview data were analysed using thematic coding. Questionnaire data were exported from Qualtrics to Microsoft Excel and Jamovi open statistical software version 2.5.7. Interview audio recordings were professionally

transcribed by transcribers who had signed confidentiality agreements. Transcripts were saved as Microsoft Word documents. Transcripts were provided to participants for member checking prior to analysis beginning, to ensure data accurately reflected what they intended to share (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Member checking is an important strategy in interpretivist research, ensuring that participants agree with what has been recorded from their interview and their views have been accurately represented (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). The approved transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 14.2 and analysed thematically.

The following sections describe questionnaire and interview analyses and how the results were reported. In line with the aims of the study, the purposes of data analysis were to describe how participating kaiako understood, perceived, and experienced gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices, without the intention to make inferences for a wider population of kaiako. The results are descriptive and illustrative of the views and experiences shared by participating kaiako.

3.7.1 Questionnaire Analysis

Closed questionnaire questions were analysed using descriptive statistics to explore numerical characteristics of the data, as recommended by Punch and Oancea (2014). Data were reported by frequency and percentages. Microsoft Excel and Jamovi open statistical software version 2.5.7 were used to generate frequencies and percentages for closed questions in which participants selected from pre-determined response options. Qualitative questions were analysed in Microsoft Excel using manual content analysis. Content analysis involved inductively coding responses into categories, refining categories as codes, and then describing findings using statistics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content

analysis was selected to identify trends in data and understand the large number of responses (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

3.7.2 Interview Analysis

An iterative, inductive thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse nine interview transcripts using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it allowed me to identify, analyse, and report themes in data with flexibility and deep examination of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, interview data were transcribed using professional transcribers who had signed confidentiality agreements, and I read through all transcripts to become familiar with the data. Second, transcripts were individually coded using line-by-line open coding in NVivo 14.2 to inductively generate the initial code set. Third, codes were refined for alignment, relevance, and consistency across transcripts and codes, and clustered into potential thematic areas. At this stage, data were analysed across the data set as opposed to case-by-case. During the refinement process, some codes were expanded and others condensed or merged until all key ideas were reflected in the code set. This resulted in the creation of 47 codes. Fourth, theme generation began by reading through the data within all the clustered codes and exploring the messaging for key ideas. Key ideas were written on paper and post-it notes and clustered together. Potential themes were arranged, rearranged, and refined until ten main themes emerged. Fifth, the ten themes were analysed against coded data, looking for consistency, inconsistency, and alignment. The ten themes were refined to ensure the wording of the themes accurately reflected messaging within the data. Sixth, themes were confirmed with thesis supervisors and findings written, with the support of rich examples.

Throughout all stages, I led the analysis with input from my supervisors as secondary coders for quality assurance. Handwritten memo notes were kept throughout analysis, documenting reflections and decisions made. It was important to examine deeply, question the data, and ensure that codes and themes remained provisional and open to change until analysis was completed and themes generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My personal experiences and insights were an important aspect of the inquiry and helped contextualise meanings shared by kaiako (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). With support from my supervisors, I engaged in ongoing reflection to recognise and scrutinise my personal experiences and insights to limit bias and maintain subjectivity as I generated codes and developed themes (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Supervisor conversations supported me to interpret the data accurately without making undue interpretations based on my own experiences.

3.8 Ethics

A full ethics application was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Ohu Matatika 2. Screening identified the study as low risk, but it was identified that a full ethics application would strengthen the research process, particularly because researching and discussing gender is controversial to some people. Protection from reputational harm and autonomy were two key ethical considerations in this study. Participants were protected from reputational harm through anonymity or confidentiality and pseudonym use. Phase one questionnaire participants who did not wish to engage in follow-up interviews were anonymous. Participants who expressed interest in phase two interviews were not anonymous due to the need to collect contact information in phase one for phase two. The names and contact details of participants were kept confidential and pseudonyms were

used for the selected interviewees and any tamariki or colleagues named during interviews.

All study participants were adults who provided voluntary, informed consent to support their autonomy (Massey University, 2017). Questionnaire consent information was provided to participants at the start of the survey and provided through the answering of survey questions. Prior to their interviews, participants were given an information sheet and provided written consent. The information sheet outlined research aims, interview procedures, data storage, confidentiality, and voluntary participation for informed and autonomous decisions. Interview participants were able to withdraw their consent up until 2 weeks after receiving their transcript for member checking and emendation.

Additionally, ethical guidelines for the storage and eventual disposal of data were adhered to and ethical procedures were followed to protect the perspectives of interview participants who identify as Māori, with procedures written into the interview protocol. See Appendices: A) Phase One questionnaire and consent information; B) Interview protocol; C) Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Ohu Matatika 2 letter of approval; D) Interview participant information sheet; E) Participant consent form; and F) Transcript release form.

3.9 Researcher Bias and Responsibility

The nature of the research topic meant I needed to be very aware of researcher bias to ensure my own beliefs did not skew the interpretation of data, reporting of data, or integrity of the research (Billups, 2021). In the introduction section of this thesis, I outlined my teaching background, interest in gender diversity, and position on gender inclusion in ECE

to provide transparency and acknowledge potential bias. This was important because undue researcher bias can favour the researcher's viewpoint and override the perspectives of participants in the reporting of results (Billups, 2021). This was particularly important for the present study in which a wide range of views were sought for the first phase of the research, as well as the personal, and potentially controversial, nature of the topic. To guard against the risk of bias and provide a balanced and credible interpretation of the data, an ongoing process of reflexivity occurred between myself and my supervisors, discussing my role and prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs. Reflexivity supported me to engage in critical self-reflection and self-awareness (Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

The nature of the research topic also meant I needed to be very aware of my responsibility to ensure the protection and wellbeing of participants and gender-diverse communities. This included processes to ensure that views and comments that might be classified as harmful or hurtful to gender-diverse communities or those who support them were not sensationalised in the reporting. This is also true of the use of views or statements that might be viewed as particularly provocative. Again, with the support of my supervisors, I engaged in an ongoing process of reflexivity in making decisions about the direction and intentions of reporting data for the present study. In preparation for disseminating my research findings, I attended an 8-week PLD course focused on improving communication in hostile environments through constructive, values-based messaging. The skills gained during the course helped me address feedback, questions, and conflicting views in safe, supportive, and positive ways.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The methodology outlined in this chapter provides information to support the credibility of this research and explain key processes. An exploratory qualitative approach, using a questionnaire and interviews, was used to explore kaiako understandings, perceptions, and experiences of gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. Data were analysed through thematic analysis, content analysis, and descriptive statistics to answer the research questions. The following chapter shares the results, in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results in relation to the research sub-questions exploring kaiako views about gender, how kaiako understandings are formed, systems ECE settings have in place to support gender inclusion and diversity, enablers and barriers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity, and practices or resources that support learning about gender. Findings from the phase one questionnaire are described in all five sections. Findings from phase two interviews are shared in two sections: enablers and barriers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity, and practices or resources that support learning about gender. The first section of this chapter provides information about phase one and two research participants. Direct participant quotes are used to highlight key messages and are written in italics for clarity. Because this study was designed to explore teaching practices that are supportive of gender diversity, a decision was made not to publish quotes that could be considered harmful or transphobic. Instead, these views are reported in general terms where applicable in this chapter.

4.2 Participants

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to 2617 ECE settings and was completed by 431 kaiako. Kaiako could skip questions, so not all questions were answered by all participants. Kaiako came from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Pākehā (65%) and Māori (11%). Kaiako ranged in age from 18 to over 65 years, with most kaiako aged between 35 and 54 years. The genders of kaiako are largely unknown, with 60% of participants choosing not to answer that question. Gender was asked as an open-ended question, “What is your gender?” “Female” was the answer provided by 35% of kaiako.

“Male” was answered by 3% of kaiako and 2% provided a different answer to male or female. It could be that posing an open question felt like a “trick” question and perhaps participants felt unsure of the “correct” answer. Full gender, ethnicity, and age demographic information is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Questionnaire Participants’ Demographical Information

Age	**Count**	**Percentage**
18–24 years	17	4%
25–34 years	86	20%
35–44 years	138	32%
45–54 years	126	29%
55–64 years	56	13%
65+ years	8	2%
Ethnicity*		
NZ European/Pākehā	349	65%
Māori	56	11%
Other European	37	7%
Other Ethnicity	18	3%
Samoan	13	2%
Chinese	12	2%
Southeast Asian	8	2%
Gender**		
Not disclosed	259	60%
Female	150	35%
Male	12	3%

*Ethnicity data do not sum to 100 because participants could select multiple ethnicities. The following ethnicities were indicated by <1% of participants: Latin American, Fijian, Cook Islands Māori, Other Asian, Other Pacific Peoples, Tongan, African, Niuean, and Tokelauan.

** Gender was asked as an open question. The following gender identities were provided by <1% of participants: cisgender woman, she/her, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, nonbinary trans, wāhine Māori, and woman.

To participate in the questionnaire, kaiako needed to be currently teaching or employed in a licensed Aotearoa ECE setting. Respondents worked in a range of setting types, including privately owned education and care, community-based education and care, kindergarten, playcentre, home-based childcare, kōhanga reo, and puna reo. Most kaiako (n = 391) held a relevant teaching qualification. Qualifications included internal playcentre qualifications, teaching qualifications, and post-graduate qualifications. Forty percent of participants held an ECE teaching degree, 15% held a graduate diploma teaching ECE, and 10% held a diploma in teaching. Kaiako tended to be experienced, with 43% teaching for 15 or more years. It is possible the high levels of teaching experience reflect that the questionnaire was distributed by email and emails tend to be monitored by experienced setting leaders who directly received the invite. Other kaiako may have only received the invite if the email was passed on. Kaiako taught across a range of age groups, including infants, toddlers, young children, and in mixed-age settings. Most participants taught older children or in mixed-age settings. Table 2 outlines the information shared by kaiako about teaching qualifications, years of experience, setting type, and age group taught.

Table 2

Questionnaire Participants' Relevant Teaching Information

Highest Teaching Qualification Held*	**Count**	**Percentage**
Bachelor Teaching degree (ECE)	174	40%
Graduate Diploma Teaching (ECE)	63	15%
Diploma in Teaching	42	10%
Not ECE qualified	39	9%
Playcentre qualified	37	9%
Other	28	7%
Years of Teaching Experience		
1–4 years	77	18%
5–9 years	79	19%
10–14 years	85	20%
15+ years	182	43%
Setting Type		
Privately-owned education and care	170	39%
Kindergarten	80	19%
Community-based education and care	78	18%
Playcentre	68	16%
Other or multiple (includes Puna Reo)	17	4%
Home-based childcare	11	3%
Kōhanga Reo	6	1%
Age Group Taught		
Mixed age (about 0–6 years)	195	45%
Young children (about 3–6 years)	164	38%
Other	22	5%
Infants (about 0–2 years)	26	6%
Toddlers (about 1–3 years)	23	5%

*Qualifications indicated by <5% of participants included: Master of Education 3%, Graduate Diploma Teaching (Primary) 2%, Overseas qualified/NZ attested 1%, Kohanga qualified 1%, Bachelor Teaching degree (Primary) 3%, and PhD or EdD (n = 1).

4.2.2 Interviews

Interview participants were experienced kaiako from a range of ECE setting types located across Aotearoa New Zealand. Nine out of ten invited participants accepted the invitation and proceeded to be interviewed. Participants ranged in age from 18–24 years through to 55–64 years. Participants came from the following regions: Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Otago, Southland, Waikato, and Wellington. Setting types included community-based

education and care, privately-owned education and care, kindergarten, puna reo, and playcentre. Eight settings were urban, and one was rural. Three participants taught in mixed-age settings, two participants taught infants and toddlers, and three taught young children. One setting had a Christian philosophy. All kaiako were experienced teachers, with years of ECE teaching experience ranging from five to more than 20 years.

During interviews, all kaiako described their teaching as supportive of gender diversity and inclusion, but several felt unsupported or alone in their practice. Three kaiako described their team as being on the same page with shared gender-related teaching beliefs, two kaiako were unsure whether their teams were on the same page, and four kaiako felt their teams were not on the same page. Two kaiako had previously worked in teams where their views about gender did not align with the team. Seven participants described learning about gender diversity from members of the rainbow community, and the remaining two participants talked about learning from friends or family with knowledge of gender diversity. Three participants identified as members of the LBGTQI+ community.

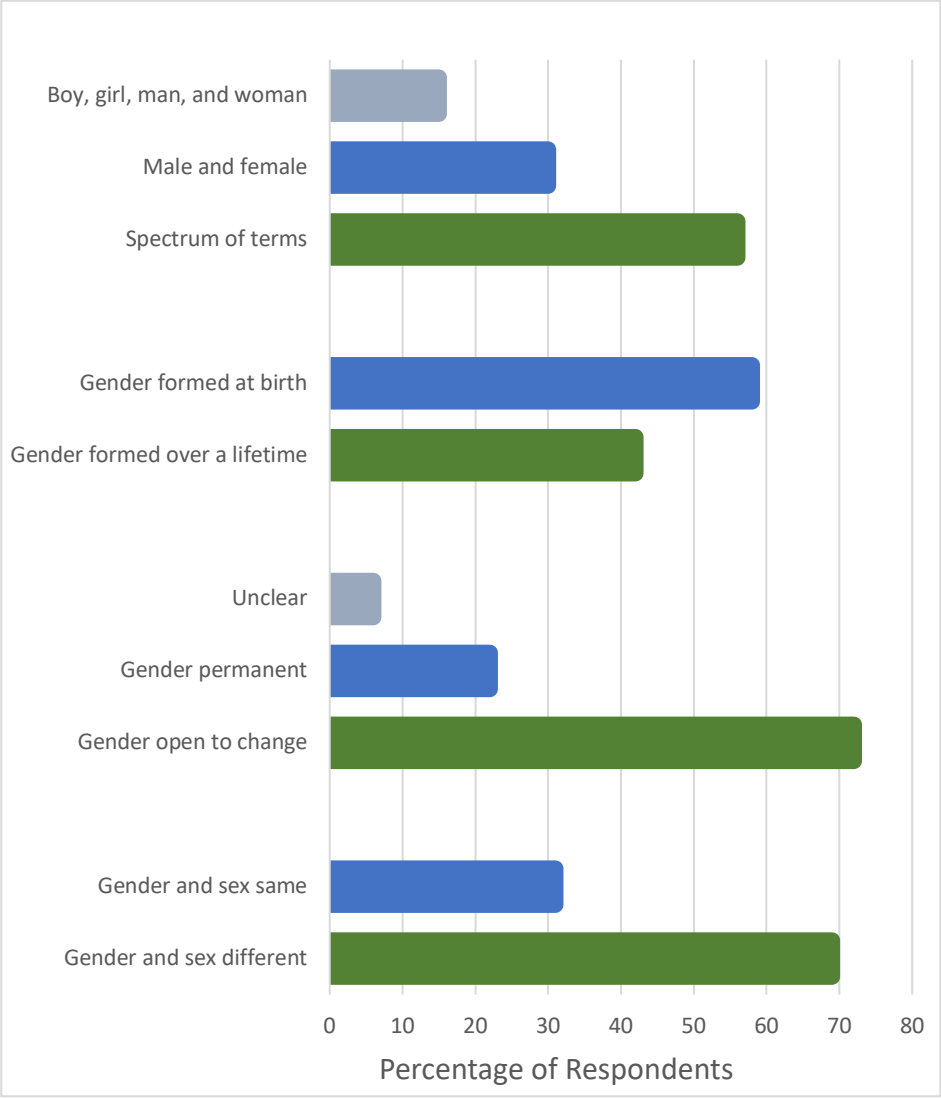
4.3 What Views Do Kaiako Hold About Gender?

Kaiako held a wide range of views about gender, ranging from gender expansive to binary. Kaiako in the questionnaire were asked closed questions to capture categorical viewpoints of gender. Most kaiako (69%) indicated gender and biological sex were different concepts and 31% saw gender and biological sex as the same concept. Most kaiako (72%) saw gender as open to change and not permanently set for a lifetime. A smaller proportion of kaiako (22%) saw gender as permanently set for a lifetime and 6% indicated gender develops across a lifetime without indicating fluidity or permanence. Just over half of kaiako (58%) saw gender as beginning at birth. To further understand how kaiako

understood gender constructs, kaiako were asked to select a set of gender terms that was closest to their thinking. “Male and female” was selected by 30% of kaiako. “Boy, girl, man, and woman” was selected by 15% of kaiako. “A spectrum of terms including agender, bigender, cisgender, man/boy, woman/girl, transgender, and nonbinary” was selected by 56% of kaiako. Figure 1 outlines the distributions of responses provided to the four questions about gender.

