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**“Everyone learns and everyone  
teaches everyone else”:**

*Family learning and teaching*

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores family learning and teaching by constructing a picture of families as learning communities. Making visible family learning and teaching is necessary as the everyday practices of families are seldom recognized, acknowledged and valued for their role in developing people's ability as learners and teachers. Families and parents are named the 'first educators' of children without significant attention being paid to the nature of family learning and teaching. How family learning and teaching contributes to the growth and development of the adults in the family also receives little attention, possibly because of a focus for adult learning on the gaining of qualifications and credentials for employment. Within Aotearoa/New Zealand's the growth and development of citizens is divided into the public domain of institutions and the private domain of families. Learning and teaching development is assigned to educational institutions and the role of families is considered to be mainly about care and socialization.

Study and research of family learning and teaching can compliment the body of work on learning and teaching within Aotearoa/New Zealand which is dominated by interest in formal institutional education. There is a growing emphasis on the need for collaboration between school, family and community to ensure educational achievement. A greater understanding of family learning and teaching capability and potential can enhance the quality of the relationship with families as they come to be seen as more than assistants to schools. Recognizing the uniqueness of families as a place of learning can enable a shift towards a strengths based view of families and valuing their contribution to building our societies ability to progress in a world focused on knowledge and information.

Initial information gifted and gathered for the first phase of the research project, Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families, is used to make visible family learning and teaching. This information provides evidence of how families describe their engagement in learning and teaching. Identification of families as learning communities is made using Etienne Wenger's work on communities

of practice. I show how these families are groups of people who share a passion for learning and teaching. Relationships, interactions and experiences within their families intentionally support their growth as learners and teachers.

## Thanks

This thesis is a compilation of ideas and beliefs, some discovered and some remembered. Some can be tracked to the work and vision of extraordinary people such as John Dewey and Lex Grey, others came from extraordinary conversations with ordinary people. Some of my beliefs came from my families both of origin and creation, others from my experiences with Playcentre, and others from all the people I have met from different perspectives and walks of life. If no man is an island then no thought has its origin and ownership with a single individual. My hope is to be a link in the many chains of thought and exploration from the past, present and future. Many have helped me be this to the best of my current ability.

In particular I would like to thank those from Massey University. Nick Zepke, Marg Gilling, Linda Leach and Alison Visovic who questioned, affirmed and channeled my intellectual curiosity. Thanks to the administration and library staff who provided an amazing service to me as an extramural student. The Human Ethics Committee provided advice and support to negotiate approval for a research project that met Massey University requirements while enabling me to pursue my area of interest with integrity.

Special thanks to Bill, William, Gillian, Nicola, Veronika, Rosemary, Nathan, Annaliese, and Cayley, my family, who have shared in our families learning and teaching journey.

## Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Thanks.....	4
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION.....	8
Introducing the thesis.....	9
Background information.....	11
Introducing the researcher.....	13
Introducing the research.....	21
Why research family learning and teaching.....	21
Deciding where to start researching.....	23
Description of the research project.....	24
Structure of the thesis.....	27
CHAPTER TWO	
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	29
Introduction.....	30
Families and communities.....	31
Intergenerational learning.....	34
Patterns of interactions and activities.....	34
Politics around family choices.....	36
The role of families in supporting school achievement.....	37
Learning communities.....	40
Learning dispositions.....	42
Educational leadership.....	45

## CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN.....	48
Introduction.....	48
Methodology.....	51
Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families.....	54
A constructive approach.....	54
The interpretative nature of narratives.....	55
Ethical engagement.....	57
Personal ethics.....	57
Being ethical within family learning and teaching.....	59
Specific ethics for the research project FLT1.....	61
Involvement in the research project – researcher’s perspective.....	67
Preparation.....	67
Introducing myself as a researcher.....	68

## CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH.....	71
Initial findings from phase on of the research project FLT1.....	72
Intergenerational learning.....	73
Families as learning communities.....	74
Families as places where learning dispositions are developed.....	76
Family educational leadership.....	78

## CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	83
Intergenerational learning.....	84
Families as learning communities.....	84
Families as places where learning dispositions are developed.....	87
Family educational leadership.....	88

## CHAPTER SIX

CLOSING COMMENTS.....	90
-----------------------	----

APPENDICES.....	100
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Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families Information Sheet.....	101
Participant consent form.....	104
Participant family consent form.....	105
Young child information sheet and consent form.....	107
Older child information sheet and consent form.....	108

REFERENCES.....	109
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# ***Introduction***

*“Seeing through engagement with mind, body, and spirit has helped me develop a different consciousness. Our world is asking us to view old problems in new ways.”*

Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2006)

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction and builds a picture of the context for this thesis. The thesis is introduced and some background information is given. An introduction to the researcher is given using the lens of; self as family of origin and creation, self as ako, self as Te Tiriti o Waitangi and self as the world of early childhood. To introduce the research why research family learning and teaching and deciding where to start researching are discussed followed by a description of the research project. The chapter concludes with a section on the structure of the thesis document.

#### Introducing the thesis

My beliefs and experiences lead me to assume that; learning and teaching occurs in all families and that families can be described as learning communities. This thesis seeks to find evidence to support this assumption. Families as learning communities is explored through a review of some of the relevant literature and the initial findings from the research project Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre<sup>1</sup> families (FLTP) started in 2007.

While our society acknowledges the role of families as custodians of children, the learning and teaching that occurs between family members and the way that families create individual and collective learner identities is not often considered in a formal sense. Families are usually seen as the place where children's physical and emotional needs are supported and outside of the family the place where intellectual needs are catered for. Adults in families are thought of as the providers of physical and emotional needs for each other and children, with their intellectual needs either having been met before adulthood (through the schooling system) or by formal education outside the home.

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<sup>1</sup> Playcentre is a parent-led early childhood education service

In Aotearoa/New Zealand there is currently an emphasis on the collaboration or partnership of educational institutions with families. One of the central aims of this is to increase the educational outcomes for children. This can be seen in government initiatives such as the Team-Up programme, which encourages parental involvement and support of children's learning at early childhood and compulsory schooling levels and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) strategic plan with the goals of increasing participation in quality ECE service, improving quality and collaborative relationships. Government initiatives such as 20hrs free ECE for 3 and 4 year olds, increasing the requirement for qualified staff in ECE services and the reduction of class size for the beginning years of primary schooling aim to improve the quality of the educational institution side of the partnership.

While some of these initiatives seek to increase parental involvement and participation in children's learning the underlying assumption is for the retention of the status quo that government decided, centre or school based education is best. This thesis seeks to reposition families as places where effective learning and teaching occurs individually and collectively. Repositioning families in this way may cause effective collaboration and partnership to take on a different design. This would necessitate a different distribution of power, decision-making, resources and leadership.

Western society now views learning and teaching as more than the transfer of information and skills. The recognition of the importance of relationships and contexts brings into question the effectiveness of educational institutions with their current structural limitations. Family learning and teaching holds potential to enable individuals, families and communities in significantly different ways for educational institutions. Families are lifelong relationships and contexts.

## **Background**

Family learning and teaching has been so central to my life that it is difficult to understand why any study or research is needed, doesn't everyone just know about and value families as places of learning and teaching. On the other hand I am aware, on a daily basis, of the legacy of education as the emancipation of individuals from the constraints of their existing way of life. Western society may have needed educational institutions to redistribute knowledge and resources, yet statistics on educational achievement show that the distribution has by no means been equal or equitable. Much time, energy, and resources have been used to improve the effectiveness of our education system. To study and research family learning and teaching provides an alternative or additional way.

