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Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Children's Communication Development

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Suanna Helen Jane Smith

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Abstract

In New Zealand (NZ), Speech-language Therapists (SLTs) work collaboratively with Early Childhood Educators (educators), empowering them to apply their knowledge and skills to interactions with children with communication difficulties within their early childhood education setting (ECE setting). There is limited information about NZ educators' perspectives about children's communication development within ECE settings. The aim of this research was to engage with educators in a way that could empower them to share their beliefs, ideas, and perceptions about their everyday communication interactions with young children. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to gather the lived experiences and perspectives from 10 educators working in NZ. Iterative coding of transcripts and rigorous Thematic Network Analysis preserved educator voice, while revealing common themes relevant across the sector. These four global themes were 1) communicative environment, 2) coming to know, 3) alignment, and 4) enactment. Findings suggested that when there is convergence among the elements included in the themes, educators believed that children's communication outcomes were positively enhanced; when there was misalignment, educator frustration, distrust, and/or disengagement occurred, and children's reported communication outcomes were not optimised. This information may be useful for SLTs wanting to engage with educators in a collaborative manner, enhancing teamwork through understanding, and facilitating robust communication interactions. It may also inform educators and their management teams about the multitude of factors that contribute to educators' convergent enactment of communication practice, positively influencing children's communication development in ECE settings.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Being able to communicate, to both send clear messages to others and understand their messages to us, is vital for building knowledge and experience of the world (Foote, Smith, & Ellis, 2004), as well as fostering wellbeing and a positive sense of self (Brebner, Jovanovic, Young, & Lawless, 2016). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines communication as "any verbal or non-verbal behaviour (whether intentional or unintentional) that influences the behaviour, ideas, or attitudes of another individual" (p. 41). Owens (2016) highlights the differences between language and communication, defining language as a social tool and a rule-governed code, utilising semantics and pragmatics. Communication is defined as a collaborative process involving the encoding, transmitting, and decoding of an intended message (Owens, 2016). Communication incorporates language, as well as para-, meta-, and non-linguistic communication aspects (Owens, 2016), such as those of articulation, speech perception and production, voice pitch and loudness, which Angell (2009) also includes in her definition of human communication. Simply, language is one component of the broader communication skill set. Children learn this myriad of communication skills progressively, and a variety of stimulating and interesting experiences are vital for children to realise their potential (Brebner et al., 2016).

Given a child's dependence, their development relies heavily on their physical and social environments (World Health Organization, 2007). Historically, a child's early experiences were facilitated by members of their family network, however increasingly, children are spending their early years cared for in ECE settings (Brebner et al., 2016). Internationally, educational governing bodies have been working hard to raise the quality of children's early childhood learning experiences (Tan & Rao, 2017). Reviewing educator knowledge, application, and supports available for educators, is fundamental to ensuring quality communication input for our children (Brebner et al., 2016).

1.1 New Zealand Context

Nearly all children in NZ attend some form of early childhood education (ECE) outside their home, many of whom commence their participation before their first birthday (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2017c). Statistical trends indicate that the numbers of

children participating in ECE are increasing, children are starting earlier in their lives, and staying for an increasing number of hours per week (Education Counts, 2018). This means that educators have a growing influence over children's development, including their communication skills. Part of the role of SLTs in NZ, is to build the capability of referred children's families and educators, so they can support their children's communication development (MOE, 2017b).

The term 'educator' had already been adopted to refer to the adults working in a teaching role with children in ECE settings, prior to a term change to 'kaiako' being used in the updated early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017c). For consistency through this research, the term 'educator' will be used. 'Educator' was chosen to include those adults working within ECE settings with official education, childcare, and/or nannying certificates or diplomas, and teaching degrees, as well as those working in the role without formal qualifications. The reason for the broad definition is that educators working in NZ may or may not have official qualifications in education or childcare. New Zealand regulations currently state that 50% of staff at a teacher-led service must hold, or be in their last year of training towards, a recognised qualification (MOE, 2017a).

Since the mid-1990s, all licenced ECE settings have been founded on Te Whāriki (MOE, 1996; MOE, 2017c), which states that the goal of ECE is for all children to become "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" (MOE, 2017c, p. 5). Communication is fundamental to learning and is imbedded as one of the five guiding strands for early childhood education (MOE, 2017c), meaning all educators are required to actively support children's communication development. As discussed earlier, communication encompasses our ability to functionally use both verbal and non-verbal skills to make our needs known, express opinions, and respond to others, as well as how we process information, understand and think, our imagination, and our humour (MOE, 2017c). In NZ, this encompasses "any method of communication the child uses as a first language; this includes New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and, for children who are non-verbal, alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)" (MOE, 2017c, p. 42). Te Whāriki

makes it clear that communication includes "words, sentences and stories, but there are also languages of sign, mathematics, visual imagery, art, dance, drama, rhythm, music and movement" (MOE, 2017c, p. 41). This definition complements that of Owens (2016), highlighting the breadth of modalities through which humans interact and convey meaning.

New Zealand currently has no formal communication development norms or consistent measuring of children's skills (Collins, as cited in New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association, 2017). The Ministry of Education *Much More than Words* booklet provides general information about "typical communication development in young children and ideas for supporting them" (MOE, n.d., p. 2), however there are several children for whom communication development varies from 'typical'. In the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study's 1980 sample of 937 children, Silva (1980) revealed that 8.5% of three-year-old children had language scores two or more standard deviations below the mean. While standard deviations below the mean give an indication of severity of difficulty, such formal measures are not currently required for diagnosis of a communication difficulty, with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), using the phrase "substantially and quantifiably below those expected for age" (p. 42), to guide diagnosis of Language Disorder. It also notes that differential diagnosis "may be difficult to make before 4 years of age" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 43).

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: Children and Youth Version (ICF-CY) provides an alternative perspective, utilising a profile of functioning, rather than a diagnosis for a child, to identify the environmental factors influencing the nature and severity of the limitations of the child's functioning (World Health Organization, 2007). This process acknowledges that young children are dependent on the people they regularly interact with, and that development is a dynamic process, thus a child must be viewed as a part of an interconnected system, rather than in isolation. Therefore, this profile of functioning may change over time as the physical, social, and attitudinal environmental factors surrounding the child alter (World Health Organization, 2007). In ECE settings, it is educators who children depend on, and who create the communicative environment, within the ECE setting's educational

framework. Although functional communication has long been embedded as one of the markers of successful early childhood development, it is well documented that NZ has a problem with quality of communication provision in ECE (Education Review Office [ERO], 2015; ERO 2017). The knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of educators influence the communicative environment for the children in their care. Despite this, there appears to be no previous research examining NZ educators' perspectives on, and beliefs about, children's communication development.

1.2 Researcher Background

I grew up in a provincial NZ town in a family who valued learning and playing an active part in the community. I started working as a SLT in 2008, supporting educators and families to confidently and competently utilise a range of communication promoting strategies throughout their daily routines. I've worked in rural, suburban, and urban geographical locations, with families from a range of ethno-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. My learning through this decade of work has propelled me to focus more on collaboration, and on learning how I can better support children who are experiencing communication difficulties and the adults who care for them. The service delivery model I work under requires SLTs to work collaboratively with a child's communication team, comprised of their primary communication partners, usually family members and educators (MOE, 2017b). I believe that improved collaboration and support of one another is vital in meeting the needs of a variety of children and families. I believe that educators have important knowledge and experiences regarding their work with children and families, which would be useful in guiding my support to them. These considerations led to this research, so I could better understand the perspectives of educators and the variables at play in ECE settings, and therefore become a more understanding communication team member.

1.3 Rationale for this Study

There has been an increase in the number of studies exploring the long-term impacts of communication difficulties, including studies exposing the high percentages of people with communication difficulties who find themselves in prison or youth justice facilities (e.g. Bryan, Freer, & Furlong, 2007; Humber & Snow, 2001; Snow & Powell, 2012). Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of communication skills in

children's development, including the impact on literacy development (Foote et al., 2004), there is very little research on educators' perspectives on fostering children's understanding and expression in ECE settings. There appear to be few research studies (Abry, Latham, Bassok, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2015; Brebner et al., 2016; Foote et al., 2004; Hu, Fan, Yang, & Neitzel, 2017; Marinac, Ozanne, & Woodyatt, 2000; Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice, & Logan, 2016; Tan & Rao, 2017) and two NZ ERO analyses (ERO, 2015; ERO, 2017) commenting on educators' beliefs about, and/or facilitation of, children's communication skills. These will be reviewed in Chapter Two, however, it is important to note that the results from these studies are not definitive, with tight restrictions on transferability, and sometimes conflicting findings.

1.4 Research Context

As educators' knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and understandings of expectations are aspects that can be actively explored (Schachter et al., 2016), the aim of this study was to consider these relative to NZ's unique educational setting. Given that Schachter et al. (2016) hypothesised that educators were answering as "they were expected to" (p. 290) during this state-wide review, rather than revealing their true beliefs, it was important for the current study to ensure non-traceability of participants, and the study's independence from the MOE. Supporting the quest for understanding of educators' lived experiences, rather than solely their knowledge base, this study explored educators' specific examples and descriptions of what they do and how, to ascertain the variety and content of their daily communication interactions. This research contributes to the emerging NZ cross-sectional conversation about communication facilitation in the early years.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One has outlined the research conducted for this thesis. Chapter Two provides a summary of communication development and its influence over a variety of life outcomes. A review of the literature surrounding the role educators play in children's communication development is also given. Chapter Three details the methodological foundations and procedures for the data collection and data analysis for this study. Key results from this study are presented in Chapter Four and are discussed in Chapter Five with reference to national and international literature. Chapter Six specifies the

trustworthiness of this study, provides the final conclusions and recommendations, as well as potential directions for further research. Out of respect to the variety of communicative contexts the participating educators' come from, as well as to preserve the authenticity and integrity of educator voice, I have retained the use of a range of non-English terms. Therefore, a Glossary has been provided at the end of the document, which provides definitions of the non-English terms used throughout this document.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights early communication skill development and its importance, incorporating a summary of the potential consequences of inadequate communication skills. The NZ early childhood context is briefly explained, including the underlying curriculum framework. Finally, this review details research exploring the understanding, skills, and attitudes of educators about children's communication skills, both nationally and internationally.

2.1 Communication Development in the Early Years

Communication skills develop within relationships and environments where children have a purpose for the interaction and communication (MOE, 2017c). Blackburn and Aubrey (2016) noted that children responded differently in different learning environments, adding weight to the important role contextual factors play in children's communication development. Frequent exposure to new concepts with a variety of tuned-in and deliberate communication partners provides the necessary context and repetition for language learning (Brebner et al., 2016; Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer, & Lindsay, 2015). This means the adults in a child's life play a crucial role in the child's communication development, through their everyday actions, reactions, modelling, and teaching, defined for this study as communication interactions.

2.2 The Importance of Communication Development

Communication skills are vital to children's wellbeing and development of positive self-concept (Brebner et al., 2016), providing a solid foundation for future, more demanding communication experiences (Dockrell, et al., 2015). As communication skill development is a cumulative process, it is important to consider and understand difficulties with communication development as a continuum of adversity (Law, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2008). These difficulties are experienced throughout learning domains (Snow & Powell, 2011; Young et al., 2002). The communication skills required to participate in the learning process become increasingly more intricate (McCartney, Ellis, & Boyle, 2009) intensifying in adolescence (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010). This means those without firm communication foundations begin their teenage years with less skill, less practice, and less confidence than their peers (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden,

2010). Because of this, many people with communication difficulties report that they have difficulty paying attention in language-based activities, often feeling stupid and angry (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010; Sanger, Moore-Brown, Magnuson, & Svoboda, 2001).

Ensuring children are actively engaged in education impacts positively on the health and wellbeing of the individual and their community (All Party Parliamentary Group, 2013; Snow & Powell, 2012). Humber and Snow (2001) highlight the positive correlations between higher language levels and more years of engagement in education, and between lower language levels and schooling attrition. This disengagement is unsurprising given that literacy skills rely on solid oral language foundations (Nation, Cocksey, Taylor, & Bishop, 2010; Te Kete Ipurangi, 2014), with 50% of preschool children with language difficulties exhibiting problems with reading persisting during their primary education years (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, Zhang, 2002). When children experience communication difficulties, they often also experience social and emotional problems (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000). They exhibit poorer sociability and increased rates of withdrawal than peers with typical communication development, with children with more severe language difficulties having more severely impaired social interactions (Hart, Fujiki, Brinton, & Hart, 2004). They also experience higher levels of peer rejection, again, connected with their level of communication difficulty (Laws, Bates, Feuerstein, Mason-Apps, & White, 2012). It is therefore understandable that many young people with communication difficulties find themselves in a downward spiral towards academic underachievement (Young et.al., 2002).

On top of this, people with communication difficulties also experience increased behavioural difficulties (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000). These can correlate with negative life outcomes, such as involvement with the criminal justice system, where the prevalence of people with communication difficulties is between 19.4% and 90% (Bryan, 2004; Bryan et al., 2007; Sanger et al., 2001; Snow & Powell, 2011). These rates are much higher than the estimated prevalence in the general childhood population (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Silva, 1980). Those involved in the justice system have, on average, significantly lower language skills than non-convicted controls (Bryan et al., 2007; Humber & Snow, 2001; Snow & Powell, 2011). Overall, prisoners also have fewer

years of formal education (Bryan et al., 2007; Humber & Snow, 2001; Snow & Powell, 2011). This area of research is in its infancy, but nevertheless needs to be taken seriously, as it provides substantial moral, ethical, and economic motivation for ensuring early and correct identification of children's communication needs.

In our increasingly technological world, employment market demands include solid communication skills, often both spoken and written, giving even further impetus to the importance of communication development (Nippold, 2010). It is therefore important that all preschool aged children have access to good quality communication stimulation. Given the heightened vulnerability of children with communication difficulties, the implementation of comprehensive, culturally relevant, and effective interventions facilitated by a well-trained and integrated team of adults, is essential to alleviate their expected ongoing difficulties (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010).

2.3 Communication and the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

This project has been carried out during a time of political and educational change, including a change of government in late 2017, and the ensuing changes of priorities and policies (e.g. MOE, 2018a, 2018c). The update of Te Whāriki was also released in 2017, reinforcing the importance of communication throughout early childhood, retaining it as a core focus evidenced through the four goals and six associated learning outcomes (MOE, 2017c). Table 1 illustrates the integration of these goals and learning outcomes, and how communication development manifests in the various curriculum areas.

Table 1: Communication Goals and Learning Outcomes outlined in Te Whāriki

Goals	Learning Outcomes
Develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	Using gesture and movement to express themselves
Develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	Understanding oral language and using it for a range of purposes
Experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures	Enjoy hearing stories and retelling and creating them Recognising print symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose Recognising mathematical symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose
Discover different ways to be creative and expressive	Expressing their feelings and ideas using a wide range of materials and modes

Optimal learning environments are those in which children hear the sorts of language they are expected to develop, and where adults follow the lead of children, building on and extending children's interests, knowledge, and experiences (e.g., Flynn, 2016; Foote et al., 2004). For a learning environment to be considered supportive of communication development, children need to receive multiple, quality, and regular opportunities to experience specific words and concepts in diverse contexts with a range of communication partners, with a high level of repetition (Dockrell et al., 2015). Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) embodies these qualities, providing guidance to educators about their responsibilities regarding the communicative environment and educator behaviours expected in ECE settings. It states that the ECE setting's environment should be "…rich in signs, symbols, words, numbers, song, dance, drama and art that give expression to and extend children's understandings of their own and other languages and cultures" (MOE, 2017c, p. 45). This requires educators to actively create the communication environment of the ECE setting, including opportunities for children to communicate. Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) also affirms that educators are expected to

respond to the initiations, strengths, interests, abilities and needs of each child in their care, providing them with additional support as required. All educators need to be able to demonstrate understanding of children's communication development, have appropriate expectations for each child, and when there are concerns, find additional ways to support the child's learning (MOE, 2017c). Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) also explicitly asserts that educators should be thoughtful, intentional, collaborative, and responsive, acting as role models for children's language, learning, and wellbeing.

Te Whāriki offers educators significant personal opportunity to create children's learning experiences (Foote et al., 2004). As well as providing a summary of educators' responsibilities (MOE, 2017c, p. 59), it poses 12 questions for educators to consider and reflect on, regarding their communication interactions to support children's communication development, for example, "How might kaiako enable all children to have regular opportunities for sustained conversations with kaiako?" (p. 45). There is an "open approach to planning" and no mandatory assessments (Blaiklock, 2017, p.44), rather assessment is to be formative, to assist planning and enhance children's learning (MOE, 2017c). How educators use this freedom is likely to be guided by their beliefs and knowledge about what is appropriate for children in an ECE setting (Foote et al., 2004).

2.4 Current New Zealand Early Childhood Education Environments

Successive NZ governments have aimed to increase the percentage of pre-school aged children enrolled in ECE (e.g. State Services Commission, 2014). This may be in part based on the understanding that children's engagement with quality learning experiences is vital, due to the wide-reaching individual and societal benefits, including the levelling of the playing field for those at risk of educational and/or developmental difficulties (McLaughlin, Aspden, & Snyder, 2016). This has resulted in ECE settings becoming an increasingly important learning context for young children, with most NZ children now regularly accessing one or more ECE settings (ERO, 2017).

However, simply being exposed to an environment in which language is used does not necessarily result in improved child language (Flynn, 2016; Foote et al., 2004). Attachment and rapport are also important, with research evidence suggesting that the relationships educators form with children are powerful foundations for children's

learning, including their communication development (Jovanovic, Brebner, Lawless, & Young, 2016). These concepts are also clearly articulated as part of the philosophical and theoretical foundation of Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c). There is evidence to suggest that secure attachment and reciprocal rapport provides the opportunity for educators to tune in to and notice children's specific communication skills, and identify their communication development needs, which in turn fosters their connection further (Jovanovic et al., 2016). Educators are also tasked with planning how to involve each child, and regularly reflecting on the impact of their actions on the child's learning (Flynn, 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2016). When responsive educators facilitate balanced communication interactions, based around the child's interests, children's spontaneous communications increase both with peers and with educators (Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2003). This leads to a greater level of participation, adding momentum to a child's communication development spiral, as they can share what language they have learned, gain an increasing amount of feedback, and be exposed to a wider variety of language (Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2004).