Figure 1

Gender Understandings Held by Kaiako



Each of the four questions shown in figure 1 were designed to better understand how kaiako understood gender, sex, and gender development. What is notable across these responses is that there are some inconsistencies in the proportion of people who hold views that might be described as gender expansive. While the reporting questionnaire data was designed to gauge overall trends by question, my cursory analysis of individual responses found some kaiako provided responses that were contradictory across questions, expressed confusion about key topics, or wrote comments that were not consistent with categorical response selection. A detailed analysis of these trends was beyond the scope of this thesis, but the cursory analysis does suggest that some kaiako were uncertain about concepts and their own views associated with gender.

Moreover, there was no single question designed or intended to determine if participants were supportive (or unsupportive) of gender diversity and inclusion in ECE. However, my analysis of the individual response patterns suggested three main trends. First, about one third of participants were open to and supportive of gender diversity and inclusion in ECE; responses suggested they were knowledgeable and taking action to advance gender-inclusive practice. Second, another third of participants were open to and supportive of gender diversity and inclusion in ECE but lacked knowledge, confidence, and ideas to action gender-inclusive practice. Third, the final third of respondents expressed views that were not supportive of gender diversity in ECE and had questions or concerns; a small portion of these respondents expressed views that were solely binary and sometimes provided responses to open questions that could be considered transphobic. Taken together, these overarching trends across participants' response patterns suggest that the majority of kaiako were open to and supportive of gender diversity in ECE.

4.4 How Are Kaiako Understandings of Gender Formed?

Kaiako beliefs, knowledge, and perspectives of gender were informed by a range of influences and sources that tended to be grounded in personal experiences as opposed to professional knowledge. Kaiako were asked which information sources influenced their beliefs about gender. “Personal experiences” and “education” were each selected by 62% of kaiako. “Family and whānau perspectives” was selected by 53% of kaiako, “culture” by 35% of kaiako, “religion” by 19%, and “other” by 15%. Of those who selected “other,” the most common sources described were social media and science. For those who cited science, their responses focused on male and female sexes: *“Science, you are born with male or female genes.”*

Kaiako were asked which information sources influenced their knowledge and perspectives of gender diversity. “Conversations with friends and/or whānau” was selected by 73% of kaiako and “conversations with colleagues and/or ECE whānau” by 46%. “Learning through social media” was selected by 54% of kaiako and “learning from mainstream media” by 39%. “Undertaking self-research or wider reading” was selected by 49% of kaiako. “Initial teacher education,” “PLD,” “Te Whāriki,” “other Ministry resources,” and, “other” were all selected by less than 20% of kaiako.

Findings for how children form their gender identities were aligned with how kaiako develop their beliefs, knowledge, and perspectives of gender. Many kaiako saw children’s gender identities being formed through experiences with family, friends, and kaiako combined with societal influences, such as media, advertising, television, social media, or books: *“Through exposure to different people (family, friends, kindy, playcentre) and being allowed to explore their interests, ask questions. They mirror behaviour that’s modelled to*

them and experiment. Usually people around them, society, tell children early on how to be and what's expected of them. Television and books are influential too." Some kaiako saw identities formed as a combination of nature and nurture: *"A mix of nature and nurture; genes and environment."* A smaller proportion of kaiako felt gender identities were formed from birth: *"Birth determines gender identity"* and *"When they are born, their parents tell them they are either boy or girl."* A minority of kaiako felt gender identities came from their God: *"They are born the way God created them to be."* Kaiako tended to develop their beliefs and knowledge about gender through informal sources, such as personal experiences or conversations, and saw children as forming their gender identities in similar ways through experiences with family, friends, and kaiako, combined with other societal influences.

4.5 What Systems Do ECE Settings Have in Place to Support Gender Inclusion and Diversity?

Systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion in ECE were not common and when systems were present, they tended to be ad hoc and reliant on individual kaiako with an interest in supporting gender diversity. Only 20% of kaiako indicated their setting had a policy or procedure that addressed gender diversity. Forty-one percent of kaiako were unsure whether they had a policy or procedure that addressed gender diversity and 38% did not have a policy or procedure. Kaiako rarely asked new whānau about pronouns during enrolment processes, with 11% consistently asking parents and whānau about their pronouns and 11% consistently asking about child pronouns.

Thirty-four percent of respondents had processes for ensuring books, songs, and toys were gender inclusive and free of gender bias. Processes tended to be informal and led by

kaiako: *“I mostly go on instinct where something might raise alarm bells when I see it, and if I know if my transgender friends would be disapproving of it, then it probably isn’t appropriate for gender diversity,”* and “*It’s not a centre process. I just remove any that aren’t inclusive. We should have a proper centre process for this. It’s tricky as we all have different acceptance levels of what is bias and what isn’t.”* Outdated or stereotypical books were removed: *“Books and songs would be removed if they were found to be biased or offensive in this way.”* A very small number of settings had more formal processes: *“We have a huge collection of books which are sorted each school holiday and checked that they are in line with more general ‘modern values’ …”*

Kaiako cared that books and resources were inclusive of gender diversity, purchased carefully, and adapted to be more inclusive if required:

> *We actively seek out resources that use gender-inclusive language (or if it’s a good book otherwise, kaiako will consciously change the vocabulary when reading the book to remove the gender bias). We adapt songs, e.g., our Old Macdonald is female. Although it’s not a policy as such, gender diversity is always a consideration when purchasing resources. If a resource was blatantly gender specific or stereotypical, we wouldn’t purchase it.*

A small number of respondents avoided having or using resources that supported gender diversity and instead utilised resources that promoted binary thinking: *“A range of books are included of both males and females. Absolutely no gender-confusion books are allowed, and this means there is no need for discussion on gender bias.”* Overall, few kaiako indicated their settings had robust and transparent systems to support gender diversity and inclusion.

4.6 What Are Enablers and Barriers to Supporting Gender Inclusion and Diversity?

4.6.1 Barriers

4.6.1.1 Questionnaire.

Barriers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity included challenges directly connected to kaiako, such as teacher beliefs or knowledge and access to teaching resources, to barriers which were harder for kaiako to influence, such as parent and whānau beliefs. A total of 23 barriers to teaching children about gender inclusion and diversity were identified by 405 kaiako.

The largest barrier was “parents and whānau” mentioned by 208 kaiako. Often kaiako simply named “parents” as a barrier. When participants expanded on their answers, the largest focus was on ensuring kaiako honoured whānau wishes and aligned their teaching with whānau beliefs: “*It’s still a parent’s decision what their child is taught at this age,”* and *“Whānau opinions and cultural reasons ... the line between encouraging gender diversity and overstepping with the values of whānau.”* Kaiako tended to want to honour whānau beliefs when the beliefs were conservative: *“Our kindergarten is a Christian one and holds more traditional beliefs on gender identity. Parents also have opinions, and we cannot go against these.”* The opposite did not appear in the data when whānau beliefs were progressive.

Sometimes, kaiako felt whānau were a barrier without knowing how their whānau felt: *“Not knowing how whānau may feel and not knowing where families stand in regard to gender diversity.”* Kaiako appeared worried about how whānau would perceive teacher actions, with one kaiako noting: “*Teachers fear backlash from parents.”*

The second largest barrier was “kaiako beliefs,” identified by 89 kaiako. Often, it was not the teacher’s own beliefs that were seen as the barrier in “kaiako beliefs” but the perspectives of their colleagues*: “Other teachers who might not feel comfortable with it or have a conservative point of view,”* and *“… not all colleagues have the same understanding and views. They might not be confident to teach the subject and might not agree with my views or opinions.”*

A “lack of knowledge” was identified as a barrier by 65 kaiako. This included teachers’ own knowledge and the knowledge of others: *“Lack of knowledge about gender—myself included!”* and *“Lack of understanding of gender diversity within kaiako teams.”* Many kaiako were keen to know more but were limited by their own knowledge: *“Me not fully understanding what it is. For example, did I just confuse homosexuality with gender diversity? Do they fall under the same category?! I feel like I am well-meaning but may make mistakes.”* For six kaiako, a lack of teacher knowledge was affected by limited access to professional learning and development (PLD): *“Lack of professional development to develop strategies and gain tools to support kaiako when faced with challenging beliefs.”*

One kaiako expressed personal risk to teaching children about gender diversity: *“I’m a teacher who is a trans man, and I feel like I already need to be extremely careful about my behaviour compared to the rest of my teaching team (all cisgender women). The thought of freely teaching tamariki about gender diversity feels like putting myself at risk.”*

Forty-three kaiako felt it was "*inappropriate or not their role to teach*" children about gender diversity: *"Gender diversity as described in this research is not appropriate for young children,"* and *"We won't be teaching them about gender diversity. It's not our role."* Forty-one kaiako described "children's ages and levels of understanding" as a barrier. Responses were linked to notions of childhood innocence and suggested children were incapable of grasping complex concepts: *"They are too young to understand its complexity," "They are not developmentally ready to understand gender as a construct,"* and, *"Depending how far the teaching and language goes I think it could be inappropriate to expose children to concepts they cannot comprehend beyond the boy and girl basics."*

Overall, kaiako identified a range of barriers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity in ECE settings. The largest barrier was "parents and whānau" and most barriers related to adult beliefs and knowledge. Table 3 outlines all 23 barriers and the number of times the barrier was present in kaiako responses.

Table 3

Barriers to Supporting Gender Inclusion and Diversity

Kaiako Barriers	Count	Other Barriers	Count
Parents and whānau	208	Fear (of rocking boat, saying wrong thing or offending someone)	10
Kaiako beliefs	89	Media and advertising	8
Lack of knowledge	65	Lack of PLD	6
Religion	45	Lack of diversity in teams	7
Inappropriate or not kaiako role to teach	43	Lack of guidance and support	6
Children's ages and levels of understanding	41	Management	4
Cultural beliefs	36	Politics	4
Lack of resources	29	Stereotypes	4
Other people's beliefs (not clearly identified as kaiako or whānau)	25	Children's attitudes	3
Society	24	Confusion between sexuality and gender	2
Kaiako not wanting to have undue influence on children	22	Personal safety risk to kaiako	1
Adults feeling uncomfortable	17		

4.6.1.2 Interviews.

Interviewees elaborated on three key barriers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity in ECE. Harmful whānau views, a lack of a whole team approach, and insufficient access to books and resources all hindered participants' aspirations to be inclusive of gender diversity. The first barrier "harmful whānau views" was reported by eight kaiako. Harmful whānau views included parents valuing the gender binary, trying to limit curriculum access based on gender, and potential transphobia. An example of each of these is presented below.

Valuing the gender binary:

> M*ost of our families choose us because we're a Christian organisation. We have grandparents asking questions like, "So you still call girls, girls and boys, boys here, right?" … It feels like there is a strong belief. It feels like a lot of people are on the same page but I'm not on that page.*

Limiting curriculum access:

> *I had bought several dresses for the setting. A dad came in one time when his son was wearing a dress, and was like, "Oh take that off. You can't wear that." I made it a point from then on to be like, "Do you want to wear this dress today?" Like this is my safe space for you and I will make sure you are safe here to wear this even if you think you're not safe at home to wear this.*

Potential Transphobia:

> *One family took their child out of the setting because his daughter came home and said that [gender diverse teacher] has a moustache and that means he's a boy. The parent was furious.*

The second barrier, a "lack of whole team approach," was experienced by seven kaiako. Kaiako were asked directly whether their teams were on the same page when addressing gender diversity in their setting and only three kaiako expressed they were. The remaining six kaiako said their teams were not on the same page or said they were unsure if they were on the same page. Kaiako who were unsure whether their teams were on the same page shared examples during their interviews that suggested their teams held differing

views about approaches to teaching gender diversity. These kaiako all described examples of colleague's teaching practices they had observed and found concerning in their settings. One example of a direct answer to the questions about whether teams were on the same page and two examples of kaiako observing teaching practices they were uncomfortable with are outlined below.

Direct answer to the question about whether their team is on the same page:

> *I don't think we're on the same page. When I interviewed, my main question was about inclusiveness and acceptance of rainbow communities within the [name of setting with Christian values], because if that was going to be a problem, it would be a problem with me. I got told we have a lesbian teacher working in the community and everyone's accepting of her and that we are super inclusive because we're still an early childhood education setting. We have a responsibility to be inclusive, but I think not having a big issue with it is not the same as accepting and including it … It feels like a lot of people are on the same page but I'm not on that page.*

Examples of observing teaching practices they were uncomfortable with:

> *I've got a particular head teacher in mind who likes to send the girls to go wash their hands and the boys to go wash their hands, and I am not the only one who cringes every time that happens.*

Additional context is needed to understand this example of teaching practices the kaiako was uncomfortable with. Chris (pseudonym) was a child displaying gender-nonconforming behaviours who had been well supported in the toddler room. When

Chris transitioned to the preschool room, some of the kaiako wanted to restrict his feminine gender expressions and the interviewed kaiako felt uncomfortable about this. The example shows how teachers' differing gender beliefs can have a direct impact on the ways children are supported or restricted in their explorations of gender.

> *When he was younger, everyone was like, "Yeah, go Chris." He would rock the dance floor. He loved Lady Gaga. He was such a performer. When he was slightly younger, everyone was very encouraging. When Chris came to our room, there started to be a few whisperings of, "Oh, maybe we need to rein this in." His parents weren't feeling he needed to rein this in, so it came from some of the kaiako working there that clearly felt like this wasn't sitting well with them personally ... I remember saying, "No, he wants to be like this, so why not?" Then there was conversation about getting teased when he goes to school and that didn't sit well with me.*

The third barrier "insufficient access to books and resources" was described by seven kaiako. Insufficient access included kaiako self-purchasing resources, a lack of resources, and worries about using resources in settings. An example of each of these is presented below.

Self-purchasing resources:

> *If I buy them myself, I feel like I won't get any pushback … I bought these [rainbow flags] for pride month. The kids love these. They've been well loved. You can tell they've been bitten and chewed but the kids love them and they're like $25 from the Pride New Zealand website, which is fantastic.*

Lack of resources:

> *I don't believe that we do have any books. I'm still getting to know the books that are there because I am quite new there, but I don't believe there's anything there. Everything's quite old so I don't think there would be.*

Worried about using resources:

> *I've sort of like hummed and hawed about this [taking a self-purchased book into the setting], and it's not actually something that I've taken into my workplace. It's something that I really love and that I've really wanted to, but I'm a little bit nervous about the pushback that I'm going to get.*

The three barriers reported by interviewed kaiako align with barriers found in the questionnaire data. Whānau views, a lack of whole team approach or differing kaiako teaching practices, and insufficient resources were concerns raised in both sets of data.

4.6.2 Enablers

4.6.2.1 Questionnaire.

Kaiako identified a wide range of enablers to teaching children about gender inclusion and diversity, including books, resources, discussions, whānau, PLD, and kaiako knowedge. A total of 62 enablers were identified by 367 kaiako. Due to the high number of enablers identified, only 29 enablers that were each identified by more than five kaiako are reported.

“Books” were the largest enabler, identified by 69 kaiako: *“There are some lovely ECE appropriate books that tell stories about the gender spectrum and rainbow communities, queer families. Julian is a Mermaid. My Shadow is Pink. I am Jazz. Being You…”* and *“Good story books to read with tamariki really helps to start the conversation as well as give confidence to you as a teacher in what language you use, etc.”* Books were not always easily accessible to kaiako but were seen as a valuable resource*: “Very little support, meaning none; only the occasional book from Auckland City library, that outlines some aspect of diversity, that I can sneak into mat time before I am “outed” by another teacher and then the book is banned,”* and “*There are some very good children’s books. I have found several, but it took a very long time before my kindergarten would purchase them. There are more I would like to get but they seem to think that box is ticked now.”*

*“*Resources” were identified as an enabler by 40 kaiako but it was often not clear what kaiako meant by “resources.” When resources were specified, they tended to be open-ended or natural resources: *“We use a lot of natural resources (acorns, leaves, shells), which makes it easier to avoid the gender bias, e.g., the pink princess dress ups.”*

“Discussions” were another significant enabler identified by 68 kaiako. “Discussions” could be further broken down to include “general discussions” (n = 41), “discussions with children” (n = 21), and “discussions with team members” (n = 6). Some kaiako valued open conversations with children: *“Open communication and gender-neutral expectations and experiences and language like she/he/they are pretty. She/he/they have strong muscles. She/he/they are feeling sad. They/he/she is good at baking.”* Other kaiako tended to be open to conversation but only in response to child initiation: *“I’m happy to*

have discussions with my tamariki but as they are so young I don't intentionally bring it up to discuss."