It was the importance placed within my family on our role in the learning and teaching of children that brought me to Playcentre. Playcentre has enriched my experience of being a mother and contributed to my family's well-being in a holistic way. It was here that I experienced being treated as an expert when it came to my children's learning, a beginning expert who would be supported to gain greater understanding and confidence. The opportunities to grow into a wide variety of roles including parent, group member, educator, manager, librarian, adult education facilitator, and convention organizer, showed me that belief in your own and others potential opens doors and creates the possibility of realizing potential. The term used is 'emergent leadership'. The expectation that I was a competent and confident learner and the respect for my learning journey was enabling and empowering. For many Playcentre conveys only early childhood education. For me the greatest gift was the adult education.

It was the adult education I received and gave within Playcentre that brought me to adult education at Massey University. Here I found many similar beliefs and practices. It is for this reason that I have continued within adult education for my masters studies. Family learning and teaching, even when the family includes children, is largely the result of

adult action and allocation of resources. The beliefs of the adults determine the opportunities prioritized.

As a beginning researcher this thesis is part of the story of my becoming a researcher within the context of family learning and teaching. Although I had been able to clearly describe what I was *doing* for my research it was not until I was engaged in the doing that it became clear that what was involved was more than doing. Engaging in the research project was, is and will continue to be a transformation of identity, a state of *being*. Being a researcher requires a sense of congruence with the other aspects of my being. This new aspect of my being had to be integrated with my identity as known by my self, my family and my home community (Playcentre). Choosing to be a member of a research community requires finding a place and a voice. My hope is that while each of these parts of my identity has wholeness within itself integrating them may create synergy: “the combined effect of parts that exceed their individual effects” (Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey, Bill Taylor, 1992, p.18). Choosing Playcentre families as participants for my first research project has come from this need to create congruence.

While working on the project (FLT1) it became clear that one of the challenges is to work in a way that fosters a feeling of being part of the project for participant families and diminishes any feelings of having research done on us. This included looking at how the project was presented to others in a thesis or publication, retaining the integrity of working in a way that enables families to continue to be part of the journey while engaging the academic and research communities needed to be considered. This has been resolved in this thesis by the inclusion of some material that I believe may be of importance to the families involved in the project which is not necessarily desired or required by the academic community. I have included an introduction to myself, the researcher, and shared some of my context that I bring to the research within family learning and teaching. There is some general discussion about ethical engagement, in Chapter Three, while not necessarily being of academic interest may assist participant families to understand the context of the project.

## **Introducing the researcher**

I have included this information as by choosing to work outside of the boundaries of objective enquiry I believe I have a responsibility to make known the nature of the subjectiveness I bring to research. It is more than disclosure of interests in relation to a specific research project; it is sharing of information integral to self identity.

Who are you is a question that promotes different responses when asked in different times and places and by different people. Who am I, as a self reflexive question, requires an exploration of mind, body and spirit. Here I have used the word reflexive to integrate reflection and response. I am choosing to be able to answer both questions with “a researcher within family learning and teaching”. This response needs to ring true in itself and to resonant with sufficient harmony with the other possible answers. For me other possible answers include; child, daughter, mother, learner, adult education facilitator, Playcentre person, woman, Bill’s partner, Pakeha, and friend. Self as family of origin and creation, self as ako, self as Te Tiriti o Waitangi and self as the world of early childhood provide a broad grouping of these answers. Here the word ‘as’ denotes a place in the continuum of emphasis on the relevance of socio-cultural context, where identity is entirely embedded in the context. My identity can only be complete when these contexts are included.

### **Self as family of origin and creation**

Welcome. My name is Kay Tracey, my parents Norma and Vince Forman were Mainlanders (born in the South Island), and I was born in Tamaki-makaurau (Auckland) where I have lived all my life, for the past thirty years with my husband and partner Bill (William). Together we are parents to William, Gillian, Nicola, Veronika, Rosemary, Nathan and Annaliese and have the privilege of being Cayley Lam-Tracey’s grandparents.