Despite the necessity for quality teaching being reiterated in the MOE briefing to the then incoming Minister of Education in 2014 (MOE, 2014), one year later, the report regarding infants and toddlers (ERO, 2015) found only 12% of facilities were highly responsive to children's communication needs. The evaluation determined that 44% of ECE settings had limited or no responsiveness, with educators in these settings less likely to follow children's interests or build on children's communications to them (ERO, 2015). These educators were also more likely to have a limited understanding of Te Whāriki (MOE, 1996; MOE 2017c), and had difficulty both with applying the communication guidelines to practice with children and with documenting children's progress towards the outlined communication goals (ERO, 2015).

The more recent ERO report, *Extending their language – expanding their world; Children's oral language (birth-8 years)*, (ERO, 2017), used different criteria and different parameters, focusing on the practices surrounding oral language development for children up to the age of eight. According to this report, 19% of facilities were well-focused, with 31% having limited or no focus on oral language development (ERO, 2017). The comment was made that across settings, internal evaluation and reflection,

and tracking of children's progress over time were not areas of strength (ERO, 2017). This lack of quality teaching contradicts the intentions of Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) which highlights the importance of communication development throughout the strands and principles. Evidence indicating that there are a wide variety of approaches used by educators (Foote et al., 2004) may suggest that educators' enactment of Te Whāriki is guided by their beliefs and knowledge about what is appropriate for children in an ECE setting.

According to Collins (2017), there is currently no formal normative benchmark for communication development in NZ, and therefore no nationally consistent measure for tracking children's oral language skills (as cited in New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association, 2017). This means there are no available statistics about the current overall state of NZ children's communication skills, nor the prevalence of communication difficulties. The 2017 ERO report recommended to the MOE, that clear guidelines be made available to educators to support educators' understanding of children's communication development, and their assessment of the multitude of components involved in children's communication skill development, so that children with difficulties can be identified in a timely and accurate manner (ERO, 2017).

ERO (2017) also recommended that the MOE provide resources to help educators ensure the creation and maintenance of high-quality language learning environments. This aligns with the focus of Dockrell et al. (2015) on identifying ways to support educators in the United Kingdom to gain awareness of how their practices provide optimal environments for communication. It could be possible that the lack of guidance currently provided is contributing to the disparate standards of communication input reported across the sector. It is therefore vital to find out what educators' perceptions are about children's communication development, their beliefs about their role in the communication guidance of children, and what factors enable educators to ensure quality communication provision.

2.5 The Role of Educators in Children's Communication Development: Studies and Perceptions

2.5.1 Difficulties with comparing international literature and data

Internationally, educators are not consistently engaging with children in ways which reliably promote quality communication development, and the amount and richness of the language children are exposed to in ECE settings is not ideal (Schachter et al., 2016). However, comparing international research findings is problematic due to inconsistency in the terminology and benchmarks used to define the point at which a child is considered to have a communication difficulty (Reed, 2004). Another variable is that communication is multidimensional, and solely relying on standardised tests is insufficient for the functionality of the data collected (Duchan, 2001). Each study is also conducted within particular communication environments, with specific communication partners. For these reasons, international evidence needs to be appreciated in context, and carefully examined to determine relative applicability to the NZ educational environment. An important consideration in these comparisons, is the cultural foundation which underpins learning environments, families, and research. Interpretation of evidence may be shaped by a range of factors, including ethnicity and unique world view perspectives (Macfarlane, 2015).

2.5.2 Educators' underlying beliefs and knowledge

Research about relationships between knowledge of educator-child interactions, and how that translates into daily practice is limited (Hu et al., 2017), as is research about the connections between educators' beliefs and practice (Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011). Due to the scarcity of research in these areas of increasingly important work, the research articles discussed hereafter have utilised very different methodologies and samples. They also have been conducted in significantly different educational environments with great variability in educational cultural values. This disparity means results cannot be directly compared, only contrasted in discussion.

The importance of educators' underlying beliefs was explored in a pioneering NZ study (Foote et al., 2004). This involved open-ended interviews with eight educators, all of whom held three-year education qualifications. Educators worked in two sessional kindergartens and two full day ECE settings, and these settings were randomly selected

from one provincial NZ city. Ten boys and 10 girls (five from each setting), all four-years-old, and attending their ECE setting at least four hours each day, were also included. These children were each observed for a four-hour morning session, using narrative recording, and these observations were then analysed for types of interactions with educators, literacy experiences, and oral language experiences. An environmental survey was also completed for each ECE setting, and educator interview transcripts analysed for key themes. Educators expressed the belief that they have a significant role in encouraging language and literacy learning, sharing beliefs that books and stories, and 'print rich environments' were central to learning. They also shared the belief that children's learning is fostered by adults following children's interests, within children's play, which requires adults to listen, answer children's questions, retell and read stories to children as requested. However, when the interviews shifted to discussing how children develop literacy in daily activities, educators gave a range of responses, from play-based, to four educators detailing structured skills learning, revealing the variety of understandings of how these beliefs should be enacted in literacy teaching approaches.

Through comparing the observations and interview responses, the researchers commented on the relative impact of the educators' beliefs discussed above (Foote et al., 2004). They revealed that implementation relied on educators' foundational beliefs about children's development and their role in children's learning, as well as their understanding of how to document learning, rather than their technical or professional espoused knowledge (Foote et al., 2004). The authors proposed that these underlying beliefs, as evidenced through their description of interactions and backed up through the observations, directly informed their teaching practice, more so than educator's espoused professional or technical knowledge. These findings were similar to an earlier Australian study by Marinac et al. (2000). The Australian study of 21 tertiary qualified educators, involved educators being observed, their language recorded and then coded, as well as being involved in interviews. They found that educators' language use with children was based on four key drivers: educators' perception of appropriate language, ECE setting aims, interpretation of government requirements, and perceived or explicit parental expectations. Given these studies were conducted more than a decade ago, there may have been some changes in educators' knowledge and practice since then, as well as in the SLT service provision models to support educators.

Underlying educator beliefs also featured in Schachter et al. (2016). They conducted a state-wide review in the Midwest, United States of America (USA), investigating multiple types of educator knowledge, and beliefs about language and literacy learning. Clear participant information was shared about the 222 educators, who were teaching children aged 39-78 months old. The authors state that these settings were mostly reflective of the broader USA context for ECE. Educators completed a written self-assessment, and researchers videotaped their classroom interactions on a day selected by the educator. Researchers coded the recordings for the amount and type of literacy instruction provided by educators. Of note, is that nearly half the educators did not engage in any language or literacy interactions with children during the recording time frame. Results will have been significantly impacted by this fact, which is acknowledged as a surprising finding and a drawback for this study.

In comparing educators' stated beliefs with evidence-based ideals, correlations were relatively high (2.85-3.32/4). However, when comparing these with the in-class behaviours of educators, negative associations were found for oral language and vocabulary instruction, with higher belief scores associated with a decrease in the amount of time spent engaging children in these activities. Given this study was part of a state-wide evaluation of early childhood professional development, the authors questioned whether these surprising results were due to educators responding with what they thought they were expected to say, rather than with what they truly believed. The researchers discussed the difficulty in gaining accurate measures, as well as the idea that potentially someone can believe something without, for some reason, being able to apply it in their setting in an observable manner.

More recently, Hu et al. (2017) found almost the opposite, with positive connections between an educator's knowledge and observable classroom interactions, which was even stronger when the educator also held child-centred beliefs. They worked with 164 kindergarten educators, from Guangdong province in China, with three cities selected for variability in socioeconomic status. Educators were invited to participate after selection via a stratified random sample of 180 educators with 60 from each city contacted. The knowledge measures used examined effective educator-child

interactions, as well as educator beliefs about children. Educators completed a questionnaire, an 18-point multiple choice knowledge scale, a one to five scaled beliefs measure, and underwent a classroom observation to rate their interactions with children. These assessments had been piloted with 57 educators from the same region to determine validity and adjust for sociocultural norms.

The significant indirect relationship between educators' knowledge, practice and beliefs about children, indicates that beliefs played a mediating role between knowledge and observable teaching quality (Hu et al., 2017). This led to the assertion that to increase quality classroom environments and educators' instructional support of children, we need to increase educators' beliefs in child-centred approaches (Hu et al., 2017). The authors surmise that holding child-centred beliefs, similar to those detailed in Foote et al. (2004), may positively impact the quality of educator-child interactions, creating positive impacts on behaviour management, and communication development (Hu et al., 2017). Interestingly, 19.9% of the total variance in educators' beliefs about children, was accounted for by educators having an associate degree or higher, as well as over a decade of teaching experience, findings that were, again, in stark contrast to the Schachter et al. (2016) state-wide review. It is possible that differences in educational expectations and outcomes, cultural values around how educators should interact with children, and/or variations within the operational factors of ECE settings in different countries, have influenced these diverse results.

In a South Australian study, Brebner et al. (2016) worked with 19 early childhood educators from eight ECE settings offering long-day childcare in mid to lower socioeconomic areas of metropolitan Adelaide. It is important to note that while Australia is geographically close to NZ, it has a different ethnocultural mix, different qualification and ratio requirements (Australia Children's Education & Care Quality Authority™, n.d.), and a different early childhood curriculum (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009) from NZ. These educators were working with children aged zero to three-years-old, which is also a younger age group than the current study. Educators were divided into 3 geographically based focus groups. Understanding of communication development, and educators' role in this, were the foci for the question guide.

Thematic analysis of educators' responses revealed their belief in the importance of relationships with children and families, with trust, confidence, belonging, and attachment said to increase a child's level of security, which in turn influenced communication (Brebner et al., 2016). The triad of trust (child-family-educator) is said to be the foundation for attachment, on which learning and development are built (Jovanovic et al., 2016). Brebner et al., (2016) revealed that educators' knowledge of, and strong relationships with, individual children and their families, led to educators personalising their interactions with individual children. They also found that educators believed it was important that each child had a key adult who considered their needs in the programme development and made sure their interests were included in activities. These educators believed their role included being co-creators of a child's development alongside the child's family, thus they focussed on children's strengths, as well as their family's goals. Knowledge about children's strengths and possible next steps was based on focussed observations of children's interactions and behaviour, as well as discussions with other educators in the setting (Brebner et al., 2016). Educators' belief in the significance of both verbal and non-verbal communication was highlighted, as was the view that communication development was vital for well-being and positive self-concept development (Brebner et al., 2016). Brebner et al. (2016) reported that educators demonstrated understanding of children's typical communication development and that educators believed variations in development trajectories could be expected for some children based on their individual factors, such as each child's home context.

Abry et al. (2015), utilised information about 2650 students in the ECLS-B data set in the USA, which followed a nationally representative sample of children born in 2001. This data set enabled researchers to compare children's preschool and kindergarten educators' beliefs about the relative importance of children's learning domains. Misalignment between educators' beliefs was associated with negative learning outcomes for children across a remarkably wide range of learning areas, including children's social interaction, academic, and self-regulation domains (Abry et al., 2015). The negative impacts of belief misalignment were greater for children from lower socioeconomic households, with researchers calling on educators to focus on sharing

information with each other, with the goal of belief alignment between educators (Abry et al., 2015). This means that the alignment of educators' beliefs may be a key contributing factor in children's communication development with aligned beliefs impacting positively on their communication outcomes, and misaligned beliefs having a negative influence (Abry et al., 2015).

2.5.3 Educators' interactions with children

Schachter et al. (2016), examined the data for educators who engaged with children, to identify the connection between the knowledge assessment outcomes and the time spent engaging children in oral language activities. There were positive associations above the 75th quartile with educators with higher knowledge scores spending more time engaging with children in oral language activities. There were also negative associations in the lower 50% (more knowledge meaning less time), with floor effects at the lower end. These correlations were of equal strength, with a 3-point increase in knowledge scores correlating with 1 minute less or 1 minute more oral language engagement depending on the quartile. The conclusion was drawn that this knowledge measure did not predict an educator's enactment, and that a more sensitive assessment might be required to strengthen the internal validity of future research (Schachter et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to identify what is measured, and the measurement procedures, to capture the dynamic nature of communication interactions.

The strongest knowledge related variables in Hu et al. (2017) were found in the emotional support domain: educators' social and emotional understanding, their awareness of children's needs, and their flexibility, appeared to be based on knowledge about attachment and relationships. The authors found a significant, direct association between educators' knowledge and the quality of their interactions with children, such as involving children in learning opportunities throughout daily routines and activities. However, solely possessing the knowledge about how to interact with children may be insufficient in creating optimal communication interactions, with educators also needing to have child-centred beliefs to best implement their knowledge into classroom interactions (Hu et al., 2017). According to Hu et al. (2007), educators may tend to teach in similar ways to how they were taught, and those who are more knowledgeable

about effective educator-child interactions, are more likely to hold child-centred beliefs. These beliefs appear to mediate knowledge and interaction, with educators who provide quality teaching found to be both knowledgeable about how to best interact with children, and more likely to actively plan for children's learning opportunities throughout daily routines and play interactions (Hu et al., 2017).

In terms of NZ research, Foote et al. (2004) examined educator-child interactions through direct observations, as well as interviews. Foote et al., (2004) proposed that educators' underlying beliefs may be directly impacting their communication interaction practice. Their study revealed two distinct educator approaches: educator-led, and child-led. The benefits of child-led learning experiences were upheld, with Foote et al. (2004) finding that children's learning was substantially richer, with more in-depth language experiences, when children led the interactions, and their educator followed their interests using a variety of language. In line with these findings, Blackburn and Aubrey (2016) found that adult-led activities produced fewer child initiations than during free-play, when children's initiations related to their interests.

There are multiple social theories underpinning educators' practice, as well as educational policy (Weismer, Venker, & Robertson, 2017). In NZ, Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) affirms the expectation of educator intentionality, asserting that educators' "primary responsibility is to facilitate children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy" (p.59). In fact, one of the recommendations from the ERO (2017) review was that NZ educators needed to improve their use of deliberate teaching strategies. Intentional teaching was defined by Hart and Risley (1975) as an "interaction between an adult and a single child, which arises naturally in an unstructured situation such as free play and which is used by the adult to transmit information or give the child practice in developing a skill" (p. 411). Another approach currently in use is focused stimulation, in which a child is "provided with concentrated repetitions of specific linguistic forms/functions/uses within naturalistic communicative contexts" (Weismer et al., 2017, p.122). The understanding of, and balance between, the role of the child and those of the adult, is one with which educators appear to be struggling (Kirkby, Keary, & Walsh, 2018).

The previous studies (Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017; Schachter et al., 2016) highlight the variance in approaches educators are using in their interactions with children. Their findings indicate that knowledge is not sufficient for ensuring quality communication outcomes, with underlying beliefs and previous experiences likely to play an important role in shaping educators' communication interactions with children (Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017; Schachter et al., 2016). These include beliefs about how educators should interact with children (Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017), and underlying theoretical constructs (Weismer et al., 2017).

2.5.4 Convergent communication practices

Educators' knowledge, decisions, and reflections, as well as educators' purposeful application of these to individual children, are important for enhancing children's learning journeys (McLaughlin et al., 2016). The ERO (2015) review of NZ ECE settings found those settings which were responsive to children's communication needs, had educators who shared beliefs and practices about ongoing learning and development, both regarding children's needs, and concerning current research theories and approaches. They also exhibited a sharing and highly reflective self and whole-staff culture, actively considering how their new learning could be embedded into their daily practice with children (ERO, 2015), which resonates with the research detailed above. The beliefs held by educators appear to be important considerations when exploring their communication interactions with children. Beliefs shared in the research so far have included the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication (Jovanovic et al., 2016), secure and trusting key relationships with children and families (Jovanovic et al., 2016), and the importance of adults actively engaging in, and planning for, child-led activities (Foote et al. 2004; Hu et al., 2017; Schachter et al., 2016). While overall, research has been indefinite, it is fair to say that educators' knowledge and beliefs impact their behaviour and practice (Hu et al., 2017).

Research currently provides mixed viewpoints on the interplay between educators' instruction, knowledge, beliefs, educational backgrounds, and teaching experience (Schachter et al., 2016). It is also unclear exactly what sort of educational foundations and ongoing reinforcement is most effective in producing educator interactions that lead to optimal child learning (Hamre, Downer, Jamil, & Pianta, 2012). International

ideas and evidence, however limited, must be examined in light of NZ's unique cultural mix, national curriculum, and educational climate. It is imperative to understand how the variables explored in previous studies apply to NZ's current ECE provision. Understanding these variables remains crucial for those who are interested in better understanding the driving forces behind child language development (Schachter et al., 2016).

2.6 Importance of the Current Study

There is significant evidence that in order to improve practice, adults need to be actively engaged in reflecting on their performance, considering new ideas, and establishing next steps towards their goals (Dunst & Trivette, 2009). Self-reflection is a key practice factor detailed in Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c), and is central to understanding educators' key motivations for their communication interactions with young children. Educators' beliefs, understandings, expectations, and experiences can be actively explored through research (Schachter et al., 2016). Understanding educators' core beliefs and knowledge is central to investigating educators' communication interactions with children. The importance of relationships between children, their families, and their educators, is a significant element of development, raised by several theorists such as Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jerome Brunner and Lev Vygotsky, as well as in research studies (e.g. Brebner et al., 2016; Chapman et al., 1992; Jovanovic et al., 2016). These relationships are also fundamental to NZ's cultural values (Macfarlane, 2015) and are an important component on which to elicit educators' self-reflections, both in terms of underlying beliefs and espoused practice.

Therefore, through educators' self-reflection, this study aims to investigate educators' beliefs about, understandings of, and lived experiences regarding children's communication development in ECE settings in NZ. This research will consider internationally recognised communication interaction variables with relation to NZ's unique educational landscape in order to help fill the current knowledge gap of NZ educators' perspectives on children's communication development. Key themes and influences will be highlighted, which may be useful to consider when supporting educators' communication interactions with children in ECE settings.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological philosophies and approaches that underpin the present study. To set the context for the research, the research questions are outlined, followed by a rationale for the qualitative approach. Information about the research conducted, including a description of participants and recruitment, procedures for data collection and analysis, are described. Ethical considerations and processes for the study, are detailed. I will use personal pronouns to refer to myself as I am the primary researcher and author.

3.1 The Research Questions

The present study aimed to examine educators' beliefs, ideas, and perceptions about the communication interactions between educators and preschool aged children. There was no intention to explore the structural systems of early childhood teaching and learning, such as ECE setting aims, staff qualifications or ratios, as these variables are usually beyond the control of the individual educators. This research will help fill the current knowledge gap regarding NZ educators' perspectives in relation to children's communication development. This will be achieved through exploring educators' beliefs, practices, and ideas around child communication development, answering the following questions:

1. What are early childhood educators' perspectives about children's communication development in the early childhood education setting?
2. How do early childhood educators describe their communication interactions with young children?
3. What do early childhood educators believe influences children's communication development in the early childhood education setting?