Some kaiako saw the benefits of discussion as an enabler but were yet to begin:

> *I think we could think more about this as a setting, bring it up at our next meeting and begin the conversation around inclusivity as a starting point. We have so many diverse members, being aware of gender diversity and starting the conversation around being inclusive of all people could be where we begin.*

Support from colleagues and leaders was an enabler for kaiako to engage in discussions about gender diversity with children:

> *Having a knowledgeable and supportive teaching team and management. I was able to transition while teaching in my setting in 2018 with my boss being fully supportive of me having open conversations with the tamariki about it and answering any questions they had. I only felt comfortable doing this because my boss had given me her full support and told me she would deal with any negative whānau reactions.*

"Kaiako knowledge" was identified as an enabler by 36 kaiako and the nature of responses tended to include teacher education or training: *"Well trained kaiako—with that everything should fall in place,"* and having knowledge about gender diversity: *"Teachers having knowledge of gender diversity."* "PLD" was seen as an enabler by 39 kaiako but access to PLD was an issue: *"Understanding, which may come from experiences but PLD around gender diversity and how to support those who identify as gender diverse is sorely lacking"*

and *“I have never seen any PD about gender diversity and all my knowledge comes from a short 15 minute course and what I see in media.”*

“Whānau” were seen as an enabler by 39 kaiako. Whānau enablers included whānau providing support, sharing their knowledge and experiences, and providing representation: *“Support from management, support from whānau, support from kaiako and the teachers being able to evolve and come together to enable an inclusive environment.”* It appeared kaiako felt whānau shared responsibility for paving the pathway for teaching children about gender diversity in their ECE settings: *“Families sharing their experiences in diversity”* and *“If we have gender-diverse parents and whānau it will lead an open path for us to teach.”*

“Being open” was identified by 30 kaiako and included being open-minded and open to learning and teaching. Open-minded: *“… being open and honest in questioning our own antibias ideas, and where they come from”* and *“I think it comes back to respect, tolerance, communication, and having an open mind …”* Open to learning and teaching: *“Kaiako/leaders/management being prepared to research, inquire, and be open-minded to teaching gender diversity,”* and *“Kaiako remaining open to learning and asking questions.”* Closely connected to being open was “acceptance”, which was identified as an enabler by 24 kaiako. Openness and acceptance tended to be mentioned together: *“Openness and acceptance,”* and “*An openness and acceptance of all cultures and all people.”* Some participants saw the need for kaiako to model or teach acceptance: *“Kaiako modelling authentic acceptance to tamariki and whānau,”* and *“Integrating acceptance in all aspects of practise not as a separate unit.”* Others viewed acceptance more broadly: *“A shift in society towards greater acceptance and acknowledgment is helpful.”*

“Supporting each child to be their unique self” was addressed by 28 kaiako. For some this was about accepting each child as an individual: *“Teachers to individually treat each learner as unique as who they are,”* and *“Making our mokopuna feel it’s ok to be who you are.”* For others, it was an opportunity to expand children’s thinking about gender and identity:

> *It allows them to know that there are other options, that they can choose the gender they feel they are. It supports children to learn about diversity, and to accept that others may be different to them, or what they know to be true.*

Some kaiako had a more limited view about acceptance and inclusion and described accepting or protecting children as their responsibility related to gender diversity: *“I don’t think it should be encouraged or taught. I think our role is to embrace what a child brings to the setting and just accept without expanding,”* and “*An overly woke agenda can be confusing for a child, as can information about sexuality and gender. I believe the most supportive thing is to let the child be comfortable in their body ...”*

A “whole team approach” and being on the same page was mentioned by 20 kaiako. A whole team approach was characterised as: *“a team that is on the same page in their beliefs about gender”* and *“… teachers knowing they will have support of the other staff when discussing such things.”* One kaiako summarised:

> *Being supported by educated and like-minded people enables me to teach children about gender diversity, having the support of open-minded families and management, being able to share personal experiences, working in a respectful environment where my views are taken seriously. Gender diversity*

is an area I am looking into for my own professional growth cycle so I can grow my own knowledge and share it with my teaching colleagues.

Closely connected to a whole team approach was the enabler of “kaiako” or colleagues, which appeared in the responses of 20 kaiako. Like-minded kaiako were seen as a support and several participants specifically mentioned younger or newer kaiako: *“Having a lot of young kaiako who are very open-minded, and this is very natural from how we have grown up within our lives.” “*Diversity within teaching teams and communities” was identified as an enabler by 22 kaiako: *“I find being a gender minority in ECE helps me to teach this. It is a lot easier to teach against gender stereotypes like ‘boys don't do ballet’ when you are a boy who has done ballet!”* and *“Having kaiako and whānau who represent a range of gender identities.”*

Overall, a wide range of enablers to supporting gender inclusion and diversity were identified by kaiako. Books were the largest enabler identified by kaiako. While kaiako valued books and recognised them as a resource to support gender diversity and inclusion, book usage was sometimes restricted through limited access to books or by team members. Discussions were the second largest enabler. Other frequently mentioned enablers were resources, whānau, PLD, kaiako and kaiako knowledge, being open and accepting, supporting each child to be their unique selves, diversity within teams and communities, and team support. Table 4 shows the 29 enablers identified by more than five kaiako. Not represented in the table are 16 kaiako who said there were no enablers, 16 who were unsure what enablers could be, and 36 who stated gender diversity should not be taught.

Table 4

Enablers to Supporting Gender Inclusion and Diversity

Enablers	Count	Enablers	Count
Books	69	Understanding	15
Discussions	68	Social media and mainstream media	15
Resources	40	Using specific language	14
Whānau	39	Children's play and interests	12
PLD	39	Te Whāriki	12
Kaiako knowledge	36	Ensuring children can access all curriculum areas	11
Being open	30	Community	11
Supporting each child to be their unique self	28	Challenging gender roles	11
Acceptance	24	Society	10
Diversity within teams and communities	22	Normalising gender diversity	9
Kaiako	20	Respect	9
Whole team approach	20	Leadership and management	9
Inclusion	19	Providing a positive environment	8
Research and reading	16	Attitudes, values, and beliefs	8
Children	15		

4.6.2.2 Interviews.

Interviews revealed four valuable enablers that supported kaiako to teach children about gender diversity. The first enabler was that kaiako valued children's rights to be celebrated as unique individuals. The second enabler was that kaiako valued children's rights to equitable curriculum access. The third enabler was that kaiako were open-minded and deeply committed to their own learning. The fourth enabler focused on kaiako connections to the rainbow community. There is overlap and alignment between enablers identified in

questionnaire data and enablers revealed in interview data. Significant questionnaire enablers tended to be more practical, such as books and discussions. Enablers revealed during interviews were strongly grounded in kaiako values, attitudes, and relationships.

The first enabler was that kaiako strongly valued "children's rights to be celebrated as unique individuals," free to explore their interests and be themselves without needing to conform to gender roles or stereotypes. All nine kaiako felt this way:

> *In early childhood it's quite easy, I think, for a child to be who they want to be. We celebrate that child … So, by saying that every child should be celebrated as they're unique, if we're working towards that uniqueness, then we should just be celebrating that child for who they are and not trying to squish them into a role … You must be careful that you don't place your assumptions on a child, like be clear with your language that it's okay to be whoever you want to be because whoever you are is the perfect you.*

> *I find making sure that we're not boxing people into certain frames of mind and social constructs is quite important. Letting people choose who they want to be and how they want to do things is important.*

When kaiako taught children who were gender nonconforming or gender diverse, they followed the child's lead and were supported by whānau:

> *The most recent time, we let the family guide us on that. It was about them letting us know that their child was physically male but wanted to be she/her. We took the lead from the whānau and ran with it with their tamaiti. She was*

very vocal and could hold a conversation, let us know and inform the other tamariki.

In the second enabler, kaiako valued children's rights to "equitable curriculum access" for all children in all areas of play. All nine interviewed kaiako felt this was important and took steps in their practice to ensure children's rights to play were upheld.

All children could access all areas of play:

ECE settings provide dress ups and climbing equipment, messy play, imaginary play, dolls and kitchens, fine motor and gross motor activities, music, dance, and all children should have equitable opportunities to partake in all those things.

Taking steps to ensure equitable curriculum access:

We say things like, "The costumes are for everyone. They aren't just for specific people."

I said [to colleagues only doing girls' hair], "You know if you're going to be fun, creative and do expressive hairstyles, why don't you invite the boys in? Why is it only girls that are being invited and encouraged?"

The third enabler was that all kaiako were "open-minded and deeply committed to their own learning about gender diversity." Kaiako approached learning in different ways, but the theme was evident in the responses of all interviewed kaiako.

Open-minded:

> *I've always been quite open-minded and believing that how we are is a social construct.*

> *I grew up with open-minded parents regarding life, not specially gender or anything, but I was always raised as we're all different and we've got different things going on. I think I grew up more with race being more of the big social thing at the time, and so my parents always raised me as that's just how you're born. I think that's translated into my feelings around gender and sex.*

Deeply committed to own learning:

> *I'm always trying to further understand what things mean. There's always new stuff coming out all the time.*

> *I recently bought a book about the indigenous people of Hawaii and how they also have a similar two-spirit term for their people. I thought that was just like [our] indigenous gendered approach as well. It [gender] was such a part of so many indigenous cultures for so long, which I find so amazing.*

The fourth enabler was that all kaiako were "connected to the LGBTQI+ community" either as members themselves, through friends and family members, or were personally connected to someone with extensive knowledge of gender diversity: *"I am a part of the*

rainbow community with a great number of gender queer friends and acquaintances," "I've got a friend whose daughter is transgender … she knew from a very young age and that's one of the reasons why I think this is important. She knew from 3 or 4," and *"I've got friends and family who are in the LGBTQ+ community, so having seen some of their experiences probably has also shaped that [beliefs about gender]."*

4.7 What Practices or Resources Do Kaiako Identify and Use to Support Learning About Gender?

4.7.1 Questionnaire

Planning to teach children about gender was rare. Only 6% of respondents (n = 24) indicated they planned for teaching about gender diversity in their regular planning processes. The main practices used in planning by the 24 kaiako included books, responding to exclusionary behaviours, conversations with children, ensuring children were not grouped by gender, planning for small and large group activities, and creating shared understandings within their teams.

While only 24 kaiako indicated they planned for teaching about gender diversity, a much larger number of kaiako (62% or n = 264) indicated that they take steps to teach or support children to develop positive gender identities. Through analysis of open questions, 53 strategies or practices were identified. The practices most used included addressing gender roles and norms, engaging in conversations with children, books, ensuring all children can access all the curriculum, careful use of language, resources, supporting children to be themselves, challenging stereotypes, and supporting children's play and interests. These practices were all mentioned by at least 20 kaiako. Because the practices identified for gender-diversity planning and supporting children to develop positive gender

identities were similar and overlapped, the findings are reported together through a selection of kaiako quotes.

As reported in earlier sections, using books to support children was seen as a useful practice: *Reading age appropriate pukapuka that uses the most up-to-date gendered language.*

Sometimes book reading came with worries about negative reactions:

> *When I was the librarian for my playcentre, I sought out books to borrow from the library on gender diversity. However, I did this feeling like I was going to get called out for it. I never did.*

> *One of my favourite children's books is My Shadow is Pink, but I haven't been brave enough to take it [to] work. I work with many colleagues who have "old school" ways of thinking (as well as living in a small rural community) and I guess I've been worried about how they might react. I think this [questionnaire] might have inspired me to read it at mat time. I guess change doesn't happen unless someone leads the way.*

Kaiako either removed books with stereotypical gender messaging or changed the words:

> *I change words in books or discuss the book. Even when the picture of a puzzle displays stereotypes and a child talks in a stereotypical way, I open up the dialogue and get them thinking outside the box.*

> *We have removed books that no longer meet our children's needs. We have bought some big books that look at diverse families around the world and continue to search for these sorts of stories. We use and re-tell Māori legends as they are often genderless.*

As they did with books, kaiako looked for resources that challenged gender stereotypes: "*We have resources which show different professions people can do, which often challenges gender stereotypes. We avoid resources that reinforce gender stereotypes."* Kaiako were mindful of removing resources which reinforced gender stereotyping or were outdated: *"Reminding ourselves that some of our old resources are no longer fit for purpose."*

Kaiako had thought about their roles in small and large group activities: "*Just being mindful of how I use my language when facilitating group learning opportunities."*

> *Coming up with group activities that allow children to explore their understandings of their gender identities. For example, What colour is your shadow today? Stand here if you feel like a boy today. Stand here if you feel like a girl today. Stand here if you don't feel like a girl or a boy today. Stand here if you feel like a girl and a boy today.*

It was important to kaiako that stereotypes were recognised and challenged: *"Responding with gentle challenges to stereotypical conversations"* and *"Talking to tamariki about how the stereotypes are just that."* Kaiako also addressed gender roles and norms in

conversations with children: *“Simple things like reminding the children that anyone can be a fire fighter, cop, nurse, etc.”*

> *I have open conversations about gender, roles, and assumptions. I question children thinking around gender norms like colours, forming gender roles, or assuming someone’s gender. “This is an all-girls table” [I would challenge] “How do you know that? Did you ask them?”*

One respondent’s team focused on challenging gender roles and norms through role modeling:

> *We have transgender students in the centre. We challenge binary positions, and we praise and support nonbinary behaviours by the children. Staff model care and routines being nonbinary. We have three male teachers, so all staff do the same mahi. This is important to take the caring role away from a female binary.*

Exclusionary behaviour was responded to: *“When children are excluding others based on gender, we plan around inclusive play, e.g., language, resources, etc.”* Kaiako tried to avoid grouping children by gender:

> *In the past when children were leaving kindy, we used to call their farewell mat time “King or Queen of Kindy”. Now we call it their “Goodbye Mat Time”. When we call children off the mat, I use children’s names rather than their gender.*

Kaiako engaged in conversations with children focused on inclusion: *"You pop yourself into conversations and ask questions to encourage children to be open minded and accept everyone."* Kaiako were mindful of their tone and attitude during conversations: *"If conversations lead to discussions about gender, I would be curious in my conversations to encourage dialogue around children's thoughts about gender."* One nonbinary kaiako felt it was important to share their identity with children: *"Sharing my story. [Saying,] 'I just feel like me,' or 'I don't feel like a boy or a girl.' Asking the children what their thoughts are on gender and what they know and understand."*

Kaiako valued answering children's questions and providing information during conversations:

> *It's not something I've come up with a lot, but I think for me actually answering questions that tamariki have instead of teaching them it is a taboo subject. I think this is probably the most powerful tool we as kaiako have to support children to develop positive gender identities.*

As identified in earlier sections, ensuring all children can access all of the curriculum was important to many kaiako: *"We remind children that inclusion means anyone is allowed to play anywhere and with anything ..."* and *"Providing dress ups and clothes without discrimination to all children."*

> *When older children begin to discuss things like only boys or girls like this or do that, then I take the time to talk to them that interests or activities aren't limited to one gender. That if you like something, you should feel free to explore it regardless.*

We include and encourage all children in all aspects of our programme, e.g., boys in the dress up area wearing the fairy dresses, girls in our carpentry/construction areas using hammers and nails and wearing hard hats, family play where mums are at work and dads are at home looking after the baby.

Inclusive language use mattered for kaiako: "*I use a lot of language that is inclusive."* For most kaiako, inclusive language encompassed using gender neutral terminology: *"I do make a conscious effort to use non-gendered language when talking with children. If a child tells me the pronoun they would like me to use or their whanau informs me, I will use their chosen pronoun."*

I work with under twos. When I sing songs with them, I try to move away from a he/she dichotomy (like, "Old MacDonald had a farm … and on the farm they had ...). I try not to refer to baby dolls as he or she, depending on their genitalia. I try to refer to tamariki as "child" rather than girl or boy.

I role model being gender diverse, nonbinary. Because I don't typically fit into the gender norms, children ask me a lot whether I'm a boy or a girl and my response is always the same. I use my name! Pronouns weren't the thing when I was younger. There were limited words available to me back then that I wouldn't use today. When children dress up in clothes that other children assume to be for gender norms, I open up the dialogue with the children.