My family gave me a belief in possibilities and the courage to believe in the potential of the unknown. As a researcher within family learning and teaching I advocate for change, a refocusing of the role of families in education, teaching and learning. Values and beliefs handed onto to me, taught to and caught by my family have given me faith in the possibility of this change. At the heart of these is the belief in the intrinsic goodness of people, that people want to be in community with others, and that they want things to be better for themselves and others in their community. Despite all the many, many variations on what this may mean in practice and the differences we often encounter between what people believe in and the outcome of their actions, for me this does not detract from everyone's ability to create wholeness and well-being for themselves while contributing to the wholeness and well-being of their communities. Hopefulness and the motivation to actively contribute to the creation of a better place and space could be seen as naive, I see them as choices. This thesis provides an opportunity to contribute to the choices available to families and educational institutions.

I question the idea of original thought and worry about processes which claim individualized ownership of ideas such as the western academic tradition of referencing. I do believe and wish to acknowledge that this thesis represents a sample of the collective knowledge for which I am both receiver and sender. This sample comes from many different places and people, some more easily named than others. All contributed to the discoveries and rememberings that are described here. My thanks to all, I am who I am because you are who you are.

### **Self as ako**

The Māori concept of ako combines learning and teaching in a collective context where access to knowledge carries responsibilities to the past, present and future. I have chosen to use the concept of ako as this is the way of knowing and being grown in this land by tangata whenua. Māori is the commonly used term for the iwi which are the indigenous people of Aotearoa/ New Zealand. Using first knowledge acknowledges the strength of the connection of the tangata whenua with the land, more than settlers on the land, grown



from this place. I am mindful of the power that words hold for Māori and wish to be respectful and cautious. The words I use are ones that I feel confident that I have been gifted to use within this context. I believe that first peoples hold, remember and use knowledge that retains the connection between us and the world around us. For me our future depends on remaking a connection with the world that is based on more than the previous western, scientific model. As tangata whenua Māori are the guardians of knowledge that I believe can help guide us to a state of living in connection with this land. Much of the knowledge is held in the language and by using the word ako I hope to build a connection.

Language conveys and creates meanings. As a researcher within family learning and teaching I wish to join with others to work out ways of conveying the concept of family learning and teaching. Western society has separated learning and teaching using the word ako has potential to reconnect learning with teaching and identifies the place where I am as a researcher exploring this issue. Here I offer an explanation of how I see learning and teaching connected to the concept conveyed by ako. As my understanding is just beginning I will use the words learning and teaching hoping that when you as reader see these words some of the concept you see represented is aligned and connected to ako.

As a learner I have experienced many years of learning environments where one or more of my differences have been important. I see both my challenge and my salvation as relearning to simply be authentically me and genuinely present with other learners. The connections I then make are not on the level of activator, visual learner, feminist, Pakeha but as a person linked to all others and the natural world. This being authentically and genuinely present is how I want to be as a researcher.

Teaching changed from something that someone else did to me when I was at school to something that a child could do and then moved to something that could be seen as a collective action by a community. Children have taught me many things from a sense of wonderment to the names of dinosaurs. Playcentre gave me the opportunity to see teaching as part of the role of every member of this community. My contact with those



who teach adult learning at Massey University gave me an experience of institutional teaching that encompassed learning by all.

For all to be leaders we need to be; working with unknowns, expecting to create new ideas, and choosing to follow each other, believing that we will learn something new. This requires trusting people to be responsible, respectful and responsive. As a researcher I wish to develop this type of relationship with those who participate in research projects with me. Learning, teaching, facilitating and researching are all intentional. They are ways of being that I wish to be so ingrained that even when I am officially off-duty I am still a learner, teacher, facilitator and researcher.