3.2 Methodological Approach

This research aimed to explore educators' perspectives on children's communication development, giving educators an opportunity to detail their experiences, including their beliefs about what influences children's communication development in their ECE setting. A qualitative methodology was selected for this exploratory study, following a phenomenological approach, to determine shared meaning from the lived experiences

of individual participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology declares that people have understandings about what they do, which can help explain their behaviour (Punch, 2014). This will therefore provide opportunities to understand what educators do and identify the underlying reasons for their practice. During this process, researchers gather information from those who are involved in the phenomenon and distil this into common truths (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the current study, this included educators' knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of children's communication development in ECE settings. Participants have the freedom to share their experiences using their own words, judgements, and perceptions (Patton, 2015), with this approach honouring both the objective and subjective aspects of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study applied the constructivism approach of seeking to appreciate participants' experiences, and their interpretations of those experiences, to formulate what participants share as lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This overcomes the difficulties of interpretation experienced when an unfamiliar observer externally rates educators' experiences, and considers context bound variables, as discussed in Wen et al. (2011). The researcher's role is then to consider the depth and variety of participant's views, and the participant's right to shape the meaning they take from the everyday experiences they share during an interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, Thematic Network Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) is undertaken to examine the links inherent in these shared experiences.

3.3 Participant Recruitment

Purposeful criterion sampling, prioritising convenience of travel, was used to select participants (Punch, 2006). Eligibility was determined by the following factors:

1. Currently working four or more days a week in a licenced ECE setting, with children aged between three and five;
2. Educators are to have worked in the sector for at least two years in the previous four.

The geographical area selected for inclusion covered urban, suburban, and rural populations across a variety of socio-economic status levels, and encompassed a range of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. A list of licenced ECE settings was located

through the Education Counts website (Education Counts, 2017). Playcentres, and facilities without listed email addresses were excluded, as well as educators known socially and/or related to myself, as the primary researcher. As I currently work as an SLT in one geographical locality of NZ, the ECE settings I was working in, and those I was expected to work in during the duration of this project, were also excluded, to protect the study from undue perceived bias. Twenty ECE settings were excluded from participating in this study for this reason.

The introductory email and Study Information Sheet (Appendix A) were sent to 147 ECE settings. To increase approachability, a photograph of myself and my family as well as a brief whakapapa were included in this documentation (Appendix A). Two to three weeks later, I phoned facilities during business hours, and asked to speak to the owner, manager, or head teacher to address any questions they or their staff had regarding possible participation. The first 12 educators to indicate willingness to participate were invited to proceed further. To ensure participants met the criteria for participating in this study, and to accurately describe the sample for replicability purposes, volunteers were asked to complete a Participant Demographic Information Form (Appendix B). Details requested included the number of years spent working in ECE settings, setting types in which each educator was currently and had previously worked, the ages of children currently and previously worked with, and qualification details. This form was sent to those educators who expressed a willingness to participate, along with the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). Once these two forms were completed, educators were eligible for participation in this study. This resulted in ten educators proceeding to the interview stage.

Educators were offered a range of interview times, including during typical working hours, before or after work, or during weekends. This was to reduce any potential barriers to participation, such as personal costs, transportation, and confidentiality. Educators were offered two options for interview venue: either a quiet space at their place of work or a local hired office space. Eight educators chose to meet at their place of work at a time convenient to them and their work schedule, and two educators chose to meet outside working hours at a local hired office.

Being an SLT, as well as the interviewer and researcher may have impacted some educators' willingness to participate, due to communication being my perceived area of expertise. It is possible that some educators may have considered this combination intimidating. However, for other educators this combination of skills and experience may have been a positive factor, increasing their trust in myself as the researcher, as well as the research process and potential outcomes.

3.4 Participant Information

All ten participants were female and were registered teachers with the Education Council. Table 2 details participants length of time working in ECE settings (ordered from least to most), alongside their relevant tertiary education qualifications, and age bracket, as detailed by the educators themselves. Educators also self-generated their ethnicity description, with eight incorporating various forms of Pākehā New Zealander, four including Māori, and with Swiss, Samoan, and Celtic identities all mentioned once.

Table 2. Participant Demographic Details

Time working in ECE settings	Qualification	Age Bracket
7 years, 6 months	Grad Dip Teaching ECE	55+
9 years, 2 months	Bachelor of Education ECE	25-34
10 years, 6 months	Bachelor of Teaching ECE	25-34
14 years	Diploma of Teaching ECE	35-44
15+ years	Master of Education	55+
16 years	Diploma of Teaching ECE	35-44
23 years, 7 months	Diploma of Teaching ECE	45-54
24 years	Bachelor of Education	55+
30 years	Diploma in ECE	45-54
40 years	Diploma of Teaching ECE	55+

Participants worked in a mixture of rural, suburban, and urban environments. In terms of types of ECE settings, three educators worked in private education and care settings, four in community education and care, two in kindergartens, and one in a health

setting. All but one educator had previous experience in at least one other ECE setting type. Four educators had experience in private education and care, two in community education and care, one in corporate education and care, four in Kindergarten, two in Playcentre, and one in Homebased education.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Interview methodology

The purpose of qualitative interviews is to gain understanding of participants' experiences (Patton, 2015). Interviews are conducted to gain information which is not directly observable, such as thoughts, feelings, and the meaning people interpret from what goes on around them (Patton, 2015). They allow a glimpse into another person's perspective, valuing it as a meaningful way to explore a topic (Patton, 2015). Interviews can range from highly structured, standardised interviews, through to unstructured interviews without specific questions; instead having areas of interest and questions asked following the direction the interview takes (Punch, 2014).

When using interview protocols, the role of the researcher is as a partner in the conversation, albeit with different responsibilities to the interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this reason, the researcher must be careful to question and listen without unintentionally influencing participants' responses, or offering any guidance or advice from their professional knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the present study, as the interviewer, I asked educators to engage in interviews to directly explain their own lived experiences and actions within their context. If educators asked me questions, I reminded them that this interview was about their experiences, and asked them what they thought.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview approach was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and reflections on their everyday life experiences (Punch, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are founded on questions which are worded and ordered to guide each individual participants' sharing of their experiences on a similar path (Patton, 2015), while also allowing for the interviewer to follow the participant's lead when new ideas are introduced. These research questions were informed by

learnings from the diverse educator belief studies detailed in the literature review. Sverdlov and Aram (2016) advocated for research questions to be broad enough for educators to share their multifaceted and interwoven experiences. This idea was shared by Wen et al. (2011) who encouraged researchers to seek to explore the conditions and variables which enable consistency between educators' beliefs and child-focussed practice.

One challenge for researchers is creating a rapport that is genuine and leads to participants' willing sharing of their lives in a way that is both natural and at the same time comparable with what is shared by other participants (Patton, 2015). The option of kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) semi-structured interviews was selected to support the development of open, trusting relationships between participants and researcher, enabling educators to freely express their thoughts in detail (Punch, 2014). This is especially important for facilitating a more natural conversational flow which provides space for participants to share their stories and perspectives in a respectful relationship, free from researcher expectation or intimidation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also allows participants the flexibility to share their insights in their own words (Patton, 2015). This approach best matches the research questions regarding beliefs, lived experiences, and opinions, as daily behaviour is founded in the meaning we ascribe to our personal interpretation of our experiences (Punch, 2014). Using a semi-structured question protocol ensured the same key questions were asked of all participants, while allowing for commonalities and points of difference to be explored.

As detailed in Chapter Two, there is very little published research in this area, resulting in a lack of international models to follow. As this is an exploratory study, situated in the unique educational landscape of NZ, novel questions were formulated to specifically address this study's aims to explore educators' perceptions of children's communication development, how they describe their communication interactions with young children, and their beliefs about what influences children's communication development within the setting. Researchers conducting semi-structured interviews must ask genuine, open-ended questions to allow participants to answer with their own words and ideas, reducing the impact of the researcher's own beliefs or thoughts in participant responses (Patton, 2015). The question options and skilled question formulation guide (Patton,

2015) was used during question formulation and ordering, as this guide details a range of open-ended questions which target different areas of behaviour, opinion, feelings, knowledge, and sensory experience. Questions relating to the behaviour, opinion, and feeling areas have shaped the current Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D), as has my clinical experience, knowledge of the NZ ECE environment, and the studies detailed in the literature review (Brebner et al, 2016; Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017; Marinac et al., 2000; Schachter et al., 2016). The Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D) included broad introductory questions to help settle participants into the interview, before focussing on the specific areas of the educator's experience, perspectives on communication, reflections, factors of influence, and supports.

To strengthen credibility, the Study Information Sheet (Appendix A) and Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D) were trialled and revised based on feedback from multiple peer reviewers. These were reviewed by a trained educator of Māori and Chinese background, and three pilot interviews were conducted with educators who were also asked to review the forms and information to be used during this study. Feedback was considered, and adjustments made to increase the clarity and credibility of the questions to ensure they obtained the targeted information. Changes included having questions in written form available for educators who preferred to read the key questions and having written forms of several karakia for educators to choose from if they wished to start the engagement with karakia. This information was finally re-checked by both supervisors, leading to agreement on the final protocol.

3.6 Procedures

I conducted these interviews face to face, 1:1 to assist with whakawhanaungatanga, building a trusting relationship with educators. Participants were offered food while in attendance to help create a relaxed atmosphere, to acknowledge the value of participants' time and commitment, and to provide sustenance for those who had travelled. Before beginning the interview, educators were reminded of the details in the Study Information Sheet (Appendix A), including that interviews would be digitally recorded (audio only) and take a maximum of 60 minutes. Participants were offered a chance to ask any questions, before reiterating that they could withdraw their consent

up until they submitted their approved interview transcripts. Once participants had any questions answered, the opportunity for karakia was offered, before it was confirmed that they were happy for the audio recorder to be switched on to record the interview. Interviews were conducted verbally, however, if educators expressed a desire to view questions in written form, written key questions were placed on the table in front of the participant. Participants were invited to request repetitions or clarification of questions at any time during the interview, if needed. As interviews came to a close, participants were offered an opportunity for closing karakia.

An important component of the procedure was to reiterate the principles of non-traceability, as well as the confidentiality of what individual educators shared as part of their interviews. It was also important to reiterate that this study was being independently conducted, and as such, I had no financial partiality in the results, nor did their employers or the MOE. This included reaffirming that individual's transcripts would be considered confidential and not shared with employers or the MOE. This strengthened the trustworthiness of the research process.

3.6.1 Digital Recording and Transcription

Interviews were digitally recorded using an Olympus DS-3300 Digital Voice Recorder, which was placed on the table between the researcher and participant. Recordings were then downloaded onto a password protected laptop computer and uploaded into cloud storage for backup. Interview recordings were transcribed by a third party with transcription experience, who had signed a confidentiality form. Transcribed interviews were then checked for accuracy by the primary researcher.

3.6.2 Participant Checking

Identifying details, such as names and locations, were depersonalised, before transcripts were sent to the participant for confirmation of accuracy and intent. Hard copies were mailed if requested, which one participant accessed. Participants were asked to amend any errors, and once they were happy with the transcript, to send it back, along with a signed transcript release authority confirming their permission for the interview transcript to be used for this study.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the six-step process detailed by Attride-Stirling (2001), with Thematic Network Analysis utilised to examine educators' stated and implied practices and ideas. This process was selected because it has potential to establish recurrent and novel issues in the discussion narrative (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The first step of the Attride-Stirling (2001) process is open coding to assign codes to the concepts in the interview data. It is important for the researcher to be mindful of the study's research questions, and the themes identified in previous literature, when identifying relevant content to code (Attride-Stirling, 2001). However, themes are not predetermined (Patton, 2015) allowing for the overlapping connectedness often present in narrative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). To do this with transparency and rigour, I employed the five-step inductive coding processes described by Thomas (2006): preparation, close reading, categorisation, redundancy reduction, refinement. The written transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were comparably formatted, then read multiple times to formulate a meta-appreciation of the data (Thomas, 2006). Relevant portions of the text were then given codes representing their key meanings. A coding scheme was developed to ensure consistency, including definitions and examples from the data (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). This coding book was reviewed by research supervisors to ensure clarity of codes, accuracy of application to data, and uniformity, ensuring valid and consistent coding across all 10 transcripts. Once all data were coded with the established codes, these were refined ready for thematic analysis (Thomas, 2006).

The second step of the Attride-Stirling (2001) process, is to identify emerging themes in the data. This was achieved through rereading the data gathered in each code, identifying underlying ideas and meanings. These meaningful segments are referred to as basic themes and are the foundation of the Thematic Network Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In step three, a thematic network is constructed by reviewing the basic themes, identifying underlying commonalities, and developing organising themes which are further examined for connections and categorised under global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For this study, this process led to the identification of four global themes and ten organising themes. These global themes are then arranged into an

interconnected network which evolves from the natural groupings of the identified themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The findings for the global and organising themes for the current study are presented in the Results Chapter.

The fourth step further reviews and refines the network identified through the Thematic Network Analysis procedure (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For this study, this step established patterns, including examples of convergence and divergence in the themes and practice examples given by educators. Step five involves summarising the main themes and patterns which have emerged, explicitly and succinctly describing the network for the intended audience (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Keeping in mind the audience of educators and SLTs, the main themes emerging from the data were summarised and again reviewed by research supervisors to ensure accuracy and clarity. The Thematic Network Analysis resulted in the establishment of the Network of Influence, which is described in the Results Chapter.

Step six requires researchers to consider the resulting network in conjunction with the current study's research questions, and with reference to available related research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The Discussion Chapter presents this information. Using a documented thematic analysis procedure strengthens this study's credibility and dependability (Shenton, 2004), resulting in an in-depth, robust, and traceable process for the analysis of qualitative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

3.8 Ethical Considerations - Full Ethics

The importance of ethical research methods in the development and execution of good quality research is widely accepted as vital to keeping research focussed on making considered but principled decisions (Punch, 2014). Full ethics approval was sought through the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Appendix E) due to my role with the MOE. This was to ensure any potential and perceived conflicts of interest were examined and addressed so this research could be publicly released, and to enhance the level of trust potential participants could have in this study's independent nature. This application detailed the procedures, ethical considerations, and plans for minimising or mitigating any potential or perceived conflicts. Steps taken towards mitigating perceived bias included educators currently supported by, or in social

connection with, myself as the primary researcher, were not eligible for inclusion in this study. This study has been completed separately to the MOE, mitigating the potential perception of 'review' bias surmised in Schachter et al. (2016).

3.8.1 Informed consent and confidentiality

When interviewing people for research purposes, especially regarding personal details such as their thoughts, feelings, and actions, consent to share that information is vital (Punch, 2014). Informed consent ensures participants have the knowledge they need to make a personal choice about their information. I was clear with potential participants about my background, providing information about myself and my family in the Study Information Sheet (Appendix A), as well as reassuring educators that this study is not a 'review', and that their employer(s) will not have access to their individual transcript. This was achieved through the written Study Information Sheet (Appendix A) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) as well as verbal discussions prior to the semi-structured interviews. During the interview, participants and researcher could discontinue at any stage, if they felt uncomfortable or realised they had a current professional or personal connection outside this research. Post interview, participants were invited to check their transcripts matched their intentions, exercising their right to have any errors corrected before completing the Transcript Release Consent Form, consenting to the data being used for its intended purpose and then published (Appendix F). Informed consent also included having the opportunity to withdraw consent for any reason, at any stage, until the Transcript Release Consent Form is signed (Appendix F).

Considerations of trust and confidentiality, go hand in hand in ethical research (Punch, 2014). Ethical considerations include protecting participant identity and mitigating any harm that may come from their participation. Ensuring anonymity for smaller studies, particularly in close knit communities, can be very difficult, as it is not realistic to fully eliminate all risk (Punch, 2014). This has led to the idea of non-traceability, and the practice of having consent sought at various stages throughout the research process (Punch, 2014). Following the recommendations from Punch (2014), confidentiality of the details and perspectives shared in the interview process was ensured through participants consenting to the interview, having the opportunity to review their de-

identified interview scripts (names and specific locations removed), before releasing their transcript to be used for the research and ensuing publication(s) (Appendix F). Non-traceability was supported through de-identification of transcripts before sending to participants for checking, removing people's names, and all potentially identifiable place or venue names. Transcripts, audio recordings, and demographic details were saved using a participant code number, for example ED1 for interview participant one. These were saved on the primary researcher's password protected laptop. The intended statement in public presentations of the data is that educators come from licenced NZ ECE settings in a mix of rural, urban and suburban areas, catering for children from a broad range of socioeconomic and ethnocultural backgrounds.

3.8.2 Compensation

The aspects of participant benefit or gain must also be considered by researchers and balanced with fair reimbursement for expenses and investment of time (Punch, 2014). For this study, participants were given the option for me to travel to a location near them, or for them to travel to my hired office space. Food and drink, for consumption during the interview, were offered to all participants regardless of venue, as a means of recognising their gift of time towards this research.

3.9 Conclusion

The methodological and ethical considerations detailed above validate the procedures used for this research study. A qualitative, semi-structured interview-based approach was considered appropriate, as this study investigated the ideologies behind, and process aspects of, educator-child communication interactions. The lack of internationally consistent approaches to this area of study justified the creation of a new specific questioning protocol. As this study requested educators to share potentially personal details about themselves and their practice, non-traceability has been ensured and data coded, to thematically organise information for analysis. The findings related to steps one to five of the Attride-Stirling (2001) Thematic Network Analysis process are reported in the Results Chapter. Step six, the establishment of connections and influences is further explored in the Discussion Chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore educators' perspectives about children's communication development, including how they describe their communication interactions with children and their beliefs about what influences children's communication development in their ECE setting. This chapter describes the collective findings from the semi-structured interviews. Participants shared their experiences and perspectives, reflecting on their daily interactions with children. An organising framework for the main themes emanating from the data is described in Figure 1 and forms the structure of this chapter.

4.1 The Big Picture

This research set out to identify the Network of Influence, the interconnectedness of factors educators believed influenced children's communication development in ECE settings. The connections among the themes emerged from the data through the data analysis procedure outlined in the previous chapter. Results from the Thematic Network Analysis identified four global themes related to the research questions: *communicative environment, coming to know, alignment*, and *enactment*. The resulting Network of Influence (Figure 1) provides a useful organising framework to present and discuss the themes. Figure 1 details the global and organising themes, and the pattern of interactions within this network. The communicative environment global theme represents the structural and process features, including operational factors, educators' knowledge, and educator noticing. Coming to know represents the relational processes in place to come to know the child and family, and includes building relationships, maintaining those relationships, and creating a sense of belonging for the child and family in the setting. As shown in Figure 1, educators' responses suggested that both the communicative environment elements, and the coming to know factors, influenced the alignment between individual educator's attitudes and beliefs, and team culture. In turn, alignment factors affected educators' daily enactment of communication interactions with children, in which educators detailed either divergence or convergence of the factors of the Network of Influence (Figure 1).