> *Maui wears a piupiu, I wear clothing that is comfortable! I like the feeling of denim; I don't like wearing dresses.*

Teaching colleagues about gender diversity was important to some kaiako: *"I teach teachers about diversity."*

A small number of kaiako used binary language to support boy/girl gender identities and reinforce the gender binary: *"I would see using affirming language for boys and girls, male and female, as positively developing their identity."*

Many kaiako mentioned it was important that children were supported to be their unique selves: *"Accepting children for who they are as they come to kindergarten,"* "*We teach positivity in how we are created—fearfully and wonderfully made. All unique and special,"* and *"We support them to develop a positive view of themselves as learners in general."*

Closely aligned to celebrating children's individuality was supporting children to follow their play interests: *"With young children it has been about empowering them to follow their interests, strengths, and celebrate who they are or what they want to do"* and *"Planning for them as an individual according to their interests and preferences."*

> *We are an inclusive service and support children to be their authentic selves. We have two boys who identify as boys but enjoy wearing a wide range of "girl" clothing and accessories. They are supported in their choices and the other children are accepting and non-judgmental. There has been intentional teaching and conversation around this.*

4.7.2 Interviews

During interviews, kaiako shared detailed accounts of the practices and resources that support teaching and learning about gender diversity. Interviews identified three key areas for practice: use of gender-neutral language, use of books to support learning about gender diversity, and engaging in conversations to challenge thinking and break girl/boy stereotypes.

The first practice, “use of gender-neutral language,” was evident in descriptions provided by all nine interviewees. Kaiako mostly aimed to use gender-neutral language or minimise their use of gendered language with children in everyday conversations and when giving praise:

> *Our language as kaiako is a really important resource. How we’re talking about things is massive…My first group of key children were all girls, and I used to say, “My girl tribe,” “My girl group,” and “I’ve got my girls,” and all the time you know “girls, girls, girls”. It’s not like we were doing girly things. We’d be outside. We’d be in the mud whatever but yeah it was still the language, the reiteration of like this is who you are. Now I’m in a place where I’ll say, “You two,” or “This group…” I wouldn’t go, “Oh look all the blonde children,” or “All the blue-eyed children ...” I think I use names a lot … trying to stay rooted in their sort of identity, which is their name, I guess. Which is maybe tricky again because some people go on to change their names but it’s what we’re working on.*

One kaiako noted that some te reo Māori words were already gender neutral: *“Some of our kupu are friendly in the sense that they are not specific. Tōna, rātou, tatou, mātou, koutou, ia. It’s reference to a person or people versus the male or the female.”*

Gender-neutral praise:

> *Teachers should avoid using gendered praise such as good boy or good girl, and just be more specific about their praise. Like, “I really like the green lines that you’ve drawn” or “that’s a really straight line you’ve done there,” or “wow you’re so strong” ... [good boy or good girl] doesn’t mean anything it just turns out children who are rigid in their thinking of what gender is but also becoming people pleasers because good boy, good girl is just not the way to do it.*

The second key practice was the “use of books to support learning about gender diversity.” Despite access to books remaining a challenge, as discussed in the barriers section, using books was important to eight of the interviewed kaiako: *“I think books are the biggest resource that you can have for children to help them celebrate their identities, to understand other people’s identities, and to be more open minded”* and *“Most of my resources are books. I’m a very book ECE teacher. I love all the LGBTQI+ books that are everywhere … A lot of them are pride focused … There are a couple of books that I really, really love that do talk about gender at least a little bit.”*

When asked if they have any specific resources or books that help kaiako to be gender inclusive, interviewees collectively named 17 books they found supportive of gender

diversity, suggesting kaiako had a strong awareness of the range of gender-inclusive books available. The book titles are named in Appendix G: Gender-Inclusive Books.

The third practice “engaging in conversations to challenge thinking and break girl/boy stereotypes” was evident in descriptions provided by all nine kaiako.

Challenge thinking: *“I think it’s very important to challenge children and what their thinking is because they are the future and it’s their lives.”*

Break girl/boy stereotypes:

> *I was dressing one of them [dolls] and it was a boy doll, so I purposely put a dress on it, and a little girl said, “That’s the boy he has to wear the pants.” I said, “Well he can wear a dress,” and she said, “But he’s a boy.” I said, “Boys can wear dresses and girls can wear pants.” There are always those opportunities for those sorts of conversations.*
>
> *Children often say things like, “Boys have short hair,” “Boys can’t wear dresses,” “Boys can’t wear earrings,” etc., and in these instances I either bring a book out later on that celebrates diversity or I would ask the child something like, “If a boy let’s his hair grow would he then have long hair? or would it get longer and longer if he didn’t cut it?” or things like, “If a boy put a dress on would he then be wearing a dress or not?” Children often go, “Huh,” and then they’re like, “Well yeah,” and then their mind is changed, straight away. I often have a bit of a giggle with them about it because they go, “Oh yeah that’s really silly.”*

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined key findings of the study attending to core research questions about how 431 participating kaiako described their knowledge, understandings, experiences, and perspectives of gender diversity and their roles being responsive to gender diversity. Kaiako held a range of views about gender, from seeing gender as very binary to viewing gender as a spectrum open to change. Kaiako were learning about gender from a range of sources and were heavily influenced by conversations with family, friends, and informal sources as opposed to professional knowledge. Systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion were not widely used and tended to be informal, ad hoc, and reliant on individual kaiako with an interest in gender diversity or equity. Parents and whānau were the largest named barrier to teaching children about gender diversity and many barriers were related to a lack of knowledge, understanding, resources, or support. Books were a significant enabler for supporting gender learning but were not always accessible to kaiako and kaiako sometimes felt unable to read gender-expansive books with children. Kaiako reported engaging in conversations with children about gender, challenging gender stereotypes, and using gender-neutral language. Kaiako were supportive of children developing positive gender identities but practices to achieve this aspiration varied greatly. In general, kaiako tended to focus on supporting gender diversity through removing or breaking binary gender stereotypes and gendered expectations for boys and girls.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis presents the discussion and conclusions to my research. The research set out to investigate early childhood teachers' understandings, perceptions, and experiences of gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. The research revealed a range of beliefs and understandings that kaiako hold from a bigger-than-expected study sample. Because of my intention to support equity and inclusion in ECE, I specifically focused on highlighting systems and teaching practices that can support gender diversity and inclusion.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses key research findings through five sections: kaiako views of gender diversity, systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion, the role of whānau, conversations and language, and the role of books to support learning about gender diversity. These sections are then followed by the second part of the chapter in which the study's strengths and limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations are discussed.

5.2 Kaiako Views of Gender Diversity: Theoretical Underpinnings, Influences, and PLD

Kaiako held a wide range of views about gender. Their views, beliefs, and knowledge about gender appeared to be informed by a range of influences and sources that tended to be grounded in personal experiences as opposed to professional knowledge. Kaiako views ranged from gender expansive, seeing gender as fluid and developing over time, to very binary. In their work, Kelly-Ware and Lyall (2020) associated perspectives on gender with three key theoretical perspectives of gender: biological determinism, poststructuralist

theories of gender, and gender socialisation theory. For example, biological determinism is associated with permanent and biologically determined binary views of gender. Poststructuralism gender is associated with views of gender that are fluid and developing across a lifetime. Gender socialisation is associated with views that gender develops through social interactions with others (Blaise, 2005; Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020; Lips, 2018).

In the present study, around a third of kaiako saw gender as very binary. These kaiako indicated gender and biological sex were the same concept and about one quarter saw gender as permanently set for a lifetime. These kaiako views appeared to align with biological determinist views of gender (Blaise, 2005; Ellison & De Wet, 2017; Morgenroth et al., 2021), with kaiako citing reasons such as science or God for informing these beliefs. The implications of viewing gender through a biological lens include kaiako seeing gendered or stereotypical behaviours as normal and expected (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Kaiako may feel uncomfortable or unsure how to respond when children display nonconforming behaviours and are unlikely to challenge children's stereotypical, discriminatory, or exclusionary gendered behaviours.

Approximately two-thirds of kaiako saw gender and biological sex as different concepts. Almost three-quarters said gender developed across a lifetime. Over half indicated that gender encompassed a spectrum of terms, including nonbinary identities. These findings suggest that the majority of kaiako view distinctions between biological sex and gender with a range of views on the social influences, fluidity, and development of gender. The extent to which these views are more or less aligned with poststructuralist theories of gender or gender socialisation theories is harder to distinguish.

Notably, all interview participants expressed views that aligned with poststructuralist theories of gender. These participants had all engaged in learning outside of their workplaces to develop their knowledge of gender diversity. They also described direct connections with members of the LGBTQI+ community and learning about and supporting gender diversity through connections with knowledgeable friends, family members, or colleagues. Poststructuralist views bring responsibilities for kaiako to support children to think beyond the gender binary, challenge stereotypes of gender roles, and take an active role in their own evolving gender identity development (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

A large proportion of kaiako indicated that their views about gender were heavily influenced by personal experiences and conversations with others, including friends and whānau. Kaiako also indicated that children developed their gender identities through experiences with family and friends. These findings align with gender socialisation theories (Blakemore et al., 2009; Lips, 2018). Gender socialisation theories focus on the ways gender identities are nurtured through interactions with other people, such as parents, friends, and other family members (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020; Lips, 2018). Through gender socialisation, people learn expected ways to behave, and gendered roles can be determined based on the views of the dominant group (Lips, 2018). Gender socialisation theories tend to be dominant in early childhood settings (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). Gender socialisation theories and Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki,* both draw heavily from sociocultural theory (Lindsey, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2017b) and this common theoretical foundation may partially explain the strong alignment with gender socialisation theory.

Relying on personal experiences to develop gender knowledge can be problematic in professional early childhood settings. In their study with Australian primary school teachers, Bartholomaeus et al. (2017) found most kaiako relied on personal experiences to develop their knowledge of gender, but those who had heard of a government-funded initiative addressing gender diversity in schools were more positive, comfortable, and confident supporting gender-diverse children. The findings applied whether kaiako had participated in the initiative or not and just knowing the programme existed made a difference. To be well placed to address discrimination when it occurs in children's play and encourage children to explore gender in non-stereotypical ways, kaiako require professional knowledge of gender diversity and gender issues (Gunn et al., 2004; MacNaughton, 2000).

Only a very small number of kaiako indicated in the questionnaire that PLD had influenced their knowledge and perspectives of gender diversity. This is consistent with the finding that knowledge was generated through personal experiences and not professional knowledge. A lack of PLD was identified as a barrier to supporting inclusion by kaiako in the questionnaire data. Kaiako commented on PLD being hard to access or non-existent but recognised its value. For those who viewed PLD as an enabler for supporting gender diversity and inclusion, access to PLD was also identified as an issue. This finding is concerning as kaiako need access to gender-focused PLD to develop their professional knowledge (McCray, 2020). PLD interventions have been found to have had almost immediate effects reducing prejudice, increasing kaiako confidence, and shifting dominant views that children are too innocent to learn about gender (Blankenheim et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have reported that without sufficient professional knowledge, kaiako are unable to develop the confidence needed to engage in complex conversations about gender or teach in ways that are supportive of gender diversity (see Blankenheim et al., 2022; Chofla, 2016; MacNaughton, 2000; Smith et al., 2023; Smith & Gunn, 2015). Without sufficient professional knowledge, kaiako may not even notice gender in their setting, which could create the conditions for pervasive and subtle sexism and gender inequity (Blaise, 2005; Doyle et al., 2015; Gunn et al., 2004). For example, Li (2023) found that kaiako holding even slightly biased views of gender promoted an environment of gender bullying in ECE settings, which led to children developing stereotypical knowledge about what it means to be a boy or girl.

Knowledgeable kaiako are more likely to be positioned to actively challenge and act against gender stereotyping in play to ensure children's explorations of gender do not result in discrimination or inequity and ensure gender divisions are not reinforced within play (Gunn et al., 2004; Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023; Prioletta, 2023; Warin & Price, 2020). PLD has been shown to be effective in supporting kaiako to be gender inclusive. Smith et al. (2023) implemented a 10-month PLD intervention that introduced kaiako from three ECE settings to learn about and trial a resource developed to support gender equity and inclusion in ECE. Evaluation of Smith et al.'s intervention revealed kaiako increased their understandings of gender, planned for teaching children about gender equity, used a wider range of gender-inclusive resources, and engaged in more frequent conversations about gender with colleagues. For PLD focused on gender equity to be effective, kaiako must first have access to fit-for-purpose supports. The issue of PLD access must be addressed so that ECE kaiako have access to the professional knowledge and skills they need to support gender equity.

5.3 Systems for Supporting Gender Diversity and Inclusion: Policies, Resources, and Whole of Setting Approach

Systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion in ECE were not common and when systems were present, they tended to be ad hoc, reliant on individual kaiako with an interest in supporting gender diversity, and focused on books and resources. When asked whether their setting had a policy that addressed gender diversity, only a small number of kaiako indicated that their setting had a policy. Most were unsure or did not have a policy. Policies help create shared understandings and help to ensure teaching practices are consistent, safe, and appropriate (Ministry of Education, 2024c). Kaiako in the questionnaire commented that policies and guidance would support them to address gender equity in their settings. These findings are similar to Sodano's (2019) findings that guidelines or "concrete support" were needed to help kaiako understand how deeply they could explore gender diversity. At present, the Ministry of Education does not provide any gender diversity policy guidance to ECE settings. National level policy would inform setting-based policy and support inclusive practice. Policy intervention at national and setting levels can positively influence professional cultures, the quality of ECE provision, and children's learning (Connors, 2016).

About a third of kaiako in the questionnaire indicated they had processes for ensuring books, songs, and toys were gender inclusive and free of gender bias. Processes described tended to be informal and mostly consisted of kaiako removing any resources they deemed inappropriate or outdated. Very few kaiako indicated they had systematic approaches to vetting resources. Systematic approaches where kaiako and leaders collaboratively vet resources for gender bias are invaluable (Tzannetis, 2022). Auditing

books is important because research has shown books can provide authentic and accurate representations of diverse genders and reading and discussing inclusive books can help reduce stereotyping and promote inclusion (Adam & Harper, 2021; Tzannetis, 2022). While systematic processes were not common, some kaiako were proactively monitoring the books and resources in their settings for gender bias and inclusion. Monitoring books for gender bias involved kaiako editing the text in books or removing books that reinforced binary thinking, which is in line with Tzannetis' (2022) recommendation to carefully examine and evaluate books for gender biases or stereotypes.

Systems for supporting gender diversity and inclusion can help create whole-setting approaches to teaching gender. Whole-setting approaches include all kaiako using careful and consistent language, having books and resources that depict a range of gender identities, challenging stereotypes and discrimination, and engaging in conversations about gender diversity (Smith & Gunn, 2015). Systematic, whole-setting approaches maximise impact and are more likely to be sustainable over time (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). Heywood and Adzajlic (2023) advocate for whole-setting approaches where all team members, including leaders, kaiako, and support staff, such as the setting chef, feel empowered to seek changes to practice if needed. Of the nine kaiako interviewed, only three felt confident their teams were on the same page and implementing a whole-setting approach. The remaining six either felt their team was not on the same page or they were unsure and shared examples of observed practice they felt uncomfortable with. Setting-wide internal evaluation is one process teams could use to systematically explore their teaching practices and environment to promote a whole-setting approach. Through evaluation, teaching teams could examine all aspects of their everyday curriculum and

consider ways gender stereotyping can be reduced to help create whole-setting approaches to teaching gender (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023).

5.4 The Role of Whānau: Real, Perceived, and in the Curriculum

When considering supporting gender diversity in ECE, parents and whānau were the biggest concern or barrier described by kaiako in questionnaire data and a named concern in interview data. A dichotomy existed as parents and whānau were also described as enabling gender diversity and inclusion. In the questionnaire, parents and whānau were named as the biggest barrier to supporting gender diversity and inclusion (identified by more than half of kaiako). Kaiako appeared worried about the views that whānau might hold about a focus on gender inclusion. While kaiako concerns about parental opinions appeared to be paramount, clarity around what the specific concerns or views were was difficult to determine. The nature of questionnaire responses meant it was hard to be certain whether kaiako had experienced some form of pushback, such as parents questioning them or challenging them, or whether there was a perceived risk of whānau concerns and/or negative reactions. Interviewed kaiako provided detailed information and examples to help contextualise concerns about parents and whānau.

Interviewed kaiako shared multiple examples where whānau views were described as binary and associated with specific gender roles or kaiako experienced negative responses from whānau when addressing gender equity. Three interviewees had experienced dads feeling upset about their sons wearing dresses at the setting. Kaiako shared stories of facing their discomfort and challenging parental views to enable boys to access the full curriculum. Challenging whānau became far more complex when moving

beyond stereotypical girl/boy behaviours. Kaiako were much more hesitant to advocate for broader nonbinary gender diversity and sometimes feared doing so.