### **Self as Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

I believe that all who call Aotearoa/ New Zealand home have a responsibility to know where they stand fit with Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Naming myself Pakeha is declaring myself to be someone who lives as a consequence of the British settlement made possible and envisioned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For me te Tiriti o Waitangi provides a statement of expectation of peaceful living in Aotearoa/ New Zealand by both iwi and British settlers. This peaceful living was to be achieved by kāwanatanga or governance by the Crown, the retention of tino rangatiratanga by iwi, and both Māori and settlers having the protection and rights of British subjects. There continues to be discussion on the meaning and boundaries of kāwanatanga and tino rangatiratanga. For me kāwanatanga is defined by the existence of tino rangatiratanga. Iwi hold the treasures, taonga, of Aotearoa/ New Zealand and protect them through self-determination and guardianship of the land.

When I think about the protection and rights of British subjects I think about the systems put in place such as a legal system and also the expected outcome of having the systems. In order for both Māori and settlers to have the protection and rights of British subjects there needs to be equality of outcome from the systems we have in place in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. My responsibility as a researcher within family learning and teaching

involves both the opportunity to contribute and the impact of the outcome of a research project for both signatories to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

### **Self as the world of early childhood**

The world of early childhood for me is strongly connected to Playcentre. Playcentre's philosophies and practices of; parents and children learning together, the centrality of family, fostering emergent leadership, the value of mixed age early childhood education environments, creating community and respecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi, gave me a sense of belonging and an avenue to contribute to creating a learning community of wholeness and well-being.

It was at Playcentre that I was introduced to the learning cycle by another parent who was really excited by the idea that learning was not just pass/fail. For years this just made sense to me, common sense, long before I associated this learning cycle with Kolb or read anything academic about theories of learning. The theory of; something happens, an observation of what happened occurs, some thought goes into what does it mean, you then plan what you will do next time and begin the cycle again with something happens, was something I could use to make sense of my life. This experience and others like it, where there are connections between personal theory, public theory and academic theories raise questions for me about intellectual property and the truth of research findings. Having these questions influences; the connections I choose to make with public, peer-reviewed writings, prompts the search for more interpretations of facts, and gives confidence in people's ability to generate theory from examination of their experiences and practices.

My world of early childhood also involves Te Whāriki. My memory of Te Whāriki is about groups of people who were involved in early childhood education, in its many varied forms, gathering together and writing lists to describe what we considered to be early childhood education when we were doing our best. These lists were molded into the document called Te Whāriki – He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa/

Early Childhood Curriculum. Te Whāriki is a conceptually bi-cultural. It is more than a document written in two languages, English and te Reo Māori, it is a record of a bi-cultural development of a shared meaning around early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is theory generated from reflection and discussion and it belongs to the sector. This model of theory generation is one that strongly influences how I choose to be as a researcher within family learning and teaching.

Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, has a set of four central principles:

- Empowerment/ Whakamana

The early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow

- Holistic Development/ Kotahitanga

The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow

- Family and Community/ Whānau Tangata

The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum

- Relationships/ Ngā Hononga

Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things

Woven through the central principles are five strands:

- Well-being/ Mana Atua

The health and well-being of the child are protected and nurtured

- Belonging/ Mana Whenua

Children and their families feel a sense of belonging

- Contribution/ Mana Tanagata

Opportunities for learning are equitable and each child's contribution is valued

- Communication/ Mana Reo

The languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected

- Exploration/ Mana Aotūroa

The child learns through active exploration of the environment

With the four central principles forming a stable core and the five strands woven through a mat is made to support learning and teaching within early childhood education in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The uniqueness of the early childhood experience of every child, family, centres and community can be shown through the different way that the principles and strands are brought to life. They do all share a strong mat or whāriki on which to stand. This gives a place for children to

“grow up to be competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.”

(Te Whāriki: p.9)

Te Whāriki draws on the work of Bronfenbrenner and a socio-cultural approach where context is recognized and valued as inseparable from learning and teaching. Using Bronfenbrenner’s model of Russian nested dolls Te Whāriki identifies layers of interactive environments that influence the child’s learning. Working from a centre of the child and their immediate learning environment the layers extend to other settings for the child such as family, then onto local communities and finishes with the national environment where values, beliefs and practices relating to young children are developed and promoted.