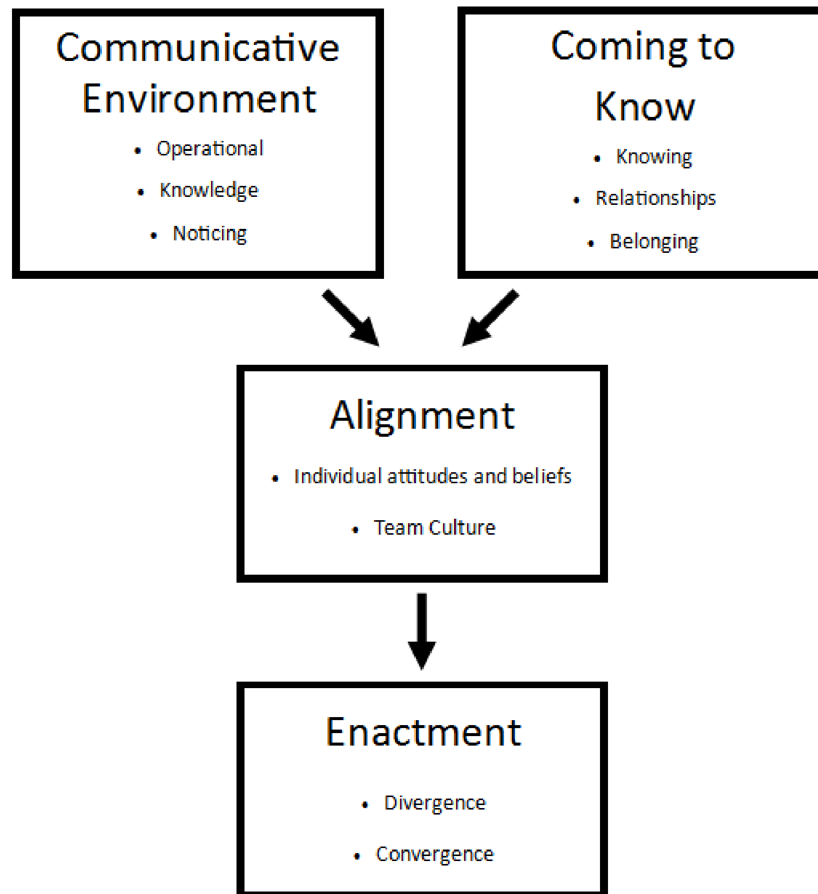

Figure 1: Network of Influence

4.2 Communicative Environment

The communicative environment encompasses features of the ECE setting that educators described as impacting children's communication development. This included operational variables, as well as educators' knowledge, and noticing. Taken together, these elements create the context in which children's communication is expected to develop.

4.2.1 Operational

Educators identified several operational factors they believed influenced children's communication development. These included how educators managed operational variables over which they did not have full control, including finances, time, and physical space.

Notably, all educators raised time as a meaningful variable in supporting children's communication development, and for many this was discussed in conjunction with

funding, as educators believed funding impacted the amount of time they had for various tasks. Due to financial constraints, educators described having to focus on the things they thought would make the biggest difference to children's learning, such as one educator using funding to prioritise "small numbers, PD (professional development)…[and] professional discussion". A further two educators mentioned that their facilities voluntarily kept ratios lower than government requirements. Although this cost more, educators viewed this as money well spent to ensure meaningful interactions with children. One educator reflected on her experience the previous week when their ratios unexpectedly rose to government funded levels; she detailed a conversation in which she asked a colleague "How much time have you spent with any kids today?" to which the colleague responded, "none really", giving the explanation "because you are just flying around". When time constraints were imposed for financial reasons, educators reported they were unable to work as closely as they would like to with children, as one educator explained "if we just had more time or more of us we could be doing those things that we would really like to do", a desire repeated by over half the educators in this study. Educators consistently raised that funding levels needed to be addressed; succinctly summed up by one educator "the Ministry [of Education] needs to give us more money".

A further six educators described instances of prioritising time with individuals or small groups, with one highlighting the importance of "listening to children so that…they are being valued as communicators…treating children with respect and dignity…so that they feel that you will listen." Another educator highlighted time needed for the learning and caring process: "sometimes within our setting there's a big rush to be able to get something done, and I think [we] are always trying to slow people down, and not make them just do it in five seconds flat". Another common theme was the length of time it takes for some children to learn communication skills, and therefore the continuity of educator input required to support learning.

In addition to constraints with the connected variables of money and time, all educators mentioned the impact of physical space factors on communication, including space to enhance belonging, the impact of weather, and concerns about noise levels. The ECE setting's role in community building, as a shared space where families and children

belonged, was detailed by one educator who said "it’s like a mini meeting place here in the morning – a community hub. Families take children to the school next to us then come here and spend time catching up with each other, with their children, and with teachers”. Educators described actively prioritising the creation of safe and welcoming spaces for children and families. They talked about the different types of spaces that can support communication development, with half of the educators mentioning their outside resources as positive for communication development. One educator reflected that she had learned to value outdoor space and physical experiences whilst on the job, "there are lots of things that we can do out of play, physical things that help the language, which I never knew”. Another educator expressed her gratitude with her current ECE setting, stating “we are lucky”, describing their “huge outdoor space”.

Another common physical space factor, was noise, with four educators detailing their struggles with their ECE setting’s acoustics. One educator expanded "the noise just goes up, up, up and up…[I] can't actually hear what they're saying because of the rest of the noise in the place, it's really frustrating”. Educators identified that having fine-weather-only outdoor spaces exacerbates this issue, with one educator sharing "on a wet, rainy day, it's definitely not the best for language development - the noise level is right up there, because we're all inside". Another educator details children "can find that quite overwhelming with all the noise…it makes it harder to calm a situation or to explain what you are doing because you feel like you are going to have to raise your voice".

4.2.2 Knowledge

Educators’ knowledge about communication development and how to enhance children’s development were vital components of the communicative environment. This encompassed educator’s definitions of communication, and the sorts of skills and strategies they employed.

4.2.2.1 Definition of communication development.

All educators stated that communication skills were important for children to develop, with one stating it is "the foundation for building relationships with people, places and things”. Strong communication skills were also considered a protective factor, as one educator noted "hopefully children become confident in being able to enquire and

express themselves really, because when they don't know how to express themselves it usually turns into a negative experience”.

All educators considered communication as including both verbal expression and body language, however, what they named as important skills within these parameters, differed. Collectively, communication development was defined as the multifaceted and ongoing process of acquiring and refining our abilities to listen to others' expressions, and use body language (gestures, eye gaze, facial expressions, and body positioning) to interpret, comprehend what is said and implied, and respond accordingly. Expression was viewed as verbal and non-verbal, with the purpose of sharing messages with others, asking questions, protesting, and singing. The ability to identify and appreciate the feelings and emotions of oneself and others was also included. Communication was described as a two-way process, requiring a communication partner to interpret, understand, and respond accordingly.

One educator expressed that "children also communicate through art, dance, movement, imaginative play, play in general, maths, gesture, singing, feelings, emotions, and sometimes through silence”. These modalities interlinked, as one educator shared “their artwork tells a story about who and what is meaningful to them. These stories intersect with what happens in the whānau” giving the example “child drew a car racing track, talked about it, describing and recalling her family's interest and involvement in car racing". The breadth of communication was summed up by one educator, who stated "everyone communicates slightly differently”.

4.2.2.2 Skills and strategies to use with children.

Educators described a range of strategies they employed to support children's communication development. All educators mentioned the importance of genuine conversations with children, with adults being, as one educator said, "open and responsive" to create two-way, meaningful conversations about children's activities and interests. Seven educators detailed using observation and listening skills, and three highlighting the importance of waiting, with one sharing "we were told about eight seconds is about how long it takes…those kids…to process". Being aware of children's communication styles was mentioned, with one educator giving the example “there is

one child…if you just go and have a conversation with her she is not going to say anything. But if you just sit there and just be, she will start talking”. Interpreting children’s intentions and non-verbal communications, and seeing these as valid, was also discussed. Three educators recounted experiences working with older children who were non-verbal, stating they used children’s facial expressions, body language, and gestures to inform their interpretations of those children’s messages.

All educators stated that intentionally teaching and extending children’s expressive language was an important strategy, giving examples of modelling the words and phrases they wanted children to use. One educator shared "adult guidance and support is hugely important, children benefit from having good oral language role models". Five educators mentioned the consistent and ongoing nature of modelling new words and extending children’s expressive language, and six educators referred to intentionally setting out to support children’s communication development, summarised by one educator "if we see that they are struggling with communication…we would maybe set a goal around one of the learning outcomes in Te Whāriki…then we can pinpoint certain activities that we could do". Using open-ended questions was discussed by eight educators with one stating she used questions such as "What do you think?”, “How will that…” Educators also discussed giving children specific directions and instructions, with three mentioning using specific praise and encouragement.

Alongside English, some educators used NZSL and Te Reo Māori which they explicitly incorporated into daily activities as an important strategy for communication development. One educator explained that this is crucial in NZ, stating "I think that is really, really important; to support Te Reo Māori and the treaty partnership", and another educator commented that several of the children attending her ECE setting had Te Reo Māori as their first and primary home language. Educators discussed the importance of finding and utilising resources in a variety of languages and learning how to pronounce words in children’s first or primary language(s), with one specifying they "put a lot of music on just to help us with pronunciations". One educator empathised “I’ve been to a country where I didn’t understand their language and couldn’t communicate. I felt frightened of being left alone too – and I was an adult”. Using a child’s primary language was considered important for relationship building and a sign

of respect. Given that communication is a two-way process, having a shared understanding is important, with educators viewing using a child's primary language as a communication and wellbeing imperative, supporting children to "feel safe and secure" rather than angry and scared.

Underlying all the strategies used, was the concept of having fun together, with one educator specifying "make it fun, language is fun, it's got to be fun with children, and you've got to be enthusiastic about it". However, making explicit links between the use of a specific strategy and the impact on a child's communication development, was difficult for educators. Several educators identified a knowledge gap around what specific strategies they use to enhance communication development, and exactly how those strategies positively supported children's communication skills, with one sharing "I don't know why or how we build that confidence and competence, but we do".

4.2.3 Noticing

Another important aspect of the communicative environment was noticing. Educators described that observing and listening helped them notice children's individual and collective interests, which they used to achieve sustained and repeated communication interactions. Children's interests were particularly highlighted with eight educators identifying noticing children's interests as a foundational component of communication interactions. For some, this was practical, and for others this was viewed as an educational essential, with one educator sharing "everything should come back from their ideas right through".

One example of the power of noticing children's interests came from an educator recounting a non-verbal child's interest in the electrician fixing a light, explaining that now when the child walks near that light, he turns to look at an educator and points up at the light. The educator shared "he's communicating what he wants you to talk about…if we hadn't noticed him standing under the ladder and really being interested in the electrician we would never have known…it's about…observing, knowing your children". Noticing children's interests was also credited with building children's communicative confidence, with one educator describing a very quiet boy who, when

she noticed his interest in animals, and they engaged in his interest, this "took him and his language and his other skills, you know, way past the norm”.

As a way of extending children’s interests, five educators mentioned the power of novel experiences as communication opportunities, including sensory experiences, and adults taking the time to notice and follow children’s interests and engagement within these opportunities. Changes in the physical environment were highlighted, with one educator recounting an extended communication interaction with a group of students about their new carpentry area, discussing where it had come from, what the children’s previous ‘carpentry experiences’ were, what this area could help them learn, and what safety requirements there might be. She also detailed her plan to extend on this learning, introducing new tools over time, and liaising with families to create further opportunities to revisit the initial discussions, build on children’s understanding, and explicitly teach the name and function of the new tools.

Repetition and routines were also noted as fostering communication learning opportunities by seven educators, with educators sharing that they would often explain to children what was currently happening, what would happen next, and the choices the child had. Daily routines detailed included news sharing time, singing and music, and karakia. Many also pointed out that children and adults have different perspectives on repetition, with one educator sharing "I feel like teachers worry that they [children] are getting bored with the songs, so they want to change it, whereas children need repetition”. One educator detailed how they balance repetition with novelty, explaining that their weekly book rotation meant some favourite books were then not available for an extended period, remedying this with a "favourites box, so they can have that repetitiveness".

Eight educators detailed the important role books have in creating communication opportunities. They highlighted the difference between simply reading a book and sharing books with children, which they defined as interactions using the pictures and the story to link with children’s real lives. One educator gave the example in a book she had, by pointing to a picture and reading “‘I've tasted better sandwiches. I can't seem to make them like our mother’” and then commenting “We might then go into a

discussion about whose mum makes horrible sandwiches, and, you know, whose mum makes delicious sandwiches”. She continued, describing how this could lead to conversations about what children like and don’t like to eat, whether they still eat “horrible” sandwiches, and if not, what they did. Educators detailed that they promote children telling their own stories, including some encouraging children to take photos to create their own books. Actively creating small group learning opportunities and time for individual children was raised by four educators. Educators’ goals were that the children had fun interacting and communicating, and that the educators could create the opportunity for explicit teaching of communication skills, which educators saw as of greater importance for children with communication difficulties.

4.3 Coming to Know

In order to support children’s communication development, educators identified as critical (1) being able to learn about children and their families, (2) building strong, open relationships with children and their families, and prioritising those relationships, and (3) actively building a sense of belonging for children and families in the ECE setting. While educators described the importance of the relationships for all aspects of their engagement with children and families, the sections that follow aim to highlight specific connections made relating to communication development.

4.3.1 Knowing

Getting to know and knowing children and families, through building an understanding of their family and cultural backgrounds, expectations and preferences, was central for educators in their efforts to support children’s communication development. For example, knowing children’s family backgrounds was raised by eight educators, including learning about families’ culture and traditions, educational expectations, and typical child-adult interactions, because, as one educator stated, children "bring the reality of what they may do at home – whatever it be – they bring it here".

Learning about and appreciating family culture was mentioned by six educators as foundational. This created opportunities for families to share about themselves and helping establish what one educator defined as a "culturally responsive context".

Central to this were educators' espoused beliefs, such as this viewpoint from one educator:

> Communication happens through whakapapa…children are not alone, they don't exist in isolation…when we are communicating with children we need to be mindful of this - thinking culturally and not through a Eurocentric lens.

Educators described inviting families to spend time in the facilities and sought to honour children's home language(s) and culture(s) through playing traditional songs, learning everyday words, and writing pepeha detailing the child's physical connections to where they were born. Educators viewed cultural diversity as enriching the communication development of children and themselves.

Learning about families' educational and behavioural expectations was raised by six educators. Educators also stressed the importance of finding agreement or common ground between family and educators' expectations. Four educators shared examples of differences in expectations between family and ECE setting, including one sharing "his whānau speaks for him, and they didn't realise it was an issue". Two educators gave examples of wanting parents to continue the sorts of things educators did, and one educator detailed adopting family expectations, so children do not become confused. Seven educators discussed children's primary relationships and typical interactions as a source of information about expectations and children's communication learning. Children were believed to copy the language around them, which educators identified as both positive and negative, depending on the situation. One educator shared about a child who "had the words, but they are not the right words…like the swearing, the abuse at you…I guess that is what they were used to getting at home". Another educator shared that "there are the children that are obviously read to and have things discussed with them - we can see a huge difference in the conversation that you can have with them".

In addition to understanding the families' backgrounds, expectations and interaction styles and appreciating how these influence the child, educators also described these interactions with families as helpful in getting to know their child as well. Learning about the child's likes and dislikes, history and current needs, and their primary language(s), were all seen as important aspects of getting to know a child to a deeper

level. Specifically, children's wellbeing and medical history was acknowledged by eight educators as important to know about. One educator drew a clear link, stating "well-being and oral language development went hand-in-hand, they were totally intertwined. As one progressed, the other did". This included hearing and ear status, operations and hospitalisations, as well as knowing about any diagnoses that children had received, specifically those suspected of having in-utero alcohol and/or drug exposure, or a potential diagnosis of Autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The language(s) the child has been exposed to, particularly their primary language and exposure to English, were also important. Environmental and care considerations, and their impact, were also raised primarily in two contexts: Firstly, in terms of priority for educators' support, and secondly, for educators to know about and take into consideration, as one educator shared "he's got quite an extensive sort of background…you think he progresses with his communication and the next minute it's gone backwards again, so you can't really guarantee what he's going to be like when he comes in". This information was considered useful, informing expectations and considered during planning so children's individual needs were catered for.

Another component raised by educators was the role of technology, with seven educators mentioning learning about family's and children's technology use, either through observation or directly asking. While several educators highlighted technology as a useful learning tool, a proportion of educators also described noticing a difference in children's communication behaviours, attributed to interactive or antisocial technology exposure. One educator outlined "I suspect a lot of it [communication and interaction difficulties] today is non-interaction with any other people apart from us because the parents arrive, and they have their phone in their hand and they are busy texting". Educators detailed learning which children expressed frustration when games with physical objects did not progress or end the same way as games on technology, as well as noticing those children who utilised technology to seek answers to their questions or access their favourite songs to sing and dance to. Knowing about children's technology exposure was linked to learning about children's communicative interaction skills, as summarised by one educator, "if somebody isn't there to be asking them [the

children] “what about this?”…you know asking them those open ended questions, [devices are] babysitting services”.

4.3.2 Relationships

Relationships were central, with this theme distinguished from the ‘Knowing’ theme, as this section relates to the ongoing active process of maintaining and strengthening associations, a deliberate deepening of the knowing referred to earlier. Relationships encompassed the educator-family relationship, educator-child relationship, and the child-child relationship.

4.3.2.1 Educator-family relationships.

Positive educator-family relationships were mentioned by all educators interviewed. Educators felt these were central to understanding families and viewed them as a great information source. As one educator shared "they (families) know their children better than anyone…for just a few hours a day [we are] caring for their children". Deepening relationships were seen to foster trust and two-way communication and were treasured by educators. Positive relationships enhanced what one educator specified as "home to centre flow…[children] know you're talking to mum and dad…That support from home is a big one". Educators shared that relationships took time to build to a level where everyone felt comfortable, with one educator noting an instance of taking "six to eight months to build on that, talk with mum and dad".