Multiple ECE studies have found that parents and whānau were seen as a significant concern and barrier when considering teaching children about gender diversity (e.g., Balter et al., 2021; Chapman, 2018; Davies et al., 2023; McCray, 2020; Sodano, 2019). Sodano (2019) found that while kaiako felt gender diversity should be taught in ECE, they feared parental reactions and complaints. When an additional layer of protection was added through clear topic guidance and leadership support, kaiako were much more willing to address gender (Sodano, 2019). Research suggests strong guidance is essential for helping mitigate the tension of whānau beliefs and providing kaiako with pathways for inclusion (Balter et al., 2021; Chofla, 2016; Sodano, 2019). Kaiako who can overcome their worries about addressing gender diversity with whānau are well placed to share accurate information and appropriate strategies for supporting healthy gender development in all young children (Timmons & Airton, 2023).

Kaiako concerns about parental opinions may have been impacted by *Te Whāriki,* which is an inclusive curriculum for all children and underpinned by the principle of family and community. Through *Te Whāriki,* kaiako are expected to engage whānau when making curriculum decisions (Ministry of Education, 2017b). It is also understood within *Te Whāriki* that whānau aspirations for their children are important. The challenge is how kaiako respect or respond to aspirations or curriculum suggestions that may be unsupportive of gender diversity or even harmful, discriminatory, or hateful. *Te Whāriki* aspires to be an inclusive curriculum for all children, with equitable opportunities for learning, including gender inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2017b).

While not specifically described by interview participants, some alluded to a potential tension between honouring *Te Whāriki* as inclusive for all children and the need to honour the views and aspirations of all whānau. The struggle could be seen as dissonance between kaiako belief systems and the views and expectations of whānau. Chofla (2016) found kaiako experienced similiar dissonance in their study when kaiako wanted to honour families as their children's first teachers, respect their cultural and philosophical beliefs, and support gender diversity in their settings. Cholfa ascertains that effective kaiako find ways to share information with families even when it is difficult or disagreement is present.

The tension with addressing whānau aspirations and being inclusive of gender diversity may be further impacted by a lack of guidance within *Te Whāriki.* The 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* is designed to be inclusive of all learners but contains very little gender-specific information for kaiako (Ministry of Education, 2017b). The 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* focused on kaiako promoting equity and reducing stereotyping for girls and boys (Ministry of Education, 1996). Kaiako in this study were more comfortable sharing examples that challenged binary stereotyping and ensured all children could experience all curriculum areas than engaging in conversations that explicitly addressed gender diversity. Perhaps, kaiako were more comfortable advocating for children's rights to experience all curriculum areas and challenge parental requests to restrict curriculum areas to boys or girls because of the explicit 1996 guidance. The 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* may have created expectations for practice, with teaching practices becoming established over time. As we move into deeper and more nuanced understandings of gender diversity, kaiako are likely to look to *Te Whāriki* for guidance, which is concerning given the 2017 version lacks explicit guidance and does not address gender diversity.

In contrast with many kaiako identifying parents and whānau as a barrier to supporting gender diversity and inclusion, a small number of kaiako also saw them as an enabler, especially when the whānau was supportive of their gender-diverse or gender-nonconforming child. Kaiako reported that whānau were able to provide support, share knowledge, and provide representation. Parents' support of their gender-diverse children is important because negative parental views place children at significant risk of poor mental health (Timmons & Airton, 2023).

Overall, my research found concerns about whānau views of gender diversity as a real and perceived barrier, as well as an enabler, but overall concerns about whānau views far outweighed whānau as sources of support. The role of the curriculum document and guidance provided within is an area worthy of further investigation as the potential dissonance between honouring the views and aspirations of whānau and ensuring an inclusive curriculum for all may create unexpected conflicts.

5.5 Conversations and Language: Three Pathways to Inclusion

For kaiako who were supportive of gender diversity, using careful language and engaging in conversations about gender was reported as a key priority for kaiako throughout questionnaire and interview data. Using careful language and engaging in conversations about gender could be categorised in three main ways: discussions as an enabler, challenging stereotypes, and minimising gendered language.

Discussions about gender was identified in the questionnaire data as the second largest enabler to supporting gender diversity and inclusion. The nature of the data meant it was

not possible to ascertain the contexts of those discussions, but it was clear that kaiako valued having conversations with children about gender. Interviewed kaiako provided multiple examples of complex teacher–child conversations they had engaged in that focused on a range of gender topics. These findings suggest kaiako are open to addressing gender in their pedagogy, which contrasts with results of other studies (see Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Prioletta, 2023).

Prioletta (2023) found that kaiako frequently subscribe to a “non-interfering role” in children’s play and subsequently avoid complex gender conversations. When kaiako avoided conversations about gender justice, they became active participants promoting gender divisions. Callahan and Nicholas (2019) viewed avoiding conversations about gender teaching through the hidden curriculum. Their study found kaiako exerted pressure on children to conform to the gender binary through a lack of intentional teaching and use of binary language (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019). In this study, many kaiako appeared open to addressing gender through pedagogical conversations, contrasting with Prioletta’s and Callahan and Nicholas’ studies where kaiako avoided conversations about gender.

In both questionnaire and interview data, kaiako who were supportive of gender diversity were committed to recognising and challenging gender stereotypes, helping to ensure all children were able to access all curriculum areas without gender limitations. Gender stereotypes are present in all ECE settings (Chapman, 2018; Todorović et al., 2023; Warin & Adriany, 2017). Kaiako actively challenging gender stereotypes is important because the culture of an ECE setting can strongly shape and normalise children’s understandings of gender (Todorović et al., 2023). Kaiako are positioned to play a key role in determining which gender working theories are supported or shut down (Faragó, 2023; Morgan &

Surtees, 2022). Engaging in conversations with children that disrupt normative discourses is essential (Kelly-Ware, 2016). Most reported conversations about challenging gender stereotypes involved traditional girl/boy stereotypes, such as boys wearing dresses or having long hair. Some interview participants also described their conversations with children that broke gender stereotypes in a more expansive way, such as talking about nonbinary identities.

Conversations about gender stereotyping tended to be in response to restrictive comments made by children. Kaiako rarely shared examples of initiating conversations without a child first making a stereotypical comment. Engaging in conversations in response to gender stereotyping appeared far less controversial to kaiako than other practices, such as introducing gender-expansive language. Challenging gender stereotypes likely felt more comfortable to kaiako because it is a long-established ECE practice (Ministry of Education, 1996; Slyfield & Sturrock, 1993) and does not require kaiako to leave the boy/girl binary. Intentional conversations that go beyond the gender binary are necessary to fully support gender diversity and inclusion and reduce gender stereotypes (Prioletta, 2023).

Interviewed kaiako and many questionnaire respondents emphasised the importance of using gender-neutral terminology and minimising gendered terms. This is an important finding because extensive use of binary pronouns can enforce the gender binary in children's thinking (Vasquez et al., 2022). Gender-neutral terminology reduces gender stereotyping and reduces exclusion (Shutts et al., 2017; Tzannetis, 2022). Minimising gendered terms by using non-gendered pet names, not overusing words like "girl" and "boy," and avoiding separating groups of children by gender are key aspects of gender-inclusive practice (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023; Tzannetis,

2022). Examples shared by interviewed kaiako included no longer separating children by gender, avoiding gendered praise, and using children's names instead of pronouns.

The self-reported use of gender-neutral language shared by kaiako may not reflect actual observed teaching practice. Studies have shown it is common for gaps to be apparent between espoused teaching practices and observed teaching practices (see Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Wen et al., 2011). In their study, Wen et al. (2011) found that almost all ECE kaiako espoused teaching practices that were not visible through observation. This is noteworthy because the self-reported gender-neutral teaching practices differ from those Callahan and Nicholas (2019) observed in their study of Australian ECE teachers' use of gendered language. Callahan and Nicholas found pervasive use of terms like "girl" and "boy," particularly in praise, such as "good girl." Girls received more comments on their appearance and boys their strength. Children were constantly reminded of their gender through the language kaiako used, which reinforced notions of appropriate gendered behaviours and possibly increased gender stereotyping (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019). Observing kaiako use of language could provide further insights about their use of gender-neutral language.

Additionally, while it is positive kaiako were aiming to minimise their use of gendered language, caution needs to be applied when utilising a completely gender-neutral language approach. A gender-neutral language approach may inadvertently leave gender teaching to the hidden curriculum. For example, if kaiako only use gender-neutral language, opportunities for role modelling an expansive range of gender and sex terms, such as nonbinary, gender-fluid, agender, bigender, cisgender, transgender, and intersex, are reduced.

Gender is an important part of identity (Blakemore et al., 2009) and through *Te Whāriki,* kaiako have a responsibility to support children's identities (Ministry of Education, 2017b). Conversations with whānau about children's gender identities appeared to be rare in the present study. Only a minority of kaiako in the questionnaire indicated they asked about pronouns during enrolment. Normalising informal conversations about pronoun choices helps promote inclusion (Vasquez et al., 2022). Not presuming or labelling children's individual genders without prior conversations with children and/or their whānau is a key aspect of gender inclusion (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). ECE kaiako are well positioned to support and respect children's gender-identity explorations (Blakemore et al., 2009; Emilson et al., 2016; Gansen & Martin, 2018). Role modelling a wide range of gendered terms helps support learning about gender identity and helps normalise gender diversity (Holford, 2020). Using gendered language carefully to support identity development and utilising gender-neutral language when appropriate are actions kaiako can take to support gender inclusion in ECE.

5.6 The Role of Books to Support Teaching Children about Gender Diversity: Affordance and Constraints

For kaiako who were supportive of gender diversity, books were the largest enabler identified by kaiako to teach children about gender concepts. Book usage was the most frequently named teaching practice in questionnaire data. Using books to support gender learning was also a key practice identified in interview data. Books that represent a diverse range of genders can enable children to learn about gender concepts and can support children to explore their ideas about gender (Piper, 2018; Smith & Gunn, 2015). Reading inclusive gender-focused books in ECE is supported by an expectation in *Te Whāriki* that kaiako provide infants with access to books that depict a range of genders (Ministry of

Education, 2017b). *Te Whāriki* only states this expectation for infants, not for toddlers or young children.

Books were used by kaiako to support learning about gender diversity and inclusion, help children develop positive gender identities, and in planning considerations. The significance of books as important for gender learning is not surprising given book reading is a familiar and well-established teaching practice in early childhood settings. The high numbers of kaiako aware of books and valuing their use in this study contrasts with Doyle et al.'s (2015) Aotearoa New Zealand study that found that books were not a strategy used to support gender learning. Doyle et al. found 99% of kaiako were unaware of gender-nonconforming literature and had not used gender-expansive books with children. When provided with a list of gender-inclusive and nonconforming books, most kaiako reported that they had never heard of these books. A possible explanation for this could be the increased visibility and accessibility of gender-focused books in the last decade.

Books can be a powerful resource, helping kaiako feel confident addressing complex topics and prompting conversations about gender, with benefits for all participating children (Nguyen, 2021). Like the findings in this study, books were a strong enabler in Sodano's (2019) thesis research exploring resources that introduce and support learning about gender diversity. Books were prioritised by kaiako over other resources, such as toys, because they were easier to use, required less explanation, and did not demand kaiako to independently provide additional information. Kaiako in the present study shared that reading books made it easier to have conversations about gender, which is in line with Nguyen's (2021) and Sodano's findings.

Reading books alone does not necessarily do the work of creating inclusion and supporting diversity. The conversations kaiako have with children about the stories matter. In a small-scale qualitative study on book reading sessions, Faragó (2023) found that one kaiako used questioning and counter-statements to actively counter children's gender stereotypes during book reading, while another kaiako mainly paraphrased children's statements and accepted stereotypical views. Faragó showed that despite good intentions, it is possible for kaiako to affirm children's problematic or stereotypical views while reading books, even when the books are intended to be supportive of gender diversity. Prioletta (2023) found similar results when researching the role of kaiako in children's gendered play. When kaiako are passive, children's discriminatory and stereotypical behaviours remain unchallenged and can become dominant setting discourses. In ECE, there tends to be a pervasive view that we cannot ever tell children their ideas or views are incorrect or harmful. This dominant view leads to situations like in Faragó's study where children's harmful views can be unintentionally affirmed by kaiako.

In the present study, kaiako reported that they used books as prompts to support conversations about gender. Sometimes, this involved reading binary-focused books and asking questions and challenging the norms within the stories. At other times, books were purchased to challenge binary stereotypes within the stories, or to feature gender-diverse characters, serving as starting points for conversations. Nguyen (2021) found that while children could participate in thoughtful interactions during story book sessions and recognise unfairness, they required substantial kaiako support to transition to activism against injustices and most children had difficulty shifting binary views from picture book sessions. This makes the role of kaiako during book reading sessions even more important. Kaiako can challenge and reinforce heteronormative understandings of gender

diversity during book reading (Morgan & Surtees, 2022). Kaiako hold the power to determine which ideas are supported or shut down. Heteronormativity and unconscious bias mean kaiako may not be aware when they are perpetuating problematic views (Morgan & Surtees, 2022). Conscious, intentional, and purposeful book reading sessions with robust conversations can be invaluable for challenging gender discourses and supporting learning about gender diversity (Morgan & Surtees, 2022).

Data in the present study showed that while kaiako valued books and recognised them as an important resource to support gender diversity and inclusion, book usage was constrained in three ways. Firstly, book usage was restricted through limited access. In the interview data, kaiako regularly named books that were supportive of gender diversity that could support their teaching about gender. When asked whether they had those books in their setting, the answer was often no or the kaiako had self-purchased books for their personal resource collections. Access to quality LGBTQI+ resources is important, however, it is not uncommon for ECE settings to have inadequate resources. In a survey of Aotearoa New Zealand ECE kaiako, Cherrington et al. (2020) found that only 28% of 278 respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had resources to support children from rainbow families.

Secondly, book usage was constrained because kaiako in questionnaire and interview data were concerned about negative reactions from parents or colleagues. Sometimes, negative reactions had been directly experienced and other times they were feared but not experienced. A fear of backlash is a significant barrier in numerous ECE gender studies. It is not uncommon for kaiako to worry about parent, whanau, or colleagues' concerns when

considering bringing gender diversity into their curriculum (Balter et al., 2018; Chapman, 2022; Chofla, 2016; Davies et al., 2023; McCray, 2020; Sodano, 2019; Tzannetis, 2022).

Thirdly, book usage was restricted by management or colleagues. Kaiako in both interview and questionnaire data commented that management or colleagues would not allow them to read gender-expansive books or would ban specific books. Restricting the autonomy of kaiako to select and read gender-inclusive books was disempowering for kaiako. Moreover, management and colleagues restricting the actions of kaiako aspiring to engage in inclusive pedagogy is concerning. Picture books can be engaging, provide representation, and create opportunities for children to talk about, solve, or discuss problems (Nguyen, 2021). Equally, picture books can marginalise, exclude, and disempower depending on the books selected. Adam and Harper (2021) found the 44 Australian and American kaiako in their study overwhelmingly chose to stock and read picture books that promoted traditional gender stereotypes and binary thinking. Whose stories are told and who is represented in the books are part of a wider power dynamic. The three restrictions discussed in this section, limited access to books, restrictions on which books can be read, and concerns about negative reactions, are all considerations within this power dynamic. These restrictions add complexities to considerations of who is represented in books and whose stories are told.

In summary, books are a resource kaiako identified as supporting learning about gender diversity. Through reading and discussing books, kaiako can challenge gender stereotypes, introduce gender concepts, and provide diverse gendered representations. To truly strengthen gender diversity and inclusion, researchers have recommended that books should be used as a stepping-stone for kaiako to plan further learning experiences

focused on gender diversity, but book reading should not be the only or complete approach (Faragó, 2023). The findings of this study suggest books are seen as the dominant approach to teaching children about gender diversity and kaiako rarely planned for experiences beyond book reading sessions. Some kaiako reported using books to prompt or create conversations about gender with children. Kaiako faced multiple barriers accessing and using books in ECE settings. When accessible and used purposefully, picture books can disrupt binary discourses and mitigate against exclusion (Morgan & Surtees, 2022). Books are an excellent starting point for supporting learning about gender diversity and many kaiako in the study saw the potential of books, were aware of books available, and aspired to read them with children.

5.7 Strengths and Limitations

This study has strengths and limitations. A key strength of the study was the diverse range of views shared by a large number of kaiako in the questionnaire (n = 431) and the depth of the data shared in nine participant interviews. The two-phase approach significantly enriched the findings and credibility of this research as it allowed for “thick descriptions” through interviews and breadth of responses through questionnaire responses to create a fuller picture than one source alone (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The detailed questionnaire insights and information provided were likely facilitated by the option of anonymity, which presumably allowed kaiako to share their thoughts openly and honestly. The depth of the study was further developed by interviews with nine kaiako, offering opportunities to gather rich, in-depth information beyond what was possible in the questionnaire.