The whāriki structure developed for and by early childhood in Aotearoa/ New Zealand also provides a suitable structure for being a research within family learning and teaching. The principles and strands can be used to construct wholeness in my identity as a researcher and provide guidance around engagement with participants. Concepts of developing learning dispositions and working theories as a way of learning found in Te Whāriki link with my growing into my identity as a researcher within family learning and teaching. The disposition, willingness or inclination to be a researcher combined with working theories, practicing held theories, translates into a state of being. As with Te Whāriki’s view of children competence and confidence as a researcher are both existing and developing states.

In young children I see a willingness to go into the unknown, in fact they are more than willing, they are eager, and often seem driven to try to do more, explore the boundaries and make new connections. And they invite participation in their journey, many quickly learning how to engage others. As a researcher within family learning and teaching I want the experiences of participation in a research project to conserve and extend these positive dispositions for learning.

## **Introducing the research**

The research project, Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families (FLT1), was started as part of study undertaken for a Masters of Education (Adult Education) from Massey University. One of the initial questions asked was how does this fit with adult education? The answer was two fold:

- my Playcentre background had provided an experience of the strong connections between adult learning and early childhood learning. Concepts of adult self direction and motivation link to the concept of child initiated learning. The emphasis on a child's state of being a friend, an interdependent person, a learner, aligns with the attribution of empowerment and transformation to adult education. The ability to be a life long learner is an aspiration developed in early childhood that comes to fruition in adulthood. Within Playcentre the focus is on the learning of the whole family, parents and children.

- my current experience of the academic world outside of adult education has been of a strong emphasis on formal education and educational institutions. Within education academic study and research there seems to be a focus on teaching and learning experiences where those involved are identified by their relationship to the activity of learning and teaching. Their primary identity is that of student, teacher, pupil, facilitator, or learner as distinct and separate from the other aspects of their identity. Adult education has a stronger heritage of integrating identities than other sectors of educational study and research.

Within family learning and teaching the separation of the learning and teaching roles is less useful as they are potentially more fluid. Who is the learner and who is the teacher may change with different activities, interests, within family considerations such as availability and outside influences such as technology.

### **Why research family learning and teaching?**

There is little research available that has a focus on family learning and teaching. This was highlighted when I began gathering related literature for the project (FLT1) and

reinforced by a recent article database search Academic Elite. The search, completed on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, used the Massey University library and required the author supplied key words learn\* and teach\* (\* allows all suffixes to the base word to be included) in articles published from 2000 onwards. This yielded 1944 results. When famil\* was added the number was reduced to two results neither of which were actually about families. Starting with famil\* gave 4856 results. Refining the search using learn\* reduced the number to 46, then the addition of teach\* left two results. Neither of these discussed families as a place of learning.

Changing from author supplied keywords to author supplied abstract widened the results of a search for articles containing famil\*, 148814 were found. Following the refining process of learn\* reduced the number to 4390, then adding the requirement of teach\* resulted in 751 documents where the author's abstract included all the words famil\*, learn\* and teach\*. The results were grouped into sub-categories, one of these was teaching methods. It contained 24 results, one of which was of relevance to the process of teaching that occurred within families.

This one example signals the lack of emphasis on combining ideas about families, learning and teaching by many contributors to the various journals easily accessed on a commonly used database. Rather than viewing these results as an indication of the content of articles I suggest that the results reflect a lack of identification of the domain of family learning and teaching. Key words and abstracts act as advertisements to those who are searching for an article connected to their area of interest. The extent of the use of families as an identified key word indicates a strong academic interest. That the number rapidly declines when learning and teaching are required, as additional identifiers, suggests that linking learning and teaching with families happens less frequently.

