Wilton Playcentre:

A journey of discovery

The beginning

Writers: Linda Mitchell and Pam Cubey (NZCER)
Lily Engelbrecht, Melissa Lock, Jacqui Lowe, and
Nikolien van Wijk (Wilton Playcentre)

Researchers: Dee Arnold, Helen Bell, Clare Collett, Angie Collins, Lily
Englebrecht, Susan Harper, Melissa Lock, Jacqui Lowe, Ainsley Simmonds,
Nikolien van Wijk, Michelle Wilson, and other members of Wilton Playcentre,
and NZCER research associates, Pam Cubey and Linda Mitchell

Foreword

In May 2003, Wilton Playcentre was selected as one of six designated Centres of Innovation (COI) aimed at sharing effective "experience and innovation" in early childhood education. This report is based on a milestone report provided to the Ministry of Education as part of the contractual obligations of a Centre of Innovation. The milestone report was modified for publication.

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Executive summary

This is the first research report for Wilton Playcentre, a designated Centre of Innovation, which is carrying out action research over a 3-year period to investigate the following areas:

- parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners;
- pedagogical approaches and children's learning; and
- continuity and quality across sessions.

Wilton Playcentre members collected baseline data on these areas by gathering documentation, surveying parents, rating process quality for each session day, participating in a group interview held by the research associates, and interviewing team leaders, education officers, Wellington Playcentre Association members, and the education standing committee of the New Zealand Playcentre Federation.

Parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners

There is a high level of parent engagement in the educational programme, since playcentre members are the educators. The playcentre is collectively managed and experienced members act as mentors and models for less experienced members. Wilton Playcentre's values embody the playcentre philosophy and underpin parent engagement. These values include parents' strong desire to play an active role in their child's early childhood education, support for the role of parents as the child's first teacher, and the gaining of skills and knowledge by parents and children through their participation in playcentre.

The experience of participating in the playcentre programme, working alongside playcentre members who are good role models of effective practice, sharing knowledge of children's learning and development, and participation in training courses and professional development are factors that, in combination, support understanding of children's learning and contribute to parenting skills.

Caring and respectful relationships contribute to "a sense of community" among adults and children. There is a view that the past contributes positively to the present and that a culture has developed of high standards of training, care, good quality education, and skill development. Children are regarded as members and active participants. A community of learners is sustained through input to the programme by all families, consistent approaches to children's learning, welcoming and informing new members, friendships which extend outside the playcentre setting, and the playcentre location within the Wilton community.

The playcentre infrastructure at the regional level (e.g. training, professional development, funding, and policy development provided by the Wellington Playcentre Association) supports a learning community.

Pedagogical approaches and children's learning

Much assessment at Wilton Playcentre is informal, and this suits the close communication that exists between playcentre members. The playcentre uses two main approaches to formal assessment of children's learning: a "learning stories" framework, and analysis of children's schemas. Both rely on close observation. These are both areas the playcentre wants to extend.

At each playcentre session, one child is observed using the learning stories framework that documents a child's learning event structured around activities of taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or a feeling, and taking responsibility. After the session, the team on duty that day carries out a short-term review discussing what learning went on. A plan is drawn up for encouraging the interest, ability, strategy, disposition, and story to be more complex and/or to appear in different areas or activities in the programme. Recognition of schemas is also used in programme planning and implementation. The playcentre team works out activities that will capture the interests of children who are exploring schemas in common. Examples from some parents show that schemas are being identified at home and in the playcentre and knowledge of these is being used to extend children's exploration in both settings.

Ratings of process quality, using the Competent Children (Wylie, Thompson, Kerslake, & Hendricks, 1996) rating scale with some modifications, were made in order to:

- gain a picture of aspects of early childhood on which Wilton Playcentre rated highly and to identify those that could be usefully developed in order to lift quality;
- find out the usefulness of training parents to use the ratings;
- consider whether there is continuity of ratings across sessions; and
- track ratings over time.

There were consistently high ratings on a range of items showing that the playcentre is well-equipped, children are given credit as independent thinkers and learners, and adults are playing a responsive and guiding role within the playcentre.

Lowest ratings were found for the following items:

- Tikanga Māori and/or te reo Māori is evident.
- There is evidence of the acceptance of the cultures of the children at the centre.
- There is evidence of children's creativity and artwork.
- The centre is a print-saturated environment.

A group of items had ratings that differed across session days, or between parent educators. These items indicated levels of cognitive challenge and questioning approaches for sustained conversations, and the encouragement of children to find their own answers. The items were:

- Adults ask open-ended questions.
- Children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas and symbols.
- Stories are told and read.
- Children can work on problems and experiment with solutions themselves.

Continuity and quality across settings

Parents' shared knowledge of schemas, learning stories, child development, and of each other's children are the most powerful mechanisms for ensuring continuity and quality between playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre. Ways to strengthen even greater continuity of approaches through using schemas and learning stories will be explored in future action research cycles. Three challenges that have been identified are to: take on board parents' personal circumstances and family responsibilities; continue to induct new members; and ensure documentation is valid and useful.

The next action research cycle

Playcentre members and the research associates analysed the findings from this data collection. They identified key issues and themes to decide what would be addressed by Wilton Playcentre in the long term, what the next action research cycle would have as a focus, and to plan the action research cycle. Playcentre members acknowledged the positive learning environment that they have created for children and adults.

They highlighted the following areas in assessment, planning, and evaluation where they would like to improve in the long term:

- sharpening the focus in observations of children to identify deep involvement and exploring schemas;
- finding effective ways to write up observations as narrative learning stories;
- better linking of planning and evaluation to *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996); and
- reconsidering ways in which documentation is displayed and kept.

The ratings on the process quality scale highlighted areas of adult/child interaction that members are keen to work on: improving the questioning approach (especially asking open-ended questions); encouraging sustained conversations; and extending children's thinking. Playcentre members want to learn how they can extend children's thinking through asking open-ended questions and through scaffolding and co-constructing learning.

Programme areas where the playcentre could make improvements were identified as:

- encouraging children to explore mathematical ideas and symbols;
- enhancing story telling;
- te reo and tikanga Māori;
- recognition of the cultures of all children at the playcentre; and
- developing a print-saturated environment.

The next action research will have a broad focus on teaching and learning, particularly on extending children's thinking through asking open-ended questions, and extending work with children using schemas and learning stories. Within this broad focus, the playcentre will work on one programme area: providing a print-saturated environment. The playcentre will have a much more print-focused environment that encourages children's print awareness.

An action plan for achieving the research goals was developed using a "Gap Analysis" approach. This involved brainstorming about the future state (where the playcentre is aiming to be) with an improved print-saturated environment and more sustained adult/child conversations through effective use of questioning.

Specific steps for the next cycle are as follows:

- The playcentre will take a fresh look at the physical environment through a child's eye (including asking children) to enhance the level of print saturation and opportunities for children's writing, mask making, and story telling.
- In the second term the playcentre will hold workshops on early writing, literacy