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**What's in that box? An account of foods in kindergarteners
lunchboxes**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Through an ethnographic exploration, this thesis explored the basic process of how foods have come to be in the lunchbox, to question another aspect of the relationship people have to food, and how this contributes to what children are eating. Additionally, two socioeconomic areas were chosen according to their deprivation levels as a way to further explore how foods may differ according to socioeconomic status. From these two areas, discourses of children, their parents, and kindergarten teachers were collected, to gather multiple experiences and first hand accounts of food-related issues. Furthermore, health promoters from an Auckland based health organisation were also recruited for this research. Health promoter representatives captured another perspective of why and what foods go into the lunchbox, which further illustrated the possibility that the construction of the lunchbox is affected by a variety of influences.

Multiple qualitative methods were used to uncover the complexity of food issues among participant groups. These methods included: focus groups with children during their lunch break, focus groups with teachers at the kindergarten, and a focus group with the health promoters at their headquarters. Furthermore, interviews took place with the parents at their home, whilst the lunchboxes were prepared. The main finding was that there were no significant differences in the content of the children's lunchboxes, despite participants being recruited from a low or high socioeconomic area. Furthermore, two themes of accountability and health emerged in the analysis. Throughout these themes, the influences of neoliberal agendas were present, as participants often internalised and individualised responsibility and health issues. However, at the same time, participant groups were aware of the constraints that environmental influences had on decision-making. Together these themes revealed interwoven discourses that exposed a messy set of interrelated food topics. In closing, this project is unique as it looked specifically at early childhood lunchboxes, which is a current gap in the literature. This thesis contributed to a growing body of literature surrounding foods inside the lunchbox.

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