The study has three notable limitations. First, the study was not designed to be generalisable to or be reflective of the early childhood kaiako population in Aotearoa New

Zealand. The large sample size might tempt readers to generalise the findings but the views, understandings, perspectives, and teaching practices reported represent only the experiences of the participating kaiako. The findings may not reflect those of the broader ECE teaching population. In order for the findings to be generalisable, probability sampling through random selection would have needed to be used instead of self-selection, which allowed interested kaiako to choose to participate (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Second, the use of self-selection means the study may include self-selection bias. Self-selection bias means people with strong views for and against gender diversity were more likely to complete the questionnaire than those without strong feelings (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020). Research participants self-selected to participate by completing the questionnaire and volunteering to be interviewed. Kaiako were not randomly selected from the ECE teacher population. The kaiako who chose to participate likely had an interest in gender diversity, contributing to self-selection bias (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020). Self-selection bias could have skewed the data towards more polarised positions, both supportive and unsupportive of gender diversity in ECE.

Third, the questionnaire distribution method may have created limitations in the study. As the questionnaire was sent to email addresses publicly listed on the Education Counts website, receivers were likely setting managers or service leaders as they are the people who tend to monitor email inboxes. The reliance on leaders to share the questionnaire with team members could have limited participation. There is a possibility that some leaders completed the questionnaire without forwarding the email on to their team members and this may explain the high levels of teaching experience reported by many participants.

5.8 Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study will likely be of interest to kaiako, leaders, and policy writers in the early childhood sector. This research has highlighted the wide range of gender beliefs held by kaiako and teaching practices which kaiako identified as supportive of gender diversity. A strong reliance on personal experiences to form gender beliefs instead of professional knowledge likely contributed to the variation. Kaiako beliefs informed their teaching practices.

This study examined teachers' self-reported practices rather than actual observed practices. Self-reports are reflective of the views kaiako shared at the time and often differ from independently observed practices (Hammond & Wellington, 2020; Wen et al., 2011). That said, kaiako have provided detailed accounts of practices, shared insights openly, and shared information that might have been challenging to capture through direct observation alone. There is a need for observational Aotearoa New Zealand ECE research exploring kaiako beliefs and teaching practices related to gender diversity. Future research could not only focus on current or existing practices but also explore how PLD can shift attitudes and beliefs that hinder inclusive practice.

5.9 Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Understandings about gender and gender diversity are rapidly changing and evolving in society. Gender is becoming less likely to be conceptualised in binary ways, and increasingly people are viewing gender as a spectrum that includes a range of fluid identities (Kelly-Ware & Lyall, 2020). The high number of kaiako who participated in this master's level study suggests kaiako are interested in and wanting to talk about these shifts in gender knowledge and the implications for ECE. A total of 431 kaiako completed

the questionnaire and more than 100 kaiako volunteered to be interviewed. The high levels of kaiako interest may reflect a lack of previous opportunities to discuss gender diversity or participate in research about gender diversity. Kaiako appeared to be aware that their teaching practices have implications for how children are socialised to understand their gender identities and kaiako wanted to support children.

While it is hard to specify precise percentages due to the nature of the data (i.e., no single question designed to capture the nature of views and inconsistencies in responses across questions), the high numbers of kaiako wanting to be supportive of gender diversity are positive. Within the questionnaire data, approximately one-third of kaiako were supportive of gender diversity and discussed teaching practices that supported gender inclusion. Approximately one-third were aspiring to be supportive of gender diversity but needed access to more information or support. Approximately one-third were not supportive of gender diversity at this time. The results from this study show that we have made progress as a sector, with many kaiako wanting to support gender diversity and we need to keep building this momentum collectively to better support children and whānau.

There is a need to support kaiako who are aspiring to support gender diversity and gender inclusion in ECE. The ad hoc, experience-reliant approach kaiako took to learning about gender is reflective of the lack of official guidance available to kaiako and limited range of PLD. Relying on personal experiences to form professional knowledge is an issue. Kaiako holding binary beliefs can limit children's opportunities, harm their self-esteem, and affect their future academic and career choices in certain fields (Li, 2023). Whilst developing kaiako knowledge about gender diversity may be controversial to some, the values underpinning its inclusion in ECE are not new. Conversations about healthy relationships, consent, culture, and identity have been long discussed with children through topics such

as friendship, families, and sharing (Heywood & Adzajlic, 2023). Kaiako already encourage children to be accepting of others who may look or live differently to them, and dismantling binary thinking and encouraging more expansive views of gender is another step towards inclusion and equity.

The study revealed kaiako were very concerned about experiencing negative reactions from parents and whānau about gender diversity and this concern was a significant barrier for kaiako. Kaiako were constrained in overcoming this barrier through a lack of systems, policies, and processes that addressed gender diversity. Implementing robust policies, systems, and processes in ECE systems would empower kaiako to expand their inclusive practice and provide reassurance as they engage in new teaching practices. The lack of systems, policies, and processes was likely compounded by a lack of guidance in *Te Whāriki.* Without curriculum support, consistent systems, and whole-setting approaches, children experience environments that reflect the cultural and gender expectations of the kaiako providing them (Chapman, 2018). As shown in this study, kaiako expectations could be very binary, stereotypical, or even resistant to gender diversity. Systems and processes are crucial in developing whole-setting approaches to supporting gender diversity and would likely provide support for kaiako who felt worried about negative whānau reactions as they explore gender diversity in their teaching pedagogy. Kaiako need access to information, guidance, and PLD focused on developing gender understandings that are inclusive, expansive, and nonbinary to ensure children receive holistic and inclusive support.

Kaiako expressed PLD focused on gender diversity was hard to access. Shifting teaching practices and developing new teaching practices can be complex and take time (Mitchell &

Cubey, 2003). Changing practice takes a concerted effort and, without effective, fit-for-purpose support, transforming practice can be incredibly difficult (Clarke, 2021). This study revealed kaiako were finding it difficult to access any PLD focused on gender diversity in ECE, let alone identify PLD options that would fit their purposes. To support kaiako who may be struggling to take action, I have developed a set of practice ideas available in Appendix H. The ideas are informed by key findings in this study and have been simplified to a bulleted list. The list should be considered in conjunction with the deeper information contained in this thesis.

5.10 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how early childhood kaiako understand, perceive, and experience gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. The aim of the research was to explore the ways kaiako support equity through the lens of gender diversity. A qualitative, question-driven, two-phase approach was used: an online questionnaire for 431 kaiako and in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine kaiako.

The study revealed new insights into how kaiako understand and approach gender diversity in ECE settings. Findings revealed wide variations in kaiako beliefs about gender and an overreliance on personal experiences to inform gender views. Kaiako worried about parent and whānau views and reactions. Systems for addressing gender diversity tended to be non-existent or ad hoc and reliant on individual kaiako. Approaches to addressing gender diversity in ECE varied considerably. Key strategies for inclusive practice included using gender-neutral language, engaging in conversations to challenge gender stereotypes, and reading gender-expansive books.

The findings from this study are intended to provide insights, inform, and offer suggestions for inclusive practice while addressing a gap in the research literature. If our aspiration is to ensure all children experience equitable opportunities, have their identities supported, and be supported as unique individuals, it is crucial kaiako are informed, empowered, and consistently embrace gender diversity.

References

Adam, H., & Harper, L. J. (2021). Gender equity in early childhood picture books: A cross-cultural study of frequently read picture books in early childhood classrooms in Australia and the United States. *Australian Educational Researcher*, *50*(2), 453–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00494-0

Balter, A. S., van Rhijn, T., & Davies, A. W. J. (2018). Equipping early childhood educators to support the development of sexuality in childhood: Identification of pre- and post-service training needs. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *27*(1), 33–42. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2017-00

Balter, A. S., van Rhijn, T., Gores, D., Davies, A. W. J., & Akers, T. (2021). Supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood: The rationales and barriers to sexuality education in early learning settings. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *30*(3), 287–295. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2021-0034

Bartholomaeus, C., Riggs, D. W., & Andrew, Y. (2017). The capacity of South Australian primary school teachers and pre-service teachers to work with trans and gender diverse students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *65*, 127–135. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.006

Batchelar, S. M. S. (2016). *Intentional teaching in New Zealand early childhood education: Aspirations, decisions, and actions* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Auckland.

Billups, F. D. (2021). *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878699

Black Delfin, A. (2021). The discursive and the material in early childhood play: Co-constitution of gender in open and subversive spaces. *Gender & Education*, *33*(5), 594–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1786012

Blaise, M. (2005). *Playing it straight: Uncovering gender discourses in the early childhood classroom.* Routledge.

Blaise, M. (2009). What a girl wants, what a girl needs: Responding to sex, gender, and sexuality in the early childhood classroom. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 23*(4), 450-460. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568540909594673

Blaise, M., & Taylor, A. (2012). Using queer theory to rethink gender equity in early childhood education. *Young Children*, *67*(1), 88–98.

Blakemore, J. E. O., Berenbaum, S. A., & Liben, L. S. (2009). *Gender development*. Psychology Press.

Blankenheim, T., Pizzinato, A., & Brandelli Costa, Â. (2022). Evaluation of a formative intervention on sexuality and gender for early childhood education teachers. *Evaluación de Una Intervención Formativa Sobre Sexualidad y Género Para Profesoras de Educación Infantil*, *32*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4327e3216

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing interviews*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716665

Brownlee, P., & Crisp, K. (2020). *The sacred urge to play*. Good Egg Books.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Callahan, S., & Nicholas, L. (2019). Dragon wings and butterfly wings: Implicit gender binarism in early childhood. *Gender and Education*, *31*(6), 705–723. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1552361

Chapman, R. (2018). *An exploration of early childhood educators' views on children's gender identities* [Doctoral dissertation, RMIT University]. Research Gate.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336083775_An_exploration_of_early_childhood_educators'_views_on_children's_gender_identities

Chapman, R. (2022). Moving beyond ‘gender-neutral’: Creating gender expansive environments in early childhood education. *Gender and Education*, *34*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1902485

Cherrington, S. (2016). Early childhood teachers’ thinking and reflection: A model of current practice in New Zealand. *Early Years*, *38*(3), 316–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1259211

Cherrington, S., Cooper, K., & Shuker, M. J. (2020). Beyond invisibility: Early childhood teachers’ inclusion of rainbow families. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *49*(6), 1099–1111. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01121-w

Chofla, S. A. (2016). *Preschool educators’ roles in creating supportive spaces for gender exploration and expression* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.

Clarke, L. R. (2021). *Transforming early childhood teachers’ professional learning and development: A study of research, provision, and potential* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Massey University.

Connors, M. C. (2016). Creating cultures of learning: A theoretical model of effective early care and education policy. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *36*, 32–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.12.005

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clarke, V. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage Publications.

Davies, A. W., Balter, A. S., & van Rhijn, T. (2023). Sexuality education and early childhood educators in Ontario, Canada: A Foucauldian exploration of constraints and possibilities. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *24*(4), 394–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491211060787

Davies, B. (1989). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*. Allen & Unwin.

Delaune, A. (2019). Moral philosophy, *Te Whāriki* and gender. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *51*(7), 721–730. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1461085

Doyle, B. K. (2023). *Mana Takatāpui: Self-determination for queer rangatahi Māori* [Master's thesis, University of Waikato]. National Library of New Zealand. https://natlib.govt.nz/records/51995524?search%5Bi%5D%5Bcreator%5D=Doyle%2C+Benjamin+Kauri&search%5Bi%5D%5Bsubject%5D=Sexual+Behaviour&search%5Bi%5D%5Btag%5D=natlib%3Aonly_at_the_library&search%5Bpath%5D=items

Doyle, T., Evans, S., & Gilbert, S. (2015). Gender equity, identity, and conformity in picture books: Teacher selection and use in the early childhood classroom. *International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, *21*(2), 15–31.

Ebbeck, M., & Waniganayake, M. (2016). *Play in early childhood education: Learning in diverse contexts.* Oxford University Press.

Education Council. (2017). *Our code our standards: Code of professional responsibility and standards for the teaching profession. Ngā tikanga matatika ngā paerewa: Ngā tikanga matatika mō te haepapa ngaiotanga me ngā paerewa mō te umanga whakaakoranga*.

Edwards, S. (2017). Play-based learning and intentional teaching: Forever different? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *42*(2), 4–11. https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.2.01

Ehrensaft, D. (2018). Exploring gender expansive expressions versus asserting a gender identity. In C. Keo-Meier & D. Ehrensaft (Eds.), *The gender affirmative model: An interdisciplinary approach to supporting transgender and gender expansive children.*

(pp. 37–53). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000095-003

Ellison, G., & De Wet, T. (2017). Biological determinism. In W. Trevathan (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of biological anthropology* (pp. 1–5). Wiley-Blackwell.

Emilson, A., Folkesson, A.-M., & Lindberg, I. M. (2016). Gender beliefs and embedded gendered values in preschool. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *48*(2), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-016-0162-4

Epstein, A. (2014). *The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children's learning*. NAYEC.

Fagot, B. I. (1992). Gender labeling, gender stereotyping, and parenting behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, *28*(2), 225–230. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.2.225

Faragó, F. (2023). Challenges and opportunities: Book discussions of gender non-conformity in two preschool classrooms. *Early Child Development & Care*, *193*(4), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2022.2153838

Fast, A. A., & Olson, K. R. (2018). Gender development in transgender preschool children. *Child Development*, *89*(2), 620–637. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12758

Fenaughty, J., Fleming, T., Bavin, L., Choo, W. L., Ker, A., Lucassen, M., Ball, J., Greaves, L., Drayton, B., King-Finau, T., & Clark, T. (2023). *Te āniwaniwa takatāpui whānui: Te irawhiti me te ira huhua mō ngā rangatahi: Gender identity and young people's wellbeing in Youth19.* Youth19 Research Group, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bdbb75ccef37259122e59aa/t/653ef9712a382244538fd8f1/1698625910424/Youth19+Gender+Identity+and+young+peoples+wellbeing.pdf

Fenaughty, J., Ker, A., Alansari, M., Besley, T., Kerekere, E., Pasley, A., Saxton, P., Subramanian, P., Thomsen, P., & Veale, J. (2022). *Identify survey: Community and advocacy report.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60187146e9f9034475dea113/t/6390e802bd4e535d10b72a17/1670440980159/community_advocacy_report.pdf

Fitzpatrick, K. (2015). Sexuality, education, and diversity. In A. C. Gunn & L. A. Smith (Eds.), *Sexual cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand education* (pp.117–134). Otago University Press.

Gansen, H. M., & Martin, K. A. (2018). Becoming gendered. In B. J. Risman, C. M. Froyum, & W. J. Scarborough (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of gender* (pp. 83–93). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0_6

Gould, K. & Matapo, K. (2016). What's in a philosophy statement? A critical discourse analysis of early childhood centre philosophy statements in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *He Kupu: The Word, 4*(3), 51–60.

Green, A., Manawaroa, T. W., & Laurence, R. (2023). Tikanga Māori supports healthy Māori communities for takatāpui trans people in Aotearoa. In A. Green & L. Pihama (Eds.), *Honouring our ancestors: Takatāpui, two-spirit, and indigenous LGBTQI+ well-being* (pp. 181-203). Te Herenga Waka University Press.

Green, A., Pihama, L., Simmonds, S., Roskruge, M., & Nopera, T. (2023). Being Māori, being Takatāpui. In A. Green & L. Pihama (Eds.), *Honouring our ancestors: Takatāpui, two-spirit, and indigenous LGBTQI+ well-being* (pp. 29–42). Te Herenga Waka University Press.

Greishaber, S., Krieg, S., McArdle, F., & Sumsion, J. (2021). Intentional teaching in early childhood education: A scoping review. *Review of Education* 9(3), 31–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3309.

Gunn, A. C. (2008). *Heteronormativity and early childhood education: Social justice and some puzzling queries.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato]. Research Gate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/33052600_Heteronormativity_and_early_childhood_education_Social_justice_and_some_puzzling_queries

Gunn, A. C. (2011). Even if you say it three ways, it still doesn't mean it's true: The pervasiveness of heteronormativity in early childhood education. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *9*(3), 280–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X11398567

Gunn, A. C. (2023, November 20). *Early insights for professional learning and policy development: Advocacy perspectives of early childhood teachers of gender diverse children.* [Conference session] NZARE Conference and Annual meeting: Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te wai, ka ora te tangata: Education research for sustainable communities, Palmerston North.

Gunn, A. C., Child, C., Madden, B., Purdue, K., Surtees, N., Thurlow, B., & Todd, P. (2004). Building inclusive communities in early childhood education: Diverse perspectives from Aotearoa New Zealand. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *5*(3), 293–308. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2004.5.3.4

Gunn, A. C. (2015). The potential of queer theorising in early childhood education: Disrupting heteronormativity and practising for inclusion. In A. C. Gunn & L. A. Smith (Eds.), *Sexual cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand education* (pp. 21–34). Open University Press.