The lack of research which centralizes the learning capability and capacity of families may be from the predominance, within our western society, of the thought that the important learning occurs within our formal education system. Why this is the case may



include: family learning and teaching is so part of life that it is hidden; the interests of educational researcher and academics are focused on what happens in educational institutions; or family learning and teaching is undervalued.

The research project (FLT1) is the beginning of a journey to make family learning and teaching visible to families, communities and the education sector. It provides an example of the content, processes, and intentions of family learning and teaching within a specific group. I am not advocating that there is one way or a best way for family learning and teaching. Indeed I expect there are many ways that families engage in learning and teaching just as there are many different types of families. What is important is that attention is given to this role of families and that appropriate ways of noticing, recognizing and documenting family learning and teaching are developed. Involving families in true partnerships is important when developing processes for family learning and teaching. Exploration on many levels and perspectives can provide more than functional and technical information. A strong platform of information on family learning and teaching will support families to build their educational capital. It will also provide those engaged with families with a body of theory and evidence to use when generating their responses to issues.

### **Deciding where to start researching**

The decision to start my research within family learning and teaching with the project, Learning and teaching within families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families, comes from my experience of having a family and of being with other families at Playcentre. For me and many other parents the responsibilities and challenges of having children prompted many opportunities for learning. Choosing Playcentre for my family meant that being a parent was extended by learning about; children's learning, working in a group, adult education and leadership within early childhood education. It was being given the chance to understand and experience the incredible process of young children's learning and development, and then being supported to learn how to facilitate this understanding in other parents that lead me to study adult education. Having



Playcentre families involved in this research project meant choosing to work with families that have already started thinking about family learning and teaching.

There have been precedents set for insider research with First Nations or indigenous groups that have implications for all social science research. The notion of social and cultural alignment has enabled greater acceptance of the value of familiarity between researchers and researched. As the importance of contextual understanding has become more acknowledged ways of working within the context rather than being removed from it have been developed. This in turn has stimulated the reconnection of researching with practicing.

Practitioner research within education has provided opportunities for strong connections between research and practice. When teachers and educators engage in research within their own practice there is greater potential for the research to be considered valid by others in the profession and any findings or recommendations to prompt debate about changes to practices. The professionalism of teachers and educators provides a degree of confidence in the integrity of the research. The Playcentre families asked to participate in this research project have a similar professionalism and commitment. Beginning with this group provided a foundation on which to build future research projects.

### **Description of the research project**

“Any research endeavour requires interplay between theory, belief systems and everyday reality.” (Nandita Chaudhary, 2004 p.77) This research brings together my theory that families function as learning communities, my belief in the value of family learning and teaching and my experiences. The research seeks to find evidence to support my theory and belief. I have begun my search for this evidence with the community that I know best, Playcentre. With this community conversations about family learning and teaching have a shared foundation of; experience in taking responsibility for the early childhood education of our families, undertaking adult education to support that responsibility and a common language based on current understandings of early learning and teaching. There

are also challenges to be faced – will this community be able to see me fairly as a researcher, is evidence from such a specific group useful in a wider context, and how well will the evidence reflect reality.

Learning and teaching with families with children: conversations with some Playcentre families, has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 07/45. The project contributes to the knowledge of how family learning and teaching through the exploration of the following questions:

- How do families with children describe learning and teaching amongst their members?
- What do families perceive as being the dispositions/tendencies that encourage learning?
- How do the relationships, interactions and experiences in families support the development of family members' identity as learners/teachers?

The emphasis is on understanding how members of families support each other to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to be successful learners/teachers.

Participants were recruited from past or present members of the Auckland Playcentres Association and have participated in Course 3 or its equivalent of the Adult Education Programme offered by the Association<sup>2</sup>. Phase one of the project has a focus of family views and experiences. Each participant family was asked to complete a questionnaire designed to develop a description of learning/teaching in their family. Families were able to choose to share their ideas through; recorded discussions with family members including children and extended family, written narratives, notated photos, collage, metaphors. Initial findings from the family views and experiences questionnaire are included in this thesis. These findings will be used to inform the second phase.