Educators described how they prioritised time with families, with one detailing "we have a nice warm time of being with parents, grandparents and children and siblings in the morning when they come in. It’s relaxed. We teachers just blend in and enjoy the whanaungatanga, the wairua and the talanoa”. Seven educators gave examples of how strong relationships created a platform for potentially difficult conversations about children’s development, particularly if families also experienced communication difficulties. One educator shared "this is so tricky isn't it…you've really got to judge, what you can do and when you're going to do it…you want to have that communication set up, those interactions and those relationships with that parent first". Sometimes these conversations went well, with information sharing resulting in increased understanding and positive outcomes for children. However, sometimes issues were

not easily addressed, with one educator giving the example of a child whose “whole personality was different” when he shifted from the care of one family member to another.

A family’s willingness to work with educators to seek further support for children if needed, was an important relational variable for six educators. Four recounted positive experiences, with one detailing "parents are normally really, really happy if you are saying ‘look I just want to get them checked out’, and they're going ‘yes, I've had some worries too’”. Regardless of the perceived or actual challenges, educators saw persevering as an imperative, with one educator maintaining "I think the major one is talking to the parents. It's scary as hell…the outcome is usually good, but it doesn't ever get any easier…but you have to do it…you've got to try and get some help for that child".

4.3.2.2 Child-educator relationships.

The importance of child-educator relationships was foremost in every interview, with a positive effect on child-educator relationships exemplified by one educator "once I developed relationships with the whānau it got a lot easier. The children see you communicating with their family and they trust you more and want to come with you to do things". This was an initial focus, as one educator explained "we have to develop relationships pretty quickly with kids, we cue on their non-verbal communication as well as what they're verbally saying". Other key concepts mentioned include trust and attention, along with spending time getting to know the child. Many educators shared views that positive, respectful and reciprocal relationships were, as one educator stated, “more than a policy, it's what we value and what we believe in, that is a good learning outcome for children”. Some educators viewed these as even more important for children who did not appear to have positive relationships with their family members, with one sharing “no matter what's going on at home for them, when they walk in this door they know nothing changes, I’m here every day”. The mutuality of relationships with their children was both professionally and personally rewarding for educators, and as one divulged "it's always nice when a kid obviously feels that they can trust you to come and ask you something".

Technology's role was also raised by seven educators. Four mentioned benefits, including accessing songs and music in other languages to help build links and increase communication opportunities. Four discussed barriers, with one stating it's "terrible…you're taking away all that beautifulness of understanding, not just through communication, but you know, through feeling". One educator summed up "technology can be absolutely marvellous, but if we're not there, if somebody isn't there to be asking them 'what about this?', 'what about that?' you know, asking them those open-ended questions, are they just turning into…babysitting".

4.3.2.3 Child-child relationships.

For five educators, children's interactions with other children, helped them get to know children better. Linking with earlier sections, as educators come to know children's interests, they actively used these to foster peer relationships. This was a key part of educators' understanding of their role, with one defining it as "getting children to talk to each other, with each other, listen to each other". Balanced alongside this, was supporting children to develop agency over their own learning.

Tuakana-teina relationships and the ako in groups of children were mentioned by six educators, exemplified by one educator who believed "I think that helps settle them in and helps with their communication because they are familiar with that child already…definitely the tuakana-teina relationships help". This spanned age ranges, with children teaching and learning from each other. Speaking specifically about peer relationships with children with additional learning needs, one educator shared her impression that these were of significant mutual benefit, explaining "the children just love him to bits…they tell him what he needs to be doing, what he doesn't need to be doing…they can read his body language and his signs more…so they've been real teachers to each other".

4.3.3 Belonging

Educators described the process of coming to know children and families, and building genuine relationships with them, as a foundation for connection and belonging. They believed that including families in everyday routines and special events, supported their intentional focus of ensuring that both children and their families felt a sense of

belonging in the ECE setting. Linking with earlier sections, educators discussed the importance of having time and space for families within the ECE setting. Two educators elaborated on their processes of actively promoting this connection and sense of belonging, with one describing the ECE setting as a place "for adults to network and communicate with each other. We have dads, mums, grandmothers and grandfathers, younger and older siblings… [to do] puzzles, read stories, talk and play”.

Educators used a range of modalities in their ongoing communication with families, with the intention of strengthening and deepening relationships. These included face to face discussions, Facebook, and written notes home. Learning journals were highlighted as another relationship building and ongoing communication tool, with parents sharing their aspirations for their children, and photos of key people and events in the child’s life. Educators also discussed using learning journals to share what children were interested in and learning about. One educator also used learning journals to share what they themselves were learning about being a more self-aware and in-tune educator for the child, stating that she shared in the child’s learning journal "‘I realised that I asked you five questions’”. They shared that this was “so that the parents can see…we are not perfect as teachers either…we say to the parents 'do you have any better ideas or anything that we can do?'”.

Community events and celebrations were also mentioned. These included dinner and discussion in the ECE setting, and talks on various topics, with one educator sharing "we try to do a lot of PD for parents so that they are on the same path...we do one every term...some are quite formal, some are informal, some include readings". Visits to other community spaces such as schools also featured, with one educator sharing about their trip to a local school to acknowledge a child’s special connection to that place "her dad went there and her dad's now dead”. Connections through cultural events were also raised, with educators inviting families to share celebrations within the ECE setting, something which many families reportedly engaged with, with three educators recalling families bringing in cultural attire, dance, and music. These positive connections and ensuing sense of belonging also contributed to a deepening of relationships and further knowledge sharing, creating positive progress towards better communication.

4.4 Alignment

The individual attitudes and beliefs of the educators who made up the team, were counterbalanced with teamwork and team culture. Alignment or misalignment had a notable impact on individual educator’s beliefs, experiences, and practices regarding children’s communication development. This section discusses the interrelated variables that affected alignment and the impact they had on communication.

4.4.1 Individual attitudes and beliefs

Educators’ individual attitudes and beliefs were consistently mentioned through the interviews, with ‘I think’, ‘I believe’, ‘I feel’, and ‘I suppose’ used frequently. This occurred when sharing their experiences, not only as an educator but also as a child, as well as when there were discussing what they felt was currently happening with children’s communication development. Analysis suggested that educators were influenced by three individual factors: 1) their childhood experiences, 2) their prior training and learning experiences, and 3) their perspectives about the role of an educator.

Starting with the first factor, educator’s experiences as children shaped their attitudes and beliefs. Three educators wanted to create a better learning environment than they experienced as children, with one describing, "in my era, you were a kid, you were seen and not heard, ‘go play’ you know" and another detailing "my teachers modelled the wrong way to pronounce Te Reo Māori and I had to relearn it later in life. How much more practical, respectful, and enjoyable to learn the phonemes of the language properly as a child”. For three others, reflecting on their childhood experiences highlighted aspects they wanted to recreate, such as singing lots of songs.

Related to the second factor, all educators completed tertiary education studies at various points in their careers. However, individuals’ attitudes to ongoing learning was an area of variation, with one educator sharing "I think a lot of what I have is just my own knowledge from years of teaching. I don't tend to read up a lot” and seven detailing that their learning was deliberate and ongoing. One educator stated that she believed educators “need to keep researching and keep up to date...that's the downside of having some staff that have been here forever because what worked 20 years ago

doesn't necessarily work today". Educators identified that not everyone they worked with shared a similar openness to learning, with one declaring "don't be scared of saying 'I don't know but how can I learn?'" as her approach. Prioritisation of ongoing learning appeared to count, with some educators consciously and specifically including communication skill development in appraisals, researching at home, keeping up to date with MOE publications and webinars, and engaging in consistent self-reflection. Four educators rated experience as crucial, with two specifically mentioning how much they were learning from children.

All educators valued access to ongoing learning opportunities, with one stating "the research on children's language and how they learn is forever changing so what I learnt 25 years ago, I know has changed over time". Educators identified conversations with staff in training as useful for keeping up to date with new research, and mentoring sessions with experienced educators as helpful for guiding reflection. Formal professional development was a valued source of learning, however educators raised concerns about consistent access, with one sharing "there's not that much PD out there for language development…seems to be like the younger sister that's not really thought about that much … consistent PD is a barrier…not like once every 5 years, you know".

The final factor influencing educators' attitudes and beliefs were their perspectives on their role with regard to children's communication development. Educators saw this as multifaceted, with one defining their role as "enabling children to be able to communicate with whoever they encounter, non-verbally, verbally". However, one stated "they're going to learn the most off their parents no matter what". Eight educators believed that sharing knowledge and ideas with whānau was an important aspect of their role, including child development expectations, and ways to positively support children's learning, with one educator sharing "it's trying to quietly get them to understand". Finding more information or other supports for whānau was also highlighted, including linking with various organisations or finding workshops families might like to consider attending. Four educators discussed their application of NZ's ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c), with three mentioning its impact on their practice. Two educators detailing using the learning outcomes from Te Whāriki (MOE,

2017c) to inform their planning, and one described how it influenced their conversations with families.

4.4.2 Team culture

Nine educators discussed the importance of a positive and supportive team culture. Team culture involved engaging in collaborative relationships and professional discussions, holding similar beliefs and underlying educational philosophies, and working in an environment where educators could ask for help. The strength and longevity of relationships formed with team members was highlighted as crucial to a positive team culture. Educators also emphasised respect, open communication, and joint problem solving towards team actions as key team culture elements. The leadership of the ECE setting played a large role in creating and maintaining team culture, with one educator detailing that the biggest influence on their team was their thoughtful and competent leader.

Educators having complimentary skills and approaches also supported the creation and maintenance of team culture, as well as knowing each other well, detailed by one educator "we all know each other quite intimately, we know what we don't like of each other, we know where the strengths are of each other, we know what pisses each other off". Diversity was highlighted as a positive facet, with one educator mentioning gender "we have a male teacher here, he is awesome…(children) communicate differently with him than they do with us" and another discussing cultural diversity "we had a Malaysian teacher here for quite some time…she brought in a lot of different perspectives that we never thought of in regards to communication" as enriching their team.

Six educators appreciated collaborative professional discussions and open communication between educators. Sometimes this occurred throughout the day, through discussions or notes in a communication book. Adults effectively discussing and problem solving together was viewed as one way to demonstrate to children and their families the usefulness of communication skills, as well as a critical component of ensuring educators were aware of children's needs. Other educators had regular meeting times when the children were not around for planning, in-depth conversations to discuss and debate, as well as learn from each other. Some teams had formally

prioritised this, with one educator stating, "communication is one of our internal review evaluation goals...anything that we implement, we discuss with the team and we kind of make these decisions as a team". Another educator proposed that “the barrier is that it [communication] is seen as the least of people's problems, and it's not, communication is the most important". This difference of educator perspective contributed to educators feeling alone, unsupported, and frustrated.

Comparable educational philosophy was also identified as an important aspect of team culture. Six educators specified a range of specific guiding sources, including Reggio Emilia (Reggio children, n.d.) and Resources for Infant Educarers (RIE®, 2019). Educators had learned about these through their training, subsequent professional development, and in previous workplaces. They shared how their philosophies impacted their interactions with children, with one stating "we let children’s learning unfold naturally and holistically ‘ā tōnā wā’ in their own time, so we are not coming along and imposing ourselves on children all the time". Another educator asserted that they “don't do for a child what they can do for themselves, so we don't draw for them, we don't feed them, in this room they feed themselves, they have glasses and they have water, and we have everything real”. All educators shared their thinking, detailing what they prioritise, what they do and do not do, and the extent to which educators believed these views were also held by their other team members.

Connected with culture and underlying educational philosophies, was the extent to which, and the ways that, educators sought help in their setting. All educators described seeking additional help with children’s communication needs. The reported incidence of children’s communication difficulties ranged from a couple of children per ECE setting, to one educator sharing that 35-40% of their roll had various communication needs, including “ones that can't talk at all". For children who educators felt needed more support, six educators accessed the support of fellow team members, discussing different points of view and possible next steps. Researching was a common action, with three educators detailing instances where they used the internet or written materials for guidance. Whānau were another key source of help, with three educators mentioning that they check to see what families think might help.

A team culture of asking for help from others extended to requesting support from SLTs, with nine educators discussing their experiences: three sharing positive encounters, and eight raising concerns. Related to having positive experiences with SLTs, educators reported that having an existing positive relationship with the SLT and being able to phone them for discussions as needed, was helpful. Concerns raised included difficulties with completing referral forms, a long wait time, and issues around parental involvement, with one educator proclaiming "obviously we make referrals to the Ministry (of Education) but that doesn't always work out…if the parents are not on board then the kid is out, and that upsets me because I think it is not the kid's fault".

Two educators described that specialist support levels appeared to decrease over time. When support was sought, educators also expressed annoyance at being told children's communication difficulties were minor, feeling like meeting one child's needs may come at the expense of meeting another's, feeling "left out" of support due to geographical factors, and being told by SLTs to do things they had already tried. Another issue raised connects with the factors outlined under the Operational theme, with one educator sharing that "even if we see a speech specialist…we think 'we could be doing that if we had that person that could spend the time', so that is definitely a barrier for us…I suppose [it] comes down to money really".

Educators also proposed a variety of ideal scenarios to overcome their perceived difficulties. One educator proposed "they [specialists] have to supply one on one for these kids, there's no other way…to be really effective to get them up to speed…it is very important to catch them in these early years". Another educator shared:

> It would have been beneficial, if, every now and then, all the teachers in our team, as well as [specialists] and his family could have all met together when there were no children – an informal discussion, to talk and share about what we know and observe, sharing, suggesting, discussing research and best practice, developing ideas to help support and progress children with speech difficulties – ideas that are specific for individual children.

While these educators shared differing beliefs of responsibility and next steps, there was agreement that change was needed to better support children's communication outcomes.

4.5 Enactment

Educators shared examples of when variables converged and led to positive outcomes for children, or when they diverged and led to frustration and discouragement. The remainder of this section is organised by examples of when divergence occurred, followed by case examples of positive experiences for children that exemplify convergence of the variables described above.

4.5.1 Divergence

When the communicative environment, coming to know processes, alignment of attitudes and beliefs, and educator enactment diverge, educators shared examples of relationship break-down and frustration. These break-downs typically occurred in two primary areas: educator teaming and family-educator relationships. These breakdowns did not specifically expose children to negative outcomes or harm, however, their communication development was not optimised, and more positive outcomes could have been obtained if breakdowns had not occurred.

4.5.2.1 Educator teaming.

Educators shared examples of when they did not share the same philosophy nor believed in taking the same actions as their colleagues. One such example was "we had one staff member over the years who would just be always asking questions, and not giving the children time to answer" continuing "actually, why should we be asking them questions all of the time?" highlighting the divide in educational approaches, beliefs about strategies to use with children, and educator role. Another educator stated "I get a little bit hōhā" as "I will start things off, and they (other educators)…will extend on it" which conflicted with her belief that experienced educators ought to be demonstrating initiative, leadership, and problem solving: "the library bank should be that full enough now that they can cater to that interest (of the child's) on the spot". These occurrences created tension in team relationships, with one educator feeling like her colleagues misunderstood her deliberation action of waiting, for incompetence: "I'm trying to give the child the leadership and that, then they'll come in and go "no, no she's not…" [hand up in stop sign], so then I have to explain myself".

While primary relationships were discussed by several educators, these were not described as 'sole' relationships, with one educator detailing teaming as "if one of us is struggling we tap out and we get somebody else to come in". However, four educators gave the impression that some educators had designated roles supporting children with communication difficulties or developmental delays, with one stating "it's a pity [name of educator]'s not here because she is the one that has actually been supporting two of our children".

4.5.2.2 Family-educator relationships.

Another area educators raised was disagreement with families, with one sharing "what I find is when it is not reciprocal between home and the ECE setting – that's what I find the biggest barrier". Another educator detailed "his mum wants him to come here to speak English" and revealed her struggle to balance mum's wishes with her beliefs about the importance of acknowledging their country of origin, primary language, and significant cultural events, "it's very important for us to know that he knows and you know who you are, and where you're coming from because that's the essence of who we are as Kiwis…where we stand and where we've come from".

Another common theme was when educators believed children needed additional help, and parents did not. One educator shared "I have one at present…his communication is very limited. He screams, he is 3 ½, he throws things, he throws tantrums and he didn't know what he had to do". She described approaching the child's mum "she was like, 'yeah if he doesn't get his way at home he just throws a tantrum and we give him what he wants…we can't be bothered so we just let him go for it'". Another educator detailed "parents can be a barrier for us if they don't feel that there are any issues…we can't access any Ministry (of Education) help or anything unless the parents are on board, so that can be challenging". This was raised as a concern as "they [children] get to school, and they are really, really struggling". Educators described feeling troubled, wondering if what they alone could do would be enough to overcome the communication challenges the child was experiencing. Again, educators reported that breakdowns in relationships with families, and/or holding differing beliefs and values than families about priorities and ways forward, led to educator frustration and regret.

4.5.2 Convergence

When the communicative environment, coming to know processes, alignment of attitudes and beliefs, and educator enactment converged, educators shared examples of strong mutual relationships, teamwork, and positive communication outcomes for children. Three examples of educator's and children's stories are used to highlight the positive communication and experiences when convergence occurs.

4.5.2.1 Case example one: Dance.

One educator shared that she noticed that a child was interested in ballet through observing her dance and talk about the moves and music. Discussions with family revealed an interest in music so she put on "violin music so that would help settle her when she first started". As their relationships deepened, the educator learned more about ballet, including that the family were travelling a long way for lessons. The educator asked ECE setting management for resources such as tutus and ballet slippers to follow the children's interest. They also invited the mum to share her musical skills, which she did, explaining to the children "the different sounds and talked about the music, like the flight of the bumblebees". Educators built on this experience by playing ballet videos and music often, with other children becoming so interested that their families found a ballet teacher to take classes in the school hall. Positive outcomes for the child ensued, with the educator describing she "communicates joy and can tell you the whole story with words" and had developed a wide range of friends through sharing her interest. Team work and asking for help were highlighted:

> It just goes to show how…the support in our teaching team to buy the tutus and ballet slippers, and our wonderful resources like access to YouTube and the big screen TV, and the generosity of the school, and the willingness of the dance teacher to travel, to support the children's interests, it takes a whole team, a motivated group of parents and community support and communication between everyone, for these kinds of things to happen, so it is never one teacher or one person in isolation.