Halbeisen, G., & Jaffé, M. E. (2022). Construal level mindsets modulate gender categorizations in preschool children. *Acta Psychologica*, *229*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103708

Hammond, M. & Wellington, J. (2020). *Education research: The basics.* Routledge.

Hargraves, V. (2019). Intentional teaching. *The Education Hub*. https://theeducationhub.org.nz/intentional-teaching/

Hedges, H., & Cooper, M. (2018). Relational play-based pedagogy: Theorising a core practice in early childhood education. *Teachers and Teaching*, *24*(4), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1430564

Heywood, S., & Adzajlic, B. (2023). *Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: Changing the narrative.* Routledge.

Hogan, V. (2014). Revisiting the teachers gaze: Have we changed how we see gender in early childhood education? *He Kupu: The Word*, *3*(3).

Holford, N. (2020). Children and young people negotiating gender in context. In V. Cooper & N. Holford (Eds.), *Exploring Childhood and Youth*. Routledge.

Hoominfar, E. (2021). Gender Socialization. In W. Leal Filho, A. Azul, L. Brandli, A. Salvia, & T. Wall (Eds.), *Gender Equality* (pp. 645–654). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95687-9_13

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Inside Out. (2022). *Inside Out Terminology Handout*. https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/InsideOUT-rainbow-terminology-.pdf

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2020). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches.* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.

Kahuroa, R. (2013). Questions that matter conversations that count: Implementing critical literacy with young children. *Early Childhood Folio*, *17*(2), 9–14. https://doi.org/10.18296/ecf.0118

Kelly-Ware, J. (2016). What's he doing that for? He's a boy! Exploring gender and sexualities in an early childhood setting. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *6*(1), 147–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610615624519

Kelly-Ware, J. (2018). *Negotiating fairness and diversity: Stories from an Aotearoa New Zealand kindergarten.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Waikato University.

Kelly-Ware, J., & Lyall, M. (2020). Gender matters in early childhood education. In A. C. Gunn, N. Surtees, D. Gordon-Burns, & K. Purdue (Eds.), *Te aotūroa tātaki: Inclusive early childhood education: Perspectives on inclusion, social justice, and equity from Aotearoa New Zealand.*

Kerekere, E. (2017a). *Growing up takatāpui: Whānau journeys.* Rainbow Youth. https://takatapui.nz/growing-up-takatapui#colonisation

Kerekere, E. (2017b). *Part of the whānau: The emergence of takatāpui identity he whāriki takatāpui* [Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington]. Academia. https://www.academia.edu/65034179/Part_of_The_Whānau_The_Emergence_of_Takatāpui_Identity_He_Whāriki_Takatāpui

Kerekere, E. (2021). *Takatāpui: Part of the whānau.* (3rd ed.). Tīwhanawhana Trust and Mental Health Foundation.

Kerekere, E. (2023). Te whare takatāpui: Reclaiming the spaces of our ancestors. In A. Green & L. Pihama (Eds.), *Honouring Our Ancestors: Takatāpui, two-spirit, and indigenous LGBTQI+ well-being.* Te Herenga Waka University Press.

Leggett, N., & Ford, M. (2013). A fine balance: Understanding the roles educators and children play as intentional teachers and intentional learners within the Early Years Learning Framework. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *38*(4), 42–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911303800406

Lewis, R., Fleer, M., & Hammer, M. (2019). Intentional teaching: Can early-childhood educators create the conditions for children's conceptual development when following a child-centred programme? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *44*(1), 6–18. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1177/1836939119841470

Li, J. (2023). Gender never defines me: A study on preschool teachers' do and don't about gender. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100397

Lifter, K., Mason, E. J., & Barton, E. E. (2011). Children's play: Where we have been and where we could go. *Journal of Early Intervention*, *33*(4), 281–297. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815111429465

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2013). *The constructivist credo.* Left Coast Press.

Lindsey, L. L. (2021). *Gender: Sociological perspectives.* (7th ed.). Routledge.

Lips, H. M. (2018). *Gender: The basics.* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Lyall, M. (2013). *Don't you perceive gender as different because of the chromosomes': Examining the impact of gender discourses on early childhood pre-service teachers?* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Waikato University.

MacNaughton, G. (2000). *Rethinking gender in early childhood education.* Allen and Unwin.

Massey University. (2017). *Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluations involving human participants* (Revised code).

McBreen, K. (2023). He takatāpui, he queer, he mokopuna rānei. In A. Green & L. Pihama (Eds.), *Honouring Our Ancestors: Takatāpui, two-spirit, and indigenous LGBTQI+ well-being* (pp. 60–72). Te Herenga Waka University Press.

McCray, D. M. N. (2020). *Prekindergarten educators' perspectives on professional development about transgender and gender-nonconforming children* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.

McLaughlin, T., Aspden, K., & Snyder, P. (2016). Intentional Teaching as a Pathway to Equity in Early Childhood Education: Participation, Quality, and Equity. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, *51*(2), 175–195. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-016-0062-z

Meade, A., Robinson, L., Smorti, S., Stuart, M., Williamson, J., Caroll-Lind, J., Meagher-Lundberg, P., & Te Whau, S. (2012). *Early childhood teachers' work in education and care centres: Profiles, patterns and purposes*. Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa.

Meade, A., & Staden, F. (1985). *Once upon a time, amongst blocks and car cases: Action research to enable girls' mathematics learning.* New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Mertens, D. (2020). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Sage Publications.

Miller, E., & Costello, C. (2001). The limits of biological determinism. *American Sociological Review, 66*(4), 592-598.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (2017a). *He Māpuna te Tamaiti Supporting Social and Emotional Competence in Early Learning*. Cognition Education.

Ministry of Education. (2017b). *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2020a). *Relationships and Sexuality Education: A guide for teachers, leaders, and boards of trustees.*

Ministry of Education. (2020b). *Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP)*. https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/national-education-learning-priorities-nelp-te-wh-riki/5637164911.p

Ministry of Education. (2023). *Enrolment Agreement Form*. https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Early-Childhood/ECE-Funding-handbook/Enrolment-Form-January-2024.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2024a). *ECE funding handbook*. https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/funding-and-financials/ece-funding-handbook/chapter-14-collection-of-information#paragraph-7286

Ministry of Education. (2024b). *Kōwhiti Whakapae: Strengthening progress through practice. https://kowhiti-whakapae.education.govt.nz*

Ministry of Education. (2024c). *Starting a centre-based ECE service*. https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-a-service/starting-a-service/starting-a-centre-based-ece-service/new-cd-page/

Mitchell, L., & Cubey, P. (2003). *Characteristics of professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children's learning in early childhood settings: Best evidence synthesis: Report prepared for the New Zealand Ministry of Education.* Education Counts. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5955

Mitchell, K., & Olsen-Reeder, V. (2021). Tapu and noa as negotiators of Māori gender roles in pre-colonial Aotearoa and today. *Mai Journal: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship*, *10*(2), 84–92. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2021.10.2.2

Moon, K., & Blackman, D. (2014). A Guide to Understanding Social Science Research for Natural Scientists. *Conservation Biology*, *28*(5), 1167–1177.

Moon, K., & Blackman, D. (2017). *A guide to ontology, epistemology, and philosophical perspectives for interdisciplinary researchers*. Integration and Implementation

Insights; A Community Blog and Repository of Resources for Improving Research Impact on Complex and Real-World Problems. https://i2insights.org/2017/05/02/philosophy-for-interdisciplinarity/

Morgan, K., & Surtees, N. (2022). “I can be a girl if I want to”: Supporting or silencing children’s working theories during counter-heteronormative picture book sessions in early childhood education. *Waikato Journal of Education*, *27*(1), 133–146. https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v26i1.893

Morgenroth, T., Sendén, M. G., Lindqvist, A., Renström, E. A., Ryan, M. K., & Morton, T. A. (2021). Defending the Sex/Gender Binary: The Role of Gender Identification and Need for Closure. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *12*(5), 731–740. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620937188

Morrow, V. (2011). *Understanding Children and Childhood* (No. 1; Centre for Children and Young People Background Briefing Series, pp. 1–27). Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

Neumann, D., Yao, E., Fenaughty, J., Liang, R., Kingi, T. K., Taufa, S., Atatoa Carr, P., & Paine, S.-J. (2023). *Growing up in New Zealand: Life in early adolescence: Now we are twelve: Ethnic and gender identity at 12 years old* (No. Snapshot one of ten).

Nguyen, A. (2021). Children Have the Fairest Things to Say: Young Children’s Engagement with Anti-Bias Picture Books. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *50*(5), 743–759. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01186-1

O’Donoghue, T. A. (2018). *Planning your qualitative research thesis and project: An introduction to interpretivist research in education and the social sciences.* Routledge.

Oliphant, J., Veale, J., MacDonald, J., Carroll, R., Johnson, R., Harte, M., Stephenson, C., & Bullock, J. (2018). *Guidelines for gender affirming healthcare for gender diverse and*

transgender children, young people and adults in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato.

Piper, R. (2018). Preschool-aged children's gender identity development: Exploring gender through multicultural literature. In B. Guzzetti, T. W. Bean, & J. Dunkerly-Bean (Eds.), *Literacies, sexuality, and gender: Understanding identities from preschool to adulthood* (pp. 15-26). Routledge.

Prioletta, J. (2023). Learning through play or learning sexism through play? Why critical gender literacy matters in kindergarten education. *Early Years*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2023.2190053

Punch, K., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to research methods in education.* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Robinson, K. H. (2013). *Innocence, knowledge, and the construction of childhood: The contradictory nature of sexuality and censorship in children's contemporary lives.* Routledge.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Sarmento, M. J., Marchi, R. d.C., & Trevisan, G. d.P. (2018). Beyond the Modern 'Norm' of Childhood: Children at the Margins as a Challenge for the Sociology of Childhood. In C. Baraldi & T. Cockburn (Eds.), *Theorising Childhood: Citizenship, Rights and Participation* (pp. 135–157). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72673-1_7

Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (2013). *Essential ethnographic methods: A mixed methods approach.* (2nd ed.). AltaMira Press.

Shuker, M. J., & Cherrington, S. (2016). Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *24*(2), 172–187.

Shutts, K., Kenward, B., Falk, H., Ivegran, A., & Fawcett, C. (2017). Early preschool environments and gender: Effects of gender pedagogy in Sweden. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *162*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2017.04.014

Slyfield, H., & Sturrock, F. M. (1993). *Literature review of New Zealand research on gender issues in early childhood and primary school education.* Demographic and Statistical Analysis Section, Ministry of Education.

Smith, A. B. (2013). *Understanding children and childhood. A New Zealand perspective* (5th ed.). Bridget Williams Books.

Smith, A. B., & Inder, P. M. (1993). Social interaction in same and cross gender pre-school. *Educational Psychology*, *13*(1), 29–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341930130104

Smith, J. (2017). *Teachers' perspectives of gender differences in the social behaviours of preschool children* [Master's thesis, Massey University]. Research Gate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321709647_Teachers'_perspectives_of_gender_differences_in_the_social_behaviours_of_preschool_children

Smith, K., Hurst, B., & Linden-Perlis, D. (2023). Using professional development resources to support the inclusion of gender equity in early childhood teaching and curriculum planning. *Gender & Education*, *35*(3), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2142530

Smith, L. A., & Gunn, A. C. (2015). Challenging the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. In L. A. Smith & A. C. Gunn (Eds.), *Sexual cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand Education* (pp. 226–239). Otago University Press.

Sodano, A. (2019). *Introducing Gender Diversity in Preschool Curriculum: Storybooks and Toys* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Concordia University.

Statistics New Zealand. (2019). *2018 Census population and dwelling counts*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-population-and-dwelling-counts/

Statistics New Zealand. (2024). *Gender, sex, and LGBTIQ+ concepts in the 2023 Census*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/methods/gender-sex-and-lgbtiq-concepts-in-the-2023-census/

Strunk, K., & Mwavita, M. (2020). *Design and Analysis in Educational Research: ANOVA designs in SPSS®*. Routledge.

Swit, C. S. (2019). Understanding the Distinctive Differences between Relationally and Physically Aggressive Behaviours Used in Early Childhood Contexts. *Early Education and Development*, *30*(7), 927–946. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2019.1603579

Tan, K. K. H., Schmidt, J. M., Ellis, S. J., Veale, J. F., & Byrne, J. L. (2022). It's how the world around you treats you for being trans: Mental health and wellbeing of transgender people in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *13*(5), 1109–1121. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.1897033

Thomas, L., Warren, E., & deVries, E. (2011). Play-based learning and intentional teaching in early childhood contexts. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *36*(4), 69–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911103600410

Timmons, K., & Airton, L. (2023). Welcoming gender diversity in the early years: Interpreting professional guiding documents for gender-expansive practice. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *24*(1), 32–45. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1463949120978526

Todorović, K., Krtolica, M., Marojević, J., & Jaramaz, M. (2023). Only what's right: Normalising children's gender discourses in kindergarten: The case of Montenegro. *Education as Change*, *27,* 1–23. https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/11504

Tzannetis, E. (2022). *Gendered play in early childhood classrooms: A case study of teachers' perceptions* [Doctoral dissertation, St. John's University]. Eric Institute of Education Sciences. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=sexual+AND+development&ff1=souProQuest+LLC&ff2=eduEarly+Childhood+Education&id=ED643455

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, *15*(3), 398–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048

Vasquez, K., Tompkins, R., Olson, K. R., & Dunham, Y. (2022). Children's memory for gender-neutral pronouns. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *227*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2022.105589

Veale, J., Guy, S., Nopera, T., Yee, A., Tan, K., Bentham, R., & Byrne, J. (2019). *Counting ourselves: The health and wellbeing of trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa New Zealand.* (Version: 23 September, 2019). [Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato].

Walkerdine, V. (1990). *Schoolgirl Fictions*. Verso.

Warin, J., & Adriany, V. (2017). Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *26*(4), 375–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1105738

Warin, J., & Price, D. (2020). Transgender awareness in early years education: We haven't got any of those here. *Early Years*, *40*(1), 140–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2019.1703174

Weedon, C. (1996). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Pub.

Weisberg, D. S., Kittredge, A. K., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2015). Making play work for education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(8), 8–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217155839

Wen, X., Elicker, J. G., & McMullen, M. B. (2011). Early childhood teachers' curriculum beliefs: Are they consistent with observed classroom practices? *Early Education and Development*, *22*(6), 945–969. https://doi.org/10.1080%2F10409289.2010.507495

Westbrook, F., & Hunkin, E. (2020). Play and learning? A critical discourse analysis of the treatment of play in relation to learning in Australian and New Zealand early childhood curricula frameworks. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *2*(2), 182–196. https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00202003

White, J., Ellis, F., O'Malley, A., Rockel, J., Stover, S., & Toso, M. (2009). Play and learning in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education. In I. Pramling-Samuelsson & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Play and learning in early childhood settings* (pp. 19–49). Springer.

Wohlwend, K. (2018). Child's play: Reading and remaking gendered action texts with toys. In B. Guzzetti, T. W. Bean, & J. Dunkerly-Bean (Eds.), *Literacies, sexuality, and gender: Understanding identities from preschool to adulthood* (pp.27–38). Routledge.

Appendices

Appendix A: Online Questionnaire with Consent Information

Welcome to the Gender Diversity in ECE Survey

An opportunity to share your views Ko Vicki Gifkins ahau. I am completing a Master of Education at Massey University. My thesis explores gender diversity focusing on early childhood teachers' perspectives and teaching practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of my research, I am surveying ECE kaiako to seek current perspectives about gender and find out about the gender related teaching practices kaiako use.

Te Whāriki is described as an inclusive curriculum or a curriculum for all children. Within Te Whāriki, inclusion encompasses gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion. I am interested to hear about your views, perspectives, experiences and teaching practices in providing an inclusive curriculum with a focus on gender diversity.

The survey will begin with demographic questions and then ask about your understandings and experiences of gender and teaching practices related to gender diversity. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. You can choose not to answer any question. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your views.

By taking part in the survey and sharing your answers, you give us permission to use your responses for purposes of the research. Once submitted, it will not be possible to withdraw your responses after completing the survey. Survey data will only be used for the purposes of this research and any resulting publications of this work. The data will be stored securely and confidentially for a period of five years.

At the end of the survey, you will be asked whether you may be interested in participating in a follow-up interview. If you indicate you are interested, contact details will be requested. This means your responses will no longer be anonymous to the researcher. Contact information will be stored confidentially and not shared with anyone beyond the research team. No identifying information will be shared in dissemination. If you do not choose to provide contact details for phase two, your responses will remain completely anonymous.