The first phase of the research asked families to reflect on family life and make their own interpretation of what constitutes learning and teaching. Using their understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Auckland Playcentres Association offers the Playcentre Education Diploma in early childhood and adult education, a course registered with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

learner and teacher identity they decided which aspects of their relationships, interactions and experiences positively contribute to developing these identities. It is the families understanding of which dispositions or tendencies encourage learning that was sought by the research. By asking families to research themselves this thesis is able to bring together some relevant literature, my perspective and the voice of some families.

Phase one of the FLTP project, the questionnaire discussed in this thesis, provided an opportunity to prepare for future conversations. Qualitative and interpretive approaches reflect the position of researcher and participants as connected and subjective. This will be balanced by a shared development of interpretation, meaning making and theories in the second phase.

The second phase will involve case study discussion groups. Four case studies each comprising of up to three families with children involved in the early childhood, primary or secondary sector of education, or whose oldest child is post compulsory schooling. The discussions will be based on the themes identified by the researcher from the information collected about family views and experiences in phase one. While it is hoped that all phase one participant families would be available to attend families may choose not to be part of this phase of the project.

The use of narrative and conversation in the second phase will support power sharing for researcher and participants. It will provide an opportunity for discussion, challenge and confirmation of the interpretation shared in this thesis. The aim will be to create a dynamic and complex dialogue around family learning and teaching that will attract the contribution of others. A narrative has the “power to hold several plots, even those that may be contradictory” (Ellen A. Herda, 1999, p.4).

## Structure of the thesis

Three perspectives on family learning and teaching are brought together in this thesis; the view of family learning and teaching from the literature, the lived experiences of participants in the research project, and researcher's perspective of how those experiences can be interpreted through the lenses of; intergenerational learning, learning communities, learning dispositions and educational leadership.

This chapter has provided an orientation to the topic of family learning and teaching, outlined my focus and approach to research, and given some background information to be transparent about the perspective I bring to this endeavour. Chapter Two reviews some of the available literature. Literature on intergenerational learning, learning communities, learning dispositions and educational leadership provides a connection to current academic knowledge and research. The use of this literature reflects the lack of literature with a specific focus of family learning and teaching as well as the need and desire to explore family learning and teaching in ways that connect with the learning and teaching within educational institutions. As educational institutions have a larger heritage of written work and a greater pool of language in which to capture their concepts creating a shared language for discussion has started with the language used by them. As the body of knowledge, language and written work for family learning and teaching grows additional concepts and language may be required.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology<sup>3</sup> used for the FLT1 project, general issues of ethical engagement within family learning and teaching, specific ethics for the FLT1 project, involvement in the research project from the researcher's perspective and how the findings from the project are documented in this thesis. The combination of aligning myself with the concept of *being* a researcher and the desire to work in a way that negates feelings by participants of have research *done on us* has lead to considerable thought being given to ethical engagement. Issues raised in this chapter are considered by many researchers within social sciences. They are included as part of my philosophy of

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<sup>3</sup> *The theories, values and principles used to guide this research project.*

inclusiveness is to make documentation about research projects accessible to participants. Creating clarity is assisted by stating 'the obvious' to one group. It also contributes to re-balancing the power of the use of specialized language. Having to explain jargon challenges users to be explicit of the meanings they are conveying by the words. With any research involving people's experiences the researcher interprets the participants' world. Being collaborative requires that the researcher interprets their own world for the benefit of participants.

Chapter Four presents the information gifted by participants. In keeping with the literature review this is grouped into: intergenerational learning, learning communities, learning dispositions and educational leadership. They are presented with minimal additional interpretation than that already made by the researcher through the research design.

In Chapter Five I discuss how I have interpreted these findings. For each area of interest the discussion covers what the findings may mean for families, for research within family learning and teaching, and educational institutions as the dominant learning and teaching process.

Concluding comments form Chapter Six.