4.5.2.2 Case example two: Bereavement.

One educator described a child "who was so introverted… she didn't show any form of expression…she just watched, she didn't participate" who then experienced the sudden

death of a parent. Educators actively looked for ways to increase their support, leading to daily visits to the family's house with the teaching team, and attending the funeral. This stemmed from her belief that "seeing us more in her family environment…might help her communicate more with us". This appeared to be true, with the family reportedly sharing their child expressed a wish to continue at the ECE setting as she trusted the educators. Upon her return, the girl was paired with the educator she had appeared to gravitate towards during their visits home. The educator shared her perspective that the child had arrived "like a closed book" but she believed the girl "was very brilliant and I knew she had something in there". After three weeks, the mum and educators discussed progress, noting she "was talking, talking, talking and talked about the experience…it was emotional…everybody was crying". At the ECE setting's cultural celebration night, the girl and her mum taught everyone a dance, something the educator noted she had never seen the child do before. She developed peer friendships as well, and her connection with the ECE setting continued despite starting school "she has visited us twice…12 months on you would never believe that it was the same girl".

The educator viewed visiting the child at home as a turning point, with the relationship with the primary educator, and discussions between the educators and with the child's family about what best to do as a team, as vital. Presuming competence, being present especially when children are going through difficult life events, persisting with building positive relationships with children and their families, and fostering connection and belonging as a collective, resulted in personal growth for this child, their family, and the educators involved.

4.5.2.3 Case example three: New language.

A third example was repeated in various forms by several educators. This example comes from one educator, detailing the process of supporting a child who arrived without understanding or speaking English, which was the primary language of the ECE setting. At the beginning, things were difficult "he wouldn't leave dad's side, like at all... as soon as we went near him he would cry". The family wanted their son to learn English in the ECE setting, so the agreement between the family and educators was that the family would do extra visits and stay with him until he was feeling comfortable. The educator highlighted key factors leading to positive communication enactment as the

perseverance displayed by his parents, as well as the joint family-educator priorities of relationship building and team work, sharing “dad speaks really good English, he would come in and sit and talk to us and talk to his son about what we were doing, and I think that made it easier”.

As the educators came to know the family, they identified that the child may be experiencing a “huge culture shock”, and chose to select one educator as a primary caregiver, picking the one who shared the most similar interaction approach as the family “she is quite quiet and mum seems quite quiet…we thought she would be a good fit for her to be his primary caregiver while he settled in, and he took a real shine to her straight away”. At the time of the interview, the educator shared “he is fine, and off playing and he is starting to use some of like our phrases that we use…its nice to see him settling in so well, and dad is so happy."

4.6 Summary

Key aspects of the results include the importance of educators’ process of coming to know children and their families, prioritising these relationships, and building a genuine sense of belonging. This was said to create the opportunity for families to share about themselves, which helped educators create a responsive environment where adults worked together for the benefit of the child’s development. A positive connection and sense of belonging contributed to the deepening of educator-family relationships and further knowledge sharing, enhancing team work, and producing better communication outcomes. The importance of child-educator relationships was noteworthy, and both professionally and personally rewarding for educators.

Educator’s individual attitudes and experiences were valued and considered alongside team culture factors. The importance of a positive and supportive team culture was highlighted, enhanced through explicit and agreed pedagogy, ongoing professional learning, and the practice of asking for help when needed. How these individual and team variables interacted daily was also discussed, with case studies highlighting aspects common in either divergent or convergent educator enactment. When global themes converged, educators shared examples of strong mutual relationships, teamwork, and positive communication outcomes for children. Persevering with

nurturing relationships with families, other educators, and children, as well as ongoing discussions between the educators and the child's family about what best to do as a team, was a positive product of convergent enactment.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will highlight key results and interpretations of the study's findings in relation to current and relevant literature. This study aimed to gain educators' perspectives and lived experiences, exploring the following research questions:

1. What are early childhood educators' perspectives about children's communication development in the early childhood education setting?
2. How do early childhood educators describe their communication interactions with young children?
3. What do early childhood educators believe influences children's communication development in the early childhood education setting?

This Discussion Chapter is structured to answer these three research questions in order. The following interpretation of the results will answer these questions with reference to the key findings of the detailed analysis of educators' personal explanations, quotations, and communication interaction examples given during the semi-structured interviews. The third research question will also reference the Network of Influence (Figure 1), which highlights the connections between the variables educators believe influence children's communication development in ECE settings.

5.1 What are Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives about Children's Communication Development in the Early Childhood Setting?

Throughout the interviews, educators shared their perspectives about children's communication development, including its value and multifaceted nature. This section is arranged according to the organising themes which informed this section.

5.1.1 Educators' beliefs about communication development.

Educators unanimously shared the perspective that communication development is vital for all children. This aligns with the findings of Blackburn and Aubrey (2016) and Leyden, Stackhouse, and Szczerbinski (2011), who reported that educators believed communication is essential for all children across the entire curriculum, and is a prerequisite for positive learning outcomes. While their study populations were slightly different from the current study (semi-structured interviews with school-aged educators compared with early childhood educators), a common thread identified was

the underpinning belief in the value of communication skill development as a core driver of children's positive communication outcomes. It is possible that Te Whāriki's (MOE, 2017c) focus on communication, with four communication goals and six communication learning outcomes (more than any of the other four development strands) influenced the current study's participants' points of view.

While educators' position of highly valuing communication development aligns with Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c), it contrasts with ERO (2017), which suggested that increasing educators' awareness of the importance of children's communication skill development was needed. The current study also contrasts with ERO (2015), which stated that many of the ECE settings with fewer quality language learning opportunities, already had Professional Learning and Development (PLD) available to educators to broaden their knowledge and teaching approaches. This implies that a lack of individual educators' belief in the importance of communication, may be a determining factor in the quality of communication practices ERO (2015). The results from the current study indicated that many educators already possessed a well-articulated belief in the importance of children's communication development, and most held a solid belief that they can make a difference in children's lives through their daily communication interactions.

Several educators reflected on how their own childhood and life experiences had influenced their appreciation of communication skills, and had helped to formulate their perspectives about their role as an educator, as one which should support children's communication development. This links with the ERO report (2015), which found that self-reflection was an important educator behaviour for quality communication support. This position is well documented in research, for example, Foote et al. (2004), who commented that educators' beliefs about what is appropriate language input for children are shaped by their own experiences. The positive impact of the belief in the importance of their role in children's communication development is also well documented (e.g. Brebner et al., 2006; Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017).

Educators held the perspective that family members were key influencers of children's communication development. Educators perceived that variability in children's communication skills was dependent on the child's early life experiences, family

expectations, health and wellbeing, and the role models they had been exposed to during their early years. This appeared congruent with educators' perspectives that getting to know a child also involved getting to know, and building connections with, the child's family. It is possible that this perspective was influenced by Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c), which details relationships, and family and community, as two of the four foundational principles.

Previous literature acknowledged the importance of educators getting to know a child's family, building a strong working relationship with them, and co-constructing a child's development together (Brebner et al., 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2016). However, the extent to which educators believed these relationships were important, was so great, that some educators expressed the feeling that they could not do their job without these relationships in place. Although unnamed by educators in the current study, one potential source of influence on their viewpoints is Ka Hikitia (MOE, 2013), NZ's Māori education strategy, which turns relational beliefs into educational policy. Another potential influence on educators' beliefs could be the person-directed outcomes detailed in NZ's Disability Action Plan (Office for Disability issues, 2015), which codify the responsibilities of all New Zealanders to promote all people's rights to participate in and contribute to society. The understandings of, and beliefs in, the value of belonging and relationships, as expressed by the educators in the current study, resonates with NZ policy and curriculum, and shapes their practice.

Educators perceived providing communication development support to children as a societal responsibility. Most saw themselves as one important part of a wider support network, which included families, other educators, the MOE, and if needed, SLTs. This position reflects the bioecological theory of human development, detailed by Bronfenbrenner, who described the interrelated impacts of the environment and humans on each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), particularly the mesosystem level connections between the family, the ECE setting, and any other communication support people and/or agencies. However, educators shared the perspective that they did not always feel like all those involved agreed about the objectives of children's communication development within the ECE setting, the processes to achieve those goals, or what supports children needed. For many, this was a point of frustration,

especially when they felt unsuccessful in their attempts to access the supports they viewed as imperative for assisting the development of children's communication skills. One possible aspect influencing a team's willingness to seek support in the future was their present and past frustration with not gaining access to the support they believed they and their children needed. This also impacted their perspectives of how to proceed without SLT assistance, to support children's needs. This reiterates findings in previous studies across various age ranges (Brebner et al., 2016; Foote et al., 2004; Marinac et al., 2000; Leyden et al., 2011; Roulstone, Coad, Ayre, Hambly & Lindsay, 2010), and highlights the importance of positive working relationships, founded in collaboration and shared goal setting.

5.1.2 Practices regarding children's communication development

Educators' definitions of communication development was informed by educators' knowledge and noticing. Educators' definitions of communication development were varied, showing an appreciation of both verbal and non-verbal modalities. The collective definition included the multifaceted and ongoing process of acquiring and refining the ability to listen to others' expressions, and use body language (gestures, eye looks, facial expressions, and body positioning) to interpret and comprehend what is said and implied, and then respond accordingly. Of note, is one educator's understanding that children communicate through a variety of modalities, such as artwork, dance, or singing, which links closely with the broader modes of expression outlined in Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c). These ideas are also similar to the philosophies educators mentioned as having informed their practice, such as Reggio (Reggio children, n.d.). One educator specified these other communication modalities as an important consideration. Other educators identified that noticing children's communications was an essential skill, but did not explicitly describe children's communication through these other modalities.

Another aspect of multifaceted communication raised by educators, was the important role of children's primary and other languages, particularly the use of Te Reo Māori and NZSL within daily activities. This is clearly outlined in Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) which asserts that children's home language(s) and culture(s) should be valued in ECE, acknowledging that English, Te Reo Māori, and NZSL are three of around 200 languages children may be regularly exposed to. Valuing children's home language(s) aligns with

Bronfenbrenner's focus on family and environmental factors as constructors of a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), and Brunner's ideas around the importance of ECE settings actively accepting, valuing, and including a child's culture (Brunner, 1996). While no educators in the current study claimed proficiency in all three NZ languages, many educators shared that they actively sought resources in languages other than those they were proficient in, including liaising with parents, and using the internet to find songs and stories in relevant languages to share with children. The perspective that children had a right to have their primary language included in their ECE setting, and educators' espoused actions to back up this perspective, aligns well with Te Whāriki's (MOE, 2017c) intentions for multilingual inclusion, and demonstrates a clear understanding of the importance of holistic communication development.

5.2 How do Early Childhood Educators Describe their Communication Interactions with Young Children?

Educators described their communication interactions with children in numerous ways in response to a variety of topics raised in the semi-structured interviews. Educators' descriptions of their communication interactions took various forms, including short quotations, situational anecdotes, and mini-case stories describing components such as the communicative environment, communication partners, and communication outcomes for all involved. A number of these are highlighted in section 4.5. Analysis of the knowledge and noticing themes under the communicative environment global theme, as well as the knowing, relationships, and belonging themes from the coming to know global theme were integrated to develop a response to this question.

5.2.1 Knowledge of communication strategies

Educators in this study described using the specific strategies of coming alongside children, noticing and following their interests, and intentionally modelling the types of words children might want to use to talk about their experiences. These strategies were similar to those Hu et al. (2017) suggested educators needed more knowledge about. Educators also discussed asking open-ended questions and most importantly, having genuine, reciprocal interactions with fun as a foundation. This concurs with the evidence that when a child is interested in talking about something and their educator follows their interests using a variety of language skills, more in-depth language

experiences ensue (Foote et al., 2004). Previous research has reported that educators notice what children are interested in through observing them (Brebner et al., 2016) and follow their lead (Foote et al., 2004) during communication interactions. These types of strategies and skills were described by many educators in this study, and are well documented, both nationally (Foote et al., 2004; ERO, 2017; MOE, 2017c) and internationally (e.g. Brebner et al., 2016), as positive communication skill builders.

It is important to note that while educators in this study were able to describe how they interacted with children, many did not label specific strategies they were using to engage in and maintain their communication interactions, rather they gave a verbatim recount of communication interactions. Results also indicated that few educators had an explicit knowledge of how to intentionally use specific strategies to teach children new communication skills. This was highlighted by one educator who shared that they did not know how they were building children's communicative confidence and competence, but that they were sure they were achieving it. This aligns with evidence that indicates that while learning environments might be structured well for communication development, opportunities to specifically develop communication skills are less prevalent (Dockrell et al., 2015). This also highlights a potential gap in educators' knowledge of a shared vocabulary to describe and label their actions and the effect of these on children.

5.2.2 The importance of relationships

Analysis of the coming to know global theme, encompassing findings from the knowing, relationships and belonging organising themes, highlighted these as of foundational importance in educators' communication interactions. Educators described their interactions in the context of trusting reciprocal relationships, acknowledging the important role of children's families, other educators, and children's peers. The importance of family connections, and family involvement in the ECE setting was regularly mentioned by educators in this study, which is in line with Ka Hikitia (MOE, 2013) and the findings of previous studies (e.g. Brebner et al., 2016). The impact of these relationships is also highlighted by Bronfenbrenner in his description of the importance of the microsystem and mesosystem on children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Berryman, Ford, and Egan (2015), also discussed the

importance of connections between educators and families, emphasising the significance of deliberate engagement in two-way, trusting relationships, founded on collaboration and partnership. Educators' description of relationships as a communication foundation also appears to be in line with those of the Children's Commissioner, who highlighted the importance of collaboration between families and educators for children's educational success (Children's Commissioner, 2013).

5.3 What do Early Childhood Educators Believe Influences Children's Communication Development in the Early Childhood Setting?

As shown in the Network of Influence (Figure 1) which evolved from the Thematic Network Analysis, the outcome for this research question was informed by a range themes. Both the communicative environment and coming to know processes influenced alignment (individual educators' attitudes and beliefs, as well as the team culture around children's communication development). Patterns in the convergence or divergence within these factors, were connected with educators' reported enactment of communication development practices with children. As exemplified in the convergence case studies, the communicative environment, coming to know, and alignment factors all needed to be positively integrated for educators to believe they were making a constructive difference in children's communication development.

5.3.1 Operational factors

Educators described feeling that they do not have the opportunity to spend as much small group or 1:1 time with children as they feel children deserve and need. This was influenced by both time and financial pressures educators described as negatively impacting their communication enactment. Published research supports these educators' beliefs, with Foote et al. (2004), finding that having more children to each educator created question-answer communication interactions, but fewer children to each educator resulted in in-depth discussions and sustained conversations, supporting children's higher-level thinking, concluding that adult:child ratios impacted communication opportunities. While some educators in the current study explained that their ECE setting tried to alleviate some of these communication barriers through employing more educators than the government requirements, this was not the reality for many. This meant that some educators felt that they did not have the autonomy to

interact with children in the ways they believed they should, and therefore could not implement their preferred practice due to external pressures.

Educators raised physical space as a factor in their communication practice. They identified the communicative importance of having space for children to explore. They also raised the ECE setting's influence in community building and valued having space to include families in the ECE setting. Excessive noise also was identified as a common divergent operational factor. This was especially concerning when outdoor spaces were not accessible due to adverse weather conditions. As with time, space considerations are not a new issue, nor one pertaining solely to NZ. In Canada, Picard (2004) found that children would have to use "extreme vocal effort" (p. 31) to make their message heard in the ECE context, a situation they deemed less than ideal for children who are still developing their communicative competence. In NZ, the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations state that appropriate noise control measures be in place to support safety and learning (New Zealand Legislation, 2008). McLaren (2008) investigated the effects of noise in NZ ECE settings, noting that noise levels negatively impacted children's communication development, exemplified through decreased children's concentration, and increased behavioural difficulties related to irritability and over-stimulation. Measurements revealed that up to 43% of children were exposed to daily noise levels above workplace regulation limits, with up to 90% of children experiencing noise bursts over 140 decibels. The MOE (2018d) recommends that facilities control noise, especially if educators consider this has a negative influence on children. It appears that no decibel limit has been stipulated, rather, each ECE setting is responsible for determining, and implementing, what works best for them.

The World Health Organization (2007) states that adjusting and/or enhancing the physical, social and/or psychological environments children are exposed to should be the focus for the prevention of, and intervention in, communication difficulties. Research from Dockrell et al. (2015) found that the organisation of the classroom space, ability of adults to adjust their oral language according to the child/ren they are interacting with, and having adults actively considering how they deliberately scaffold children's learning, were all important variables of a quality communication context. Analysis of the themes from the current study indicates that educators identified

operational factors as impacting their enactment, with all educators discussing the importance of time, funding and/or space. All but one educator expressed their belief that current operational practices do not create the sorts of environments which they believe consistently, positively, or optimally support children's communication development.

5.3.2 Informed practice

Educators' knowledge about children's communication development and how to enhance it also revealed a range of responses. Definitions of communication varied greatly and included a wide range of communicative components. There was acknowledgement that children communicate differently, however, educators were able to give their opinion on how well the children in their setting were communicating. Given the limitations in explicit communication guidance, and the perceived lack of availability of communication specific PLD, it is unclear where educators have gained the knowledge and skills that would have contributed to their confidence in evaluating children's communication development and relative communication level. The official guidance sources educators mentioned accessing included the goals and learning outcomes detailed in Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c), the webinars on Te Whāriki online (MOE, 2018e), and the teaching standards (Education Council, 2017). Related sources educators mentioned as guiding their practice included the Incredible Years programme (Webster-Stratton, 2012) which a number of educators in NZ will have experienced, and the ERO (2017) report, which recommended that clearer guidelines be made available to educators to support their understanding of communication development. International evidence suggests that the reason there is inconsistency in educators' understandings and judgements regarding children's communication, is that these may be based on their own foundational beliefs (Foote et al., 2004; Marinac et al., 2000) and life experiences (Foote et al., 2004; Hu et al., 2017).

It is important to note that many educators self-identified their need and desire for more knowledge about what specific strategies to use to extend and enhance children's communication development. While educators valued, and sought out, formal PLD and support from communication specialists, these were not relied upon as a primary source of ongoing learning, due to their infrequent availability and/or inaccessibility.

This is congruent with the perspectives they shared about their desire for better access to PLD, time for in depth professional discussion around communication development, and the lack of opportunity they felt they had for these. Better provision of release time for training and planning has been previously raised by educators across different education stages (e.g. Leyden et al., 2011; Starling, Munro, Togher, & Arciuli, 2012). ERO (2015) also clearly identified that leadership, whole-staff PLD, and a culture of frequent reflection on teaching practice and its outcomes, were the key behavioural indicators of quality in the 12% of facilities they deemed to have created a responsive communication environment. Contrary to the position of ERO (2015), which stated that many ECE settings already had appropriate and sufficient PLD available, the educators in the current study made it clear that they did not have ready and/or regular access to the types of PLD they believed would make a positive difference to their communication interactions with children. This aligns with Blackburn and Aubrey (2016), who state that educators may benefit from a more explicit knowledge base regarding children's typical and atypical communication development.

5.3.3 Connections and relationships

As detailed above, educators' motivation for the active inclusion of children's families appears to be founded in educators' beliefs that families are important to children and should play an active role in a child's communication development. Educators' values and beliefs appeared to lead to practices of engaging with families in various ways, with the purpose of getting to know them and building two-way connections. Educators explained that their relationships with families influenced their ability to learn about each child, understand how best to engage with them, and interpret their communications. Importantly for the NZ context, these actions resonate with the findings of Berryman et al. (2015), who detailed that families need to know and connect with the people involved with their children, before considering progressing forward together.

Educators' positive involvement with families took various forms, as detailed in the convergent case studies in section 4.5, providing educators with opportunities for the aspects related to getting to know a child that educators identified as crucial to children's communication development. Although unnamed by educators in the current

study, NZ's Māori education strategy, Ka Hikitia (MOE, 2013), may have influenced educators' viewpoints about the centrality of relationships. The current study appears also to be in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Brebner et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017; Jovanovic et al., 2016), with current educators expressing their belief that their knowledge of, and strong relationships with, children and their families, led to being able to productively work together to develop children's learning and address any specific needs. A strong belief in the importance of these relationships appears to drive educator's practice.

The extent to which educators wished for family input, and the lengths they went to, to enable this to occur, went over and above typical workday requirements, highlighting the depths of educators' personal beliefs in the importance of these connections. Educators shared examples of using a variety of communication modalities to engage with families, respecting families' communication preferences, which in some instances included non-face to face contact such as texts and letters sent home. This reflects what Brebner et al. (2016) detailed about following families' lead about best ways to engage with them.

Educators in the current study also detailed visiting families in their homes, providing fun and educational activities, as well as food, for families, often outside normal operating hours, as well as encouraging family members to stay during session times. This aligns with Brebner et al. (2016) who commented that educators believed spending time with children and their families was important in establishing and maintaining strong relationships, creating the level of trust and attachment necessary for optimal communication outcomes. They achieved this through regular discussions, not just when there were concerns, but also when a child was doing well, which informed educators' planning to ensure children received quality, targeted support (Brebner et al., 2016) This was also highlighted by Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016), who detailed that strong relationships between families and educators were an essential component for working together as an effective network around a child. The idea of relational trust, as raised in Berryman et al. (2015), explains the whole-hearted nature of connection, as being one of true commitment to people without putting barriers or conditions in place.

This was demonstrated in the detailed case studies of convergence (section 4.5.2), all of which highlighted relational variables as central to optimal outcomes.

5.3.4 Alignment between educator's beliefs and espoused practices

Educators believed their role included directly supporting children to develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills which could be used with a variety of communication partners, as well as supporting children to develop positive peer relationships. Balanced alongside this, educators believed they should be supporting children to develop agency over their own learning. Educators primarily described these aspects of their role in the context of child-led interactions, with few detailing educator-led interactions, similar to those described in Foote et al. (2004). These findings concur with those of Hu et al. (2017), that educators' perceptions of their role were multifaceted, with educators balancing many aspects and factors throughout a typical day.

Educators reported that their individual attitudes and beliefs informed their communication interactions not only with children, but also with children's family members. Educators discussed the belief that their role was wide-ranging, echoing the findings of Brebner et al. (2016) who described four core categories of the work of educators, namely observations, programming, team work and family liaison. Educators in the current study described sharing knowledge of communication expectations with whānau as well as ideas of ways families could positively support their child's development outside the ECE setting. This echoes the perspectives shared by educators in Brebner et al. (2016), who believed their role included liaising with families about children's development. The perspectives of the current educators were possibly connected with the beliefs of some of the educators that children's parents were the primary influence over children's communication outcomes. However, most educators in this study shared that they felt they had an important, sometimes primary role to play in children's communication development.

Educators also discussed the role of bi/multi-lingualism in children's communication journeys. Educators shared examples of alignment between their beliefs and the child's family's beliefs, leading to convergent communication enactment, but also shared

examples of incongruent points of view, leading to frustration and divergent communication enactment. Section 4.5.2.3 highlights an example of alignment, with positive communication outcomes for a child. Educators' beliefs about the importance of fostering children's home and/or additional languages, and beliefs about the importance of family involvement, led to the practice of including family members in the ECE setting. Educators described working alongside family members to share knowledge, learn about their child's previous experiences, and understand the family's goal(s) for their child. This can be contrasted with an example from another educator, who held the belief that educators had a responsibility to recognise and nurture children's first language(s), regardless of which language that was. However, the child's mother reportedly expressed her belief that the educators should just focus on teaching her child English, and repeatedly declined to engage with the ECE setting's multi-cultural events and celebrations. Without the involvement of family, and with the disruption in relationship building, the educator faced a "moral" dilemma, which she believed impacted her enactment. This was due to divergence in the components of the coming to know global theme, and the organising themes of knowledge and individual attitudes and beliefs.

5.3.5 Alignment between individual educator's beliefs and team practice

Team alignment of educational philosophies was raised as an important factor in educators' ability to engage in quality communication interactions with children. Educators also described the importance of discussions with peers, time to plan together, as well as joint problem solving when educators identified the need for help to support a child's communication development. Educators considered these team actions vital to ensuring cohesive enactment of educators' communication interactions with children. This appears consistent with the findings of Leyden et al. (2011), which highlighted the importance of time to discuss and plan as a team. It also aligns with the ERO (2015) review of NZ ECE settings, which found that the ECE settings which were responsive to children's communication needs, had a highly reflective self- and whole-staff culture, with educators jointly considering current research theories and approaches and how new learning could be embedded into their daily practice. However, Melasalmi and Husu (2016) raised that engagement in critical reflection on one's own, and colleagues', teaching practice, and the procedures for doing so in a

constructive manner, may be a team culture variable that some teams are not used to enacting. This might help explain why some educators in the current study expressed that this did not always happen in their teams, or did happen, but not in ways that supported their convergent communication enactment.

Educators highlighted team work as an important component of their enactment of communication interactions with children. When this was working well, educators' enactment was aligned; when this was not working as well as educators believed it should, enactment was misaligned. Educators' underlying beliefs and/or educational philosophies were components which educators detailed in examples of both alignment and misalignment. When teams had a shared understanding of expectations, goals, and processes to reach those goals, convergent enactment ensued, even in complex situations, such as those detailed in sections 4.5.2.2 and 4.5.2.3. When teams' beliefs and/or philosophies were incongruent, educators described feeling frustrated, and described communication interactions and outcomes as less than optimal. In some cases, educators perceived incongruence as the cause of educator-educator relationship breakdowns, such as one educator feeling like her colleagues thought of her as 'dense' due to them misunderstanding the philosophical rationale underlying her way of interacting with children.

Educators mentioned that feeling able to ask for help when they were struggling, and the positive and affirming nature of that help, was one component of feeling part of a supportive team. They described the ability to collaborate and discuss options together as enhancing their collective positive impact, fostering trust, and furthering a positive team culture. However, educators shared that this did not always happen due to differences of opinion on the importance of communication development, and ways to enhance it. The importance of educators having complementary skills and a collaborative attitude to team work links with Abry et al. (2015), who found that when educators' beliefs were misaligned, children's learning outcomes were negatively impacted. These findings are particularly relevant considering ERO's (2017) review recommendations for shared understandings and expectations around children's communication development, and the Early Learning Strategic Plan, currently in

development, which aims to strengthen early learning over the next ten years (MOE, 2018b).

Educators' attitudes to personal ongoing learning was another aspect which varied. Many educators described their learning as deliberate and ongoing, expressing their belief in the necessity for keeping up to date with research and guidelines. These educators discussed prioritising their ongoing learning, with some educators including communication skill development in their appraisals and some researching aspects of children's communication development at home. Educators also detailed keeping up to date with MOE publications and webinars, and engaging in consistent self-reflection. These actions align with Macfarlane (2015), who highlighted the importance of educators' openness to new learning and ways of doing things, as well as a broader consideration of learning processes and expected outcomes. Educators identified that not everyone they worked with shared a similar attitude to learning, and this sometimes created a point of tension within teams. This divergence in belief in the importance of, and practical approach towards, educators' engagement in ongoing learning, is an example of misalignment within a team culture.

5.3.5 Enactment

The convergent and divergent enactment stories detailed in section 4.5 are a few of many that educators shared when detailing their personal experiences. They highlight the compounding and interrelating impact of the first three global themes on the fourth global theme: educators' daily enactment of communication interactions with children. The Network of Influence (Figure 1) provides a representation of the many variables involved in children's communication development in ECE settings, and thus the myriad of aspects through which misalignment may occur and enactment may diverge from what educators believed to be optimal.

5.4 Key Findings

Six primary findings were identified: (1) educators perceived communication development as vital for all children and believed it should be prioritised by all those involved with children, including families and the MOE; (2) educators were committed to providing opportunities for children to experience English, Te Reo Māori, and NZSL,

as well as highlighting every child's primary language in meaningful ways in the ECE setting; (3) educators believed children's communication development varied depending on the child's earlier life experiences, family expectations, health and wellbeing, and the communication role models the children had been exposed to during their lives; (4) educators described their communication interactions with young children in the context of trusting and reciprocal relationships, acknowledging relationships not just with the child, but with their family, other educators and other children; (5) educators described knowing that they should be coming alongside children, noticing and following children's interests, and intentionally modelling the types of words children might want to use to talk about their experiences, retaining fun as the foundation for these communication interactions; (6) educators identified multiple influences on their ability to provide optimal communication learning opportunities to children, including communicative environment variables, coming to know children and families, and alignment. The current research suggests that the components of the Network of Influence (Figure 1) need to work in harmony for educators to feel their enactment of daily communication interactions with children was optimal. Educators portrayed their communication interactions with children as less than optimal when even one component in the Network of Influence (Figure 1) was dislocated. This could include a communicative environment's high noise levels, disrupted coming to know processes resulting in a minimal connection with a child's family, or dislocated practice alignment with colleagues who do not agree with an educator's methods.

Findings from this study align with the six facets of culturally responsive evidence-based practice for NZ, as detailed in Macfarlane (2015). These include the importance and integrity of cultural knowledge, and the centrality of connectedness through power sharing in relationships. It also overlaps with the three core themes of Brebner et al. (2016), 'knowing and doing in context', 'ECEs' role', and 'ECEs' challenges', as well as educators' foundational beliefs in the importance of trusting relationships and belonging.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises this study's purpose and design. The study's trustworthiness will be discussed alongside potential implications of the key findings in relation to the work of educators and SLTs. Suggestions for possible further research will be made, as well as some final thoughts.

6.1 Purpose and Design

This study aimed to explore NZ educators' perspectives on young children's communication development. Educators' lived experiences were sought, including perspectives on, and descriptions about, their communication interactions with children, as well as their thoughts and beliefs about the factors which influence children's communication development in their ECE setting. Using research-based qualitative, phenomenological study design principles enabled participants to share their experiences with children's communication development and their involvement in that process. Semi-structured interviews provided a framework for educators to address points salient to them within the designated topics of interest to this study. The data from these interviews allowed for Thematic Network Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to identify diversity and common patterns, for analysis and interpretation.

To date, no other research has examined NZ educators' perspectives on children's communication development, and very little research has been conducted internationally. The findings of this study detail a NZ viewpoint on children's communication development in ECE settings and the factors which influence this development. This new knowledge is useful for understanding the communication dynamics at play in NZ ECE settings, and provides those wishing to support children's communication development, with a Network of Influence (Figure 1) to reflect on and consider. I am aware that my experience working as an SLT has influenced this research, including its purpose, direction, and research questions.

6.2 Trustworthiness of Findings

As this study is qualitative in nature, the concept of trustworthiness is appropriate to encompass discussions of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability of this study (Guba, 1981; Mills, 2014). In this section, study features, processes, and researcher actions bolstering trustworthiness will be discussed.

Credibility is the term used to represent the truth value, or internal validity components of a qualitative study, encompassing the study's ability to capture the information it intended to capture and the authenticity of participant responses (Guba, 1981). The credibility of qualitative methodologies is enhanced by many factors and actions, including a level of awareness and familiarity with the environment or phenomena being studied (Guba, 1981; Shenton,2004). My decade of experience working with children and educators in ECE settings has helped me to understand and appreciate the complexities of these contexts, enhancing my ability to develop relevant and realistic interview questions. This experience also supported my ability to make connections with the interviewees and relate to the content that they shared. These factors strengthen the credibility of this methodology. To ensure participants had the opportunity to speak freely and openly about their experiences, participants were assured of the independent nature of this study (Schachter et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004), reiterated in written form in the study information materials as well as verbally before commencing interviews.

Using a recognised methodological approach, with well documented reasoning pathways, contributes to this study's credibility (Shenton, 2004), as does the use of a published question formulation guide (Patton, 2015) to inform the creation of the novel Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D). Asking educators to provide examples of how they were interacting with children, what they were saying and doing, and what the children were saying or doing, adds to the authenticity of educators' responses. Giving participating educators the opportunity to check the transcripts of their interviews, before releasing them for the study, ensures these are a genuine representation of their lived experiences. Demonstrating harmony with previous studies' findings is another way this study has supported credibility (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability refers to the extent to which some of the results of one study with a certain subset of participants from a particular group, could be applied to other settings with potentially different characteristics (Guba, 1981). To support readers to determine

the level of transferability to their own setting (Shenton, 2004), this study has provided detailed information of the research design, data collection methods, and participant backgrounds, to enable some relative comparison to be made. I have also made clear my background and experiences, as well as my rationale for conducting this study, to help readers understand my socio-cultural position (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). These contextual factors will support other educators and SLTs in their considerations of the applicability of these findings to their own settings.

It is acknowledged that this is an exploratory study, based on interviews with 10 educators in NZ. While this may be perceived as a restriction on transferability, this study was not intended to be of the scale required to be representative of NZ's education system as a whole, nor to represent educators and children internationally. For an in-depth, interview analysis project, 10 participants represented a range of backgrounds and perspectives, and is therefore not a methodological limitation.

Dependability relates to the consistency or reliability of a study, covering the process aspects of the research design and implementation (Guba, 1981). For the current study, this is enhanced through utilising a published questioning guide (Patton, 2015) as well as similar previous published studies in this area (Brebner et al., 2016; Foote et al., 2004) to formulate the Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D). This was further strengthened through peer scrutiny of the questions, as well as multiple trials of the Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol (Appendix D) with non-participating educators prior to pre-data collection. This was to ensure the words, phrases, and approaches used were relatable for educators, and the questions yielded the information they aimed to generate (Shenton, 2004).

Utilising a robust, peer-reviewed coding process, with a comprehensive audit trail from the original transcripts, the member-approved and released transcripts, the open coding of all transcripts, through to coding groupings, basic theme development, and the emergence of organising and global themes, all combine to add to the dependability of the research processes (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). These actions lead to the possibility of other researchers being able to replicate the processes of the research

from design through to analysis (Shenton, 2004). For this study, this has been achieved through the detailed descriptions provided in Chapter Three.

Confirmability is the neutrality or objectivity of a study, ensuring that researcher points of view are clearly articulated, and results are triangulated. Reflexivity provides transparency around the subjective personal factors researchers bring to studies, contributing to the overall confirmability aspects of this study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1981). I have been open with my position, as detailed in section 1.2, especially around the fact that I have worked as an SLT for a decade, and am currently employed as an SLT with responsibility for supporting educators to enhance children's communication development. I have also specified my belief in the importance of learning from educators about the important work they do, and the value I place on team work, both of which may have shaped the interpretations and conclusions detailed in this study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

Another factor supporting confirmability, is the triangulation of data from multiple sources (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). This was achieved through seeking perspectives from 10 educators, utilising an open coding process and highlighting direct quotations from educators, as well as triangulating data to find patterns across the information gathered. These commonalities were highlighted, as were opposing views raised by educators. The audit trail created through the coding and data analysis process was reviewed by supervisors, strengthening the confirmability of the research process.

6.3 Limitations

An important methodological consideration for this study is that it is based on educators voluntarily sharing their views. It is recognised that participants may have had a variety of motivations for volunteering for this study, both stated and unstated. The most frequently mentioned reasons for participation were personally valuing research, especially NZ based research, and a personal interest in children's communication development. This may have provided some bias to the sampled population, and the potential for selection bias is also acknowledged. One surprising factor was that all the participating educators had formal training in education, despite government requirements allowing for untrained or in-training staff to be employed in ECE settings

(New Zealand Legislation, 2008). Potential reasons for non-tertiary trained educators opting not to participate may be multifaceted, however, several of the nine facilities participating educators worked at, also employed non-trained or in-training staff, thus ruling out accessibility concerns as reasons for non-participation. It is also acknowledged that educators may have been influenced to either participate, or not, by my role as an SLT, as well as their personal levels of comfort with participating in a 1:1 recorded interview.

6.4 Implications and Recommendations for Educators

While educators can have a huge impact on children's communication skill development, there are many factors educators identified in this study which may need to converge to ensure children are receiving optimal educator input. If educators perceive that their communication interaction enactment is not optimal, or it is not achieving the desired communication outcomes for their children, educators may wish to reflect on the Network of Influence (Figure 1) and explicitly adjust the aspects within their control. Examining the impact(s) of these changes in relation to children's communication experiences and outcomes, and considering further adjustments, may enable educators to systematically and incrementally address the influential factors most salient in their own ECE settings. As educators detailed, self and whole-team reflections are powerful, so working through this process as a team may provide more satisfying outcomes.

In order to optimise children's communication development, the findings of this study indicate that educators might reflect specifically on their coming to know processes, enhancing these to create a sense of belonging for all educators, children, and their families. It may be important for educators to consider their role within the wider community network as well, contemplating their connections both as individuals and as a collective team (Berryman et al., 2015). Collaborative work within teams may be enhanced through prioritising time and opportunities for discussions about ways of creating alignment between individual and team beliefs and practices, taking into consideration their unique communicative environment and coming to know processes. This may be especially important for settings with high numbers of children from lower

socio-economic backgrounds, or in ECE settings where educators within the team have a wide range of educational philosophies and experiences (Abry et al., 2015).

Previous research has established that early and correct identification of children with language difficulties is crucial, as is an appropriate, integrated response from the child's key communication partners and specialists (e.g. Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010). This requires educators to have a working knowledge of communication development to identify whether a child's communication skill development is progressing as expected, as well as noticing when this is not happening and hence might need more support. Without consistent and clear expectations of the process of children's communication development, it is difficult to see how consistency could be enacted in NZ's current educational landscape. This also involves educators having a comprehensive working knowledge of how to optimise children's communicative competence.

The factors identified in this study as leading to practice which aligns with educators' knowledge and values (convergent enactment) include ensuring educators have (1) sufficient guidelines of communication expectations, (2) a clearly espoused understanding of how they can best enhance children's communication development, (3) access to additional support when needed, and (4) the time to spend working alongside a child who needs additional communication support as well as time with the child's wider communication team. Educators also require the provision of PLD which not only considers their existing knowledge and skills, but also enhances their individual and collective analytical abilities so they can regularly self- and peer-reflect on educator behaviours and the impact of those on children's learning (Wen et al., 2011).

For managers and those in positions of responsibility for educators and ECE provision, this study has several implications. These include considering the Network of Influence (Figure 1) in relation to each specific ECE setting, examining the factors contributing to convergent and/or divergent communication practice, and ensuring educators have the support they need for convergent enactment. This may include controlling operational variables, guaranteeing educators have time to engage with families and children in ways that facilitate comprehensive coming to know processes. This may also include

actively providing opportunities to build team culture, so educators have the skills to and practice with explicitly discussing the variables influencing their communication enactment, as well as feeling comfortable enough to do so within the team dynamic.

The educators in the current study indicated that they would like regular access to the sort of PLD they believe would make a positive difference to their communication interactions with children. This is an important consideration, influencing the entire Network of Influence (Figure 1). Promoting and supporting educators' ongoing learning and development is also stated in Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017c) as one of the key responsibilities of educational leaders. The provision of PLD which focusses on enhancing educators' communication interactions with children may go some way towards overcoming the challenges expressed by educators in this and other studies (e.g., Brebner et al., 2016).

As McLaughlin et al. (2016) shared, to safeguard positive outcomes for children, both educational policy and educators' practice need to support children's participation in high-quality learning interactions with educators. To manage the complex and interlinked communication development variables at play in ECE settings, adequate financing for both the communicative environment, and the people within it, must be in place, ensuring skilled and up-to-date educators have the time and space to give adequate attention to children's individual learning journeys.

6.5 Implications and Recommendations for SLTs

When education settings offer effective communication development support, it is expected that the numbers of children identified with significant communication difficulties should reduce (Dockrell et al., 2015). It is well established that SLTs need to be aware of what educators know and understand about children's communication development, to enlighten their joint work supporting children's communication skill development (eg. Brebner et al., 2016). The Network of Influence (Figure 1) provides guidance on what components need to be considered when co-constructing effective, useful, and sustainable communication development plans with educators. Knowing about, and valuing, the role each factor plays in educators' communication enactment,

may help specialists channel support where it is most needed, including areas that may not previously have been explicitly discussed in communication planning.

While it may not be possible to mitigate all the factors hindering convergent enactment, as described by educators in this study, the Network of Influence (Figure 1) provides a useful framework for discussions and needs analysis. For example, educators' varying knowledge and understanding about children's communication development is important for SLTs to appreciate, as educators may not always notice when a child is experiencing communication difficulties. Likewise, it is important to understand that an individual educator's attitudes and beliefs may not be reflective of all the adults that children are communicating with. It may also be important to consider that the adults around the child may have varying amounts of time to discuss and plan their explicit enactment of communication development strategies together, or may not have this structure in place at all. Effective communication support for educators needs to take into consideration their perceptions and understandings of their role in children's communication development, their beliefs about children's communication development, and their knowledge of communication promoting strategies and practices.

6.6 Considerations for Further Research

Given the small sample size, this study does not claim to be representative of all educators, nor of all ECE settings in NZ. It is not a comprehensive review or definitive document for practice and/or policy development. However, it is an exploratory study which raises several interesting points which warrant further investigation.

Scaling this study to consider the views of a greater number of educators working in a wider range of ECE settings, could further develop the Network of Influence established in this study (Figure 1), allowing for more exploration of the nuanced interplay between the identified factors, and could perhaps reveal further influences not detailed by the educators in this study. A more in-depth investigation into how certain ECE settings achieve convergent enactment more consistently than others could also be valuable in providing guidance for other ECE settings wishing to achieve similar enactment, and

potentially provide critical guidance for the 31-44% of settings exhibiting no to limited enactment towards children's communication development (ERO, 2015; ERO 2017). This could be achieved through exploring links between the examples given by educators in an interview context, and their real-world enactment of communication interactions, drawing out more nuanced aspects of the concepts detailed in the Network of Influence (Figure 1), for further analysis and consideration.

One domain of the Network of Influence (Figure 1) which stands out as a priority area for further research is the noticing organising theme of the communicative environment global theme. Educators' ability to notice changes in children's communication development, and notice which specific educator actions led to this skill development, may be linked with the other communicative environment global theme components. As discussed earlier, both ERO reviews (ERO 2015; ERO 2017) identified room for improvement in educators' communication interactions, highlighting a need for increased understanding about the links between curriculum and practice (ERO, 2015), more robust internal evaluation and reflection (ERO, 2017), and the need to sufficiently track children's communication development (ERO, 2017). These skills all hinge on educators' abilities to notice children's individual communications.

Further exploration of the elements included in the operational and knowledge organising themes could reveal their impact on noticing. This could be achieved through adjusting the components educators raised as impacting their enactment and completing a pre- and post- comparison of educators' perspectives, educator-child communication interactions, and children's communication skills. Supporting increased educator noticing could be useful in raising the quality of educators' daily communication interactions with young children. The operational factors of having more time to spend directly interacting with children and for professional discussion and planning together as a team, could be adjusted through funding for staffing and organisational changes, allowing staff to be together without children present. The operational factors of physical space and noise could be adjusted through building material choice, and the supply of wet-weather options so children can access outside spaces. Knowledge about communication development, particularly the gap some educators identified around specific strategies they used to enhance children's

communication development, and exactly how those strategies positively supported children's communication skill development, could be adjusted through PLD targeting understanding and application with children. Comparing the relative impact of these changes may reveal the extent to which each of these communicative environment variables supports educators' enactment of quality communication interactions with children in each ECE setting.

Secondly, and of significant interest in the NZ context, are the coming to know processes of knowing, relationships, and belonging. Deepening the understanding of which educator and family behaviours and processes lead to convergent communication enactment, may support educators and families towards more reliably positive outcomes for children. Further investigation in this area would add to the NZ research base, linking families' and educators' espoused beliefs, perspectives and understandings, with observable in-setting relationship building behaviours. This could be achieved by widening the research scope to include families and caregivers, seeking their perspectives on what supports, and what hinders, their co-working with educators towards the goal of children who are "competent and confident learners and communicators" (MOE 2017c, p. 5). A further step could be the comparison of these perspectives with information from observable interactions triangulated with perspectives and lived experiences of those involved.

Overall, this area is significantly under-researched nationally and internationally. Given the indispensable role communication skills play in our lives (Brebner et al., 2016; Dockrell et al., 2015; Humber & Snow, 2001; Nation et al., 2010; Nippold, 2010; Snow & Powell, 2012; Te Kete Ipurangi, 2014) it is vital that further research into how children's communication development can be enhanced, is prioritised.

6.7 Final Comments

This study confirms what many in the sector, and research community, have witnessed, that "childcare educators have a wealth of skills, knowledge and expertise which they bring to their work with young children" (Jovanovic et al., 2016, p. 95). The educators involved in this study expressed a firm belief in the importance of children's communication development and a commitment to doing what they could to support

optimal communication outcomes for all children. They defined communication development as the multifaceted and ongoing process of acquiring and refining receptive, expressive, and interpretive language and interaction skills, and shared the perspective that children's opportunities for communication development were influenced by their communication environments and by their communication partners.

Educators raised concerns about the environments in which children are expected to learn and expressed a desire for children to receive more support with their communication development. Educators affirmed the absolute centrality of strong, positive, collaborative relationships between children, families, educators and all those involved in supporting communication enactment in ECE settings. They also highlighted the importance of alignment between individual educator attitudes and the ECE setting's team culture regarding communication practices. Educators reported that convergence in the influencing variables resulted in strong mutual relationships and teamwork, and positive communication outcomes for children. They also reported that misalignment led to divergence of practice, sharing examples of relationship break-down either between educators or in family-educator relationships. These did not expose children to harm, however, their communication development was not optimised, and the difference was notable.

This research arose from my desire to be a more collaborative and supportive communication team member, and a more useful support person for the educators and children I seek to assist. To do this, I sought to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding children's communication development, and the variables which influence communication practice in ECE settings. This study's aims and methodology were based on my belief that educators have understandings about their work with children and families, which could inform my support, and make me a more understanding communication team member. Reflecting on the interviews, and the findings of this study, has led to new personal insights about the importance of working holistically. While classroom environments should develop the communication skills of all children (Dockrell et al., 2015), I need to be mindful of the often-competing priorities educators are expected to uphold. It is vital that I deliberately ask about, and be mindful of, the myriad of

responsibilities educators aspire to embody in their daily work. The interrelatedness of the factors depicted in Figure 1. provides me with a guide for these discussions, and for my own thinking when considering and reviewing communication support.

This research has renewed my commitment to the importance of communication skills and development. As educators shared, communication is "the foundation for building relationships with people, places and things", is "the glue that binds us all together" and is imperative for individual and collective wellbeing. Communication is also a human right (Doell & Clendon, 2018), and we need to do all in our power to ensure children have this right realised.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Study Information Sheet

Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

Tena koe,

Ko Parkihaka te maunga;

Ko Hatea te awa;

Ko Ngāpuhi-Nui-Tonu me Ngati Pakeha nga Iwi;

No Whangarei ahau.

Ko Richard toku papa;

Ko Brenda toku mama;

Ko Emma toku teina;

Ko Suanna Smith toku ingoa;

Photo of my family: sister, mum, me, dad
Hokianga, Northland, 2016

He korero me reo awhina ahau. He tauira o Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa ahau.

I'm Suanna Smith, a Northlander, a daughter, a sister, a speech and language therapist, and a Massey University Masters candidate. I'm seeking your help with a research project, with early childhood educators about children's communication development.

I am currently employed full-time with the Ministry of Education; however this project is being completed independently, and is not receiving financial assistance or paid leave from my employer. This research will form the thesis component of a Master of Speech and Language Therapy, and is supervised by Dr Elizabeth Doell and Dr Tara McLaughlin from Massey University.

Description of Project

The aim of this research project is to gain an understanding of early childhood educators' perspectives and practices regarding children's communication development. While children's communication starts very early on, there is a lot of development of these skills during the preschool years. To date, there has been very little research examining the perspectives of the adults who play a role in guiding preschool communication development.

This study involves 1:1 interviews with 10-15 early childhood educators who are currently working in licenced, teacher-led, early childhood education settings, to

explore their ideas about what might help, or hinder, children's communication development.

Interested?

If you are currently working as an early childhood educator in a licenced, teacher-led, early childhood education setting, please consider participating in this study if you have worked with children aged three to five years old for at least two of the previous four years, for four or more days a week. If this sounds like you, please read on for more information.

Project Procedures

Once you have expressed an interest, I will contact you to complete a demographic form and discuss whether you will participate in the interview stage of the project. The interview is with you as an individual and will last a maximum of 60 minutes. If you wish to bring a support person you are able to do so, however only your information will be recorded and used for the study. You can choose to either travel to an office space in Whangarei, or I can travel to meet you at an agreed venue. I will provide some kai for our time together.

What will happen to your information?

Interviews will be digitally recorded, so they can be transcribed for analysis. Audio files will be stored on password protected computers and will be sent electronically to a professional for transcription. They will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. Transcripts will be depersonalised and names changed as needed. You will have the opportunity to review your transcript before consenting to its use for this research. All data gathered as part of this research will be stored on password protected computers, or in a locked office at Massey University. It will be destroyed via University confidential waste services five years after thesis submission. Findings are intended to be published as a Master's Thesis, as research articles in reputable journals, and possibly shared via verbal and visual presentation at relevant conferences.

Your Rights

This study has gained full ethical approval through Massey University. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this study. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions you have about this study at any time during your participation;
- Decline to answer any question;
- Ask for the digital recorder to be turned off at any stage during the interview;
- Ask for corrections to be made to the written transcript of your interview;
- Withdraw from the study at any time prior to you signing the form to release your interview transcript for the purposes of this study, and ask for any data already collected about you to be destroyed;

- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used. You may choose a non-identifiable pseudonym to be referred to in published research or I will choose one for you;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about this research, or would like to express your interest in participating, please contact the researcher, Suanna Smith, via email child.communication.nz@gmail.com. If you have any questions about this project, you can also contact Dr Elizabeth Doell via E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz or on (09) 414 0800 ext. 43531.

Ethics Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 17/51. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for considering this invitation. Please keep or share this information sheet.

Suanna Smith

Masters Candidate

Speech and Language Therapy Department

Institute of Education

Massey University

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Information Form

Participant Code: _______________

Demographic Information

Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. The information you share on this demographic form will be confidential. You may choose to skip questions you do not wish to answer. If you have any questions about this form, or your participation in this study, please ask.

1. What is your gender?_____________________________
2. What is your age?

□ up to 24 years □ 25 – 34 years □ 35 – 44 years □ 45 – 54 □ 55 years or older

3. What is the total length of time you have worked in early childhood settings?

   (for example, 2 years 5 months) ______ Years ______ Months

4. Have you worked in licenced early childhood settings for at least two of the previous four years: Yes/No
5. Are you a registered teacher with Education Council? □ Yes □ No
6. Please detail your qualification/s: ____________________________________
7. Which best characterises your <u>current</u> setting?

□ Corporate Education and Care □ Kindergarten □ Montessori

□ Community Education and Care □ Te Kōhanga Reo □ Home-based

□ Private Education and Care □ Playcentre □ Other: ___________

8. Which best characterises your <u>previous</u> setting/s (if applicable)?

□ Corporate Education and Care □ Kindergarten □ Montessori

□ Community Education and Care □ Te Kōhanga Reo □ Home-based

□ Private Education and Care □ Playcentre □ Other: ___________

9. What age group/s do you <u>currently</u> work with? (tick all that apply)

□ birth - 1 year □ 1 - 2 years □ 2 - 3 years □ 3 - 4 years □ 4 - 5 years □ 5 + years

10. **What age group/s have you <u>previously</u> worked with?** (if applicable, tick all that apply)

    □ birth - 1 year □ 1 - 2 years □ 2 - 3 years □ 3 - 4 years □ 4 - 5 years □ 5 + years

Thank you for completing this form.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
- I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: ______________________________ Date: ____________

Printed Full Name: ____

Thank you for returning this form. Suanna Smith will be in contact to discuss your inclusion in this study.

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Question Protocol

Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development

1. We are here for an interview to explore your perspectives about children's communication development.
2. You have the right to ask any questions about this study at any time, you can decline to answer any question, and ask for the digital recorder to be turned off at any stage during the interview.
   After this interview, the digital recording will be sent to a transcriber to turn our conversation into a word document, which I'll then send to you.

- Connection/Whakawhanaungatanga
  a. Do you have any questions?
  b. Before we start with the interview questions, would you like to start with karakia?
  c. In terms of your role in early childhood, how do you refer to yourself and the other adults in in your setting?
- As you know, this study is about your perspectives on children's communication development. Given this focus, I'd like to know why you were interested in participating in this study?
- What does the phrase 'communication development' mean to you?
- If I were to follow you through a typical day at your current setting, what would I see and hear while you were communicating with children?
  a. So, thinking about a particular/specific activity or routine you usually do in your day, can you talk me through the sorts of things I might see or hear you doing/communicating?
- What do you believe your role is in children's communication development?
  a. How do you currently support children to communicate with adults?
  b. How do you currently support children to communicate with each other?
- Thinking about the children in your current ECE setting, tell me about how their communication is developing?
  a. How do you think their communication development compares to the skills you expect they should have?

b. If you have concerns about a child's communication development, what do you do?

- Thinking about your everyday communication interactions with children, what do you think are barriers to children's communication development?
  a. Tell me about challenges you have experienced when you're supporting a child's communication?
- Thinking about your everyday communication interactions with children, what do you think helps children become competent and confident communicators?
  a. Have you found any useful tools, people, or resources?
  b. What else do you think you could do to foster children's communication development in your setting?
- Thinking back to when you first started in ECE, is there anything you know now about children's communication development, that you wish you knew then?

Thank you so much for participating, I really appreciate your time and what you've shared with me.

1. The digital recording of this interview will be sent to a transcriber to turn our conversation into a word document, which I'll then send to you. Would you like this emailed to you or a paper copy sent to you?
   (address)____
   ____.

2. Please read through it and let me know if there are any corrections you'd like to be made. Once you're happy with it, please sign the Interview Transcript Release Consent form to release your interview transcript for the purposes of this study, and send the consent form and final transcript back to me.
3. You can either choose a non-identifiable pseudonym, or request the researcher to choose one for you.
4. You can withdraw from the study at any time prior to you sending through the release form and final transcript, and ask for any data already collected about you to be destroyed.
5. Once the project is finished, would you like me to send you a copy? (y / n).

Appendix E: Ethics Committee Approval Notification

Date: 22 November 2017

Dear Suanna Smith

Re: Ethics Notification - **NOR 17/51 - Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development.**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Northern Committee** at their meeting held on **Wednesday, 22 November,**

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 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz W http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz

Appendix F: Transcript Release Consent Form

Early childhood educators' perspectives on children's communication development

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript from the interview conducted with me.

- I agree that this is a true and accurate record of the interview.
- I understand that the information contained in this transcript may be used in reports, presentations, and publications arising from this research.
- I understand that this transcript will be held in archive for five years after the last publication of this data.
- I hereby release this transcript for the purposes of the above study.

Signature: ____ Date: _______

Printed Full Name: ____

Glossary of Non-English terms

Non-English term used	Closest English term
ā tōnā wā	in their own time
Ako	To learn, study, instruct, teach – two-way process
Kaiako	Learning facilitator, teacher, educator
Talanoa	Process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue, to share stories, build empathy and make wise decisions for the collective good
Tamariki	Children
Taonga	Precious gift, treasure
Teina	Younger child of the same gender
Tuakana	Older child of the same gender
Wairua	Spirit
Whakawhanaungatanga	Act of establishing positive relationships and connections with others
Whānau	Family, usually encompassing extended family not just nuclear family