To begin the survey, please click on the right arrow button at the bottom of the page. Do not use the back and forward arrows in your web browser as this may take you out of the survey.

Your participation is greatly appreciated, and your contribution is valued. If you have any questions about this survey, you can contact me, Vicki Gifkins, or my supervisors, Tara McLaughlin and Karen Harris.

Thank you!

With gratitude,

Vicki Gifkins v.gifkins@massey.ac.nz

Tara McLaughlin
t.w.mclaughlin@massey.ac.nz

Karen Harris
K.Harris3@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/63. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email humanethics2@massey.ac.nz.

Q1 Are you currently working in a teaching or leadership role at a licensed early childhood service in Aotearoa New Zealand?

- Yes
- No

The following questions are intended to gather information about you, your ECE service and your role as a kaiako in ECE. Your responses will provide context for the information you provide.

Q2 Please share which ethnicity/ies you identify with. You can select multiple answers.

- Māori
- Tokelauan
- Fijian
- Niuean
- Tongan
- Cook Islands Māori
- Samoan
- Other Pacific Peoples
- Southeast Asian
- Indian
- Chinese
- Other Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Latin America
- African
- Other Ethnicity _____
- Other European
- NZ European/Pākehā
- Prefer not to say

Q3 What is your gender?

Q4 How old are you?
- 18 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65+ years

Q5 What is the highest education qualification you hold?
- Not ECE qualified
- Playcentre qualified
- Kohanga qualified
- Diploma in Teaching
- Graduate Diploma Teaching (ECE)
- Graduate Diploma Teaching (Primary)
- Bachelor Teaching degree (ECE)
- Bachelor Teaching degree (Primary)
- Master of Education
- PhD or EdD
- Overseas qualified/NZ attested
- Other _____

Q6 How many years teaching experience do you have?
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 years +

Q7 Which type of setting do you work in?
- Privately owned education and care
- Community-based education and care
- Kindergarten
- Playcentre
- Kōhanga reo
- Home-based child-care
- Other or multiple (please specify) _____

Q8 What age group do you teach?
- Infants (about 0-2 years)
- Toddlers (about 1-3 years)
- Young children (about 3-6 years)
- Mixed age (about 0-6 years)
- Other (please specify): _____

This section asks about your **general gender beliefs.**
Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. The intention is to gather information about your current beliefs.

Q9 Are gender and biological sex the same or different?

Same
Different

Q10 When you think of the words or labels associated with gender, which set of terms is closest to your thinking?

Male and female
Boy, girl, man, and woman
A spectrum of terms including gender, bigender, cisgender, man/boy, woman/girl, transgender, and nonbinary.

Q11 Which of these descriptions of gender best align with your understanding?

Gender is something someone is born with and is permanent.
Gender is something someone is born with and may change over time.
Gender is something that develops across a lifetime.
Gender is something that develops across a lifetime and can be fluid.

Q12 Which of the following have influenced your beliefs about gender? Tick all that apply.

Personal experiences
Family/whānau perspectives
Culture
Religion
Education
Other (please specify) _____
None of these

Q13 Is there anything you would like to share about this set of questions?

Yes
No

Display Question 14:

If Is there anything you would like to share about this set of questions? = Yes

Q14 Comments about last set of questions:

Q15 How do you believe children form their gender identity?

In this study gender is described as…

Gender is a socially and culturally constructed spectrum in which individuals identify. Gender identities are fluid and move beyond the male/female binary to include diverse gender identities such as, agender, bigender, cisgender, man/boy, woman/girl, transgender, and nonbinary.

Q16 Have any of these sources influenced your knowledge and perspectives of gender diversity? Tick all that apply.

Initial teacher education course content or discussions
PLD
Learning through social media
Conversations with colleagues and/or ECE whānau

Conversations with friends and/or own whānau
Own research or wider reading
Mainstream media
Te Whāriki
Other Ministry resources
Other _____

This section asks about your general **gender diversity teaching beliefs.**
For the purposes of these questions, think of teaching as encompassing actions kaiako take during planned and unplanned interactions with children.

Q17 Do you believe ECE kaiako have a responsibility to teach children about gender diversity?
Indicate by dragging the slider along the scale 1-10 with 1 = *no responsibility at all* and 10 = *very high responsibility. If you do not move the slider, zero will be counted as 'no response.'*

Q18 Please tell us a little about why you selected this rating.

Q19 Briefly describe what an ECE environment that is inclusive of gender diversity looks like for you.

Q20 What are some of the barriers you see to teaching children about gender diversity?

Q21 What are some of the enablers or supports to teaching children about gender diversity?

This section asks about gender-focused teaching practices you use.

Q22 Is gender diversity addressed in any of your centre policies or procedures?
Yes
No
Unsure

Q23 When a new whānau enrols, do you ask them about pronoun preferences for parents/caregivers?
Yes
No
Sometimes

Q24 When a new whānau enrols, do you ask them about pronoun preferences for the tamaiti?
Yes
No
Sometimes

Q25 When organising groups of children, for example for hand washing or to go on an excursion, how often would you organise children by gender?

- Something I never do
- Something I used to do but don't anymore
- Something I do occasionally
- Something I do

Q26 Do you take steps to intentionally teach or support children to develop positive gender identities?

- Yes
- No

Display Question 27:

If Do you take steps to intentionally teach or support children to develop positive gender identities? = Yes

Q27 What are some of the steps you take to teach or support children to develop positive gender identities? This may include specific resources you use.

Q28 In your regular planning processes, do you plan for teaching about gender diversity?

- Yes
- No

Display Question 29:

If In your regular planning processes, do you plan for teaching about gender diversity? = Yes

Q29 Please briefly tell us about how you plan for teaching about gender.

Q30 Do you have a process for ensuring books, songs, and toys are gender inclusive and free of gender bias?

- Yes
- No

Display Question 31:

If Do you have a process for ensuring books, songs, and toys are gender inclusive and free of gender... = Yes

Q31 Please briefly describe your process for ensuring books, songs, and toys are gender inclusive and free of gender bias.

Q32 Would you like to expand on any answers or is there anything else you would like to share?

Q33 Finally, we are seeking expressions of interest in participating in a follow-up interview on this topic. Interviews are expected to take approximately 45 minutes and will occur via Zoom unless you are based in Manawatū. We are hoping to speak to a range of kaiako

with differing perspectives.

Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview?
Yes, I am interested
Not for me

Display Question 34:

If Finally, we are seeking expressions of interest in participating in a follow-up interview on this... = Yes, I am interested.

Q35 Thanks! Please let us know how to contact you.
Name:
Region:
Email:
Cellphone number:

Appendix B: Interview Questions

This interview protocol was informed by the following studies:

Chofla, S.-A. (2016). *Preschool educators' roles in creating supportive spaces for gender exploration and expression* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.

Dewar, B. A., Servos, J. E., Bosacki, S. L., & Coplan, R. (2013). Early childhood educators' reflections on teaching practices: The role of gender and culture. *Reflective Practice*, 14(3), 381–391.

Chapman, R. (2018). *An exploration of early childhood educators' views on children's gender identities* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. RMIT University.

Tzannetis, E. (2022). *Gendered play in early childhood classrooms: A case study of teachers' perceptions* (Issues 12-A) [Doctoral dissertation, St. John's University].

Questions marked with a * are direct questions taken from Chofla's (2016) research.

Gender Beliefs	
Main Questions	**General Prompts (as required):** -Tell me more about that. -Can you give me an example?
1. Could you start by telling me a little about yourself and your ECE setting?	
2. What motivated you to talk to me about gender diversity today?	
3. In your survey you said gender and biological sex were different and that a person's gender may change over time. Could you tell me a little more about how you understand these constructs?	
4. How have you developed your beliefs about gender?	- For some people this could be role of conversations with friends or whānau, personal experiences, religion, and culture while others may have had specific external influences like PLD or social media. Were any of these key influences for you? - In the survey data, learning through social media,

	mainstream media, conversations with colleagues and/or whānau, ITE, and personal research all emerged as sources of information. Have any of these influenced you? - What are some of the key messages you have heard from these sources? - Has there been changes in your thinking over time?

Gender Diversity and Teaching

We are going to transition now to talking about gender diversity and ECE teaching.

Main Questions	**Probes**
5. Te Whāriki is an inclusive curriculum of all children and specifically mentions the role of gender and the importance of promoting all children's identity, language, and culture. Related to gender diversity and inclusion, what does this mean to you?	- What are your responsibilities as a kaiako?
6. Could you share an example of a time where a teachable moment arose to talk about gender or gender diversity with children?	- How did you respond? - How did that moment feel for you?
7. Could you tell me about any resources you have in your setting that help you to be gender inclusive? This could be a centre policy, particular book, or other resource. Maybe you brought some along with you today to share?	
8. I am really interested in the gendered language kaiako are using. Could you tell me about your use of gendered terms like boy, girl, man, woman, trans, takatāpui, fa'afafine, or nonbinary in your ECE setting?	- What about pronouns, such as he, she, and they?
9. Have you had any experiences teaching children who self-identify or are perceived to identify as gender diverse, gender	

nonconforming or transgender? * If so, what are some of the strategies you have used to support these children? If you have not had experiences, what strategies would you use to support these children?	
10. Have you had any experiences talking with parents about gender diversity? Could you tell me a little about these experiences if so.	
11. To what extent is your team on the same page around gender diversity and inclusion?	- Is gender a topic discussed in your team? - Are there specific expectations for supporting gender diversity in your setting? - What are some of the things you have been doing to try and build a team approach?
12. In the research literature, it is common to read about children being seen by ECE teachers as too young or too innocent to learn about gender diversity. I am interested in what you think about this lens.	- How do you see this issue of innocence in relation to Te Whāriki's aspiration for children to be "competent and confident learners?"
13. As you know, this interview is contributing to my master's thesis exploring ECE teacher perceptions of gender diversity. Is there anything else you that is important for me to know?	

Appendix C: Ethics Notification

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Dear:

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

at their meeting held on

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D: Interview Information Sheet

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA MASSEY UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND | TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Gender diversity: Early childhood teachers' perspectives and teaching practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

INFORMATION SHEET – Individual Interviews

My name is Vicki Gifkins and I am a postgraduate student at Massey University. My study is designed to investigate how early childhood teachers' understand, perceive and experience gender diversity and their reported use of associated teaching practices. The research is being conducted through a two-phase exploratory qualitative research design. In phase one, data were gathered through an online questionnaire. In phase two, semi-structured individual interviews will occur with up to six survey respondents.

Thank you for participating in phase one and expressing interest in participating in the second phase of my research.

This phase of the research aims to further explore how you understand, perceive and experience gender diversity; and explore the associated teaching practices that support gender inclusion.

There is little current Aotearoa research on gender diversity in ECE. This is an opportunity to contribute to the teaching profession and research community. If you agree to participate, an interview will be held via Zoom or at an agreed alternative venue. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and be scheduled at a time convenient for you.

The interview will be audio recorded and the recording transcribed. If we are meeting via Zoom, the interview will be audio and video recorded as per Zoom settings. However, video footage will be deleted immediately. The audio recordings will be transcribed and transcriptions stored for five years after which they will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be deleted at the end of the research. Before being used, you will have the opportunity to review your transcript for emendation and approval. You have the right to withdraw your transcript from data analysis for a period of two weeks after receiving a copy of the transcript.

It is not expected you will experience any harm or major discomfort during the interview or through participating in this research. However, gender can a sensitive and controversial topic. There is a possibility some questions may feel challenging. You are welcome to skip any questions you do not want to answer or end the interview at any time. It is my intention to create a safe, welcoming environment for you to share your thoughts and opinions without causing stress.

Pseudonyms will be used in published research and any associated articles or presentations to protect your privacy. No identifying information will be shared. You will be offered a summary of findings prior to thesis submission.

Please feel free to contact myself or my supervisors any time if you have any questions in relation to this topic. Should you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form. I am very grateful for your interest in participating in this important research.

Vicki Gifkins, Student
Massey University Institute of Education

Massey University
Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222 , Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand
+64 6 350 5701 | contact@massey.ac.nz | massey.ac.nz

Appendix E: Interview Consent Form

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA MASSEY UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND | TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Gender diversity: Early childhood teachers' perspectives and teaching practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

	Please tick or initial if you agree
I have read and understand the provided research information sheet.	
I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions answered to my satisfaction, and know I can ask further questions any time.	
I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this phase of the research.	
I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my interview responses up until two weeks after receiving a copy of my transcript.	

	Yes	No
I agree to my interview being audio or video recorded for transcription and the content used in analysis for the purposes of this thesis research.		
I would like a copy of my audio recording sent to me.		
I agree to participate in this study under the conditions sent out in the Information Sheet.		

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Massey University
Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222 , Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand
+64 6 350 5701 | contact@massey.ac.nz | massey.ac.nz

Appendix F: Transcript Release Form

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA MASSEY UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND | TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Gender diversity: Early childhood teachers' perspectives and teaching practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

Massey University
Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222 , Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand
+64 6 350 5701 | contact@massey.ac.nz | massey.ac.nz

Appendix G: Gender-Inclusive Books

Gender-Inclusive Books Named by Interview Participants:

- Julián Is a Mermaid
- My Family and Other Families
- Rere Atu Tāku Poi! Let My Poi Fly!
- Children of the World
- A Queer Existence: The Lives of Young Gay Man in Aotearoa New Zealand
- My Shadow is Purple and My Shadow is Pink
- And Tango Makes Three
- Things in the Sea are Touching Me
- Clive and his Babies and Clive and his Bags
- Rainbow boy
- Want to Play Trucks?
- Pink Is for Boys
- Pink, Blue, and You!
- What Are Your Words?
- A House for Everyone

Appendix H: Practice Ideas to Consider

The following bullet points are a list of actions kaiako and their teams can take as they explore supporting gender diversity in their settings based on the findings from this study. Changing practice can be hard and takes time. This list has been simplified for ease of sharing but each action is complex and may take a long time to action with depth. There is no expectation kaiako will read this list and immediately transform their teaching practice in line with these suggestions. The ideas are intended to prompt reflection, conversation, and ultimately support curriculum implementation.

Things to reflect on individually and as a team:

- Reflect on personal views of gender, considering whether they may align more with binary theories of gender or more expansive views of gender. Kaiako in the questionnaire held a range of views and even this researcher once held binary gender views.
- Consider alignment of views in relation to literature on gender diversity. Check the reference list for some articles to pursue.
- Discuss individual views of gender within teaching teams with a focus on creating shared understandings.
- Consider individual knowledge of gender terminology. Recognise that terminology evolves rapidly and this action may be ongoing. Inside Out have a great terminology resource on their website.
- Consider personal comfort levels addressing gender diversity in teaching and seek to identify enablers and barriers that may support trialling new teaching practices.
- Audit books and resources for gender stereotyping. Kaiako in this study found removing or using a vivid to edit the wording of stereotypical books useful.

- Ensure children have access to a range of books that depict diverse genders in positive ways. Read these books and use them to prompt conversations. There is a list of books kaiako in this study recommended in Appendix G.
- Reflect on use of gendered language and how often terms like “girl,” “boy,” “nonbinary,” or “takatāpui” are spoken. Where possible, try to avoid overusing the terms “girl” and “boy.” This could include keeping a tally chart of gendered words used within a set time period.
- Talk with children about their gender identities, pronouns, and the wider spectrum of gender terms. When beginning, it may be useful to use a book about pronouns to prompt conversation.
- Take a proactive role in challenging gender stereotyping and binary thinking when it occurs in children’s play. Keep in mind that to be complacent or non-interfering is to endorse the views through hidden curriculum.
- Consider whether conversations about gender stereotyping only focus on girl/boy stereotypes or create space for more nuanced understandings of gender diversity.
- Recognise that it is common to have concerns about whānau reactions when exploring gender diversity in ECE. This was a significant barrier for research participants. Shared team understandings, policy guidance, and leadership support may help overcome this concern.

Ideas for leaders to consider:

- Create opportunities for teams to access PLD that develops knowledge of gender diversity and helps create shared understandings within teams.

- Develop systems that support gender diversity and inclusion, including local policy, processes for auditing books and resources, and processes for discussing gender identities and pronoun choices with whānau upon enrolment and during enrolment.
- Support a whole-team approach to gender diversity and inclusion to ensure children experience inclusive and consistent teaching practices. This could occur through internal evaluation processes or ongoing staff meeting conversations.
- Recognise that worrying about parent and whānau views is a common concern for many kaiako. Clarify the roles for whānau and kaiako determining curriculum decisions. Provide clear expectations about teaching gender diversity to kaiako and support if whānau raise concerns.
- Ensure environments are sufficiently resourced including books that depict a range of diverse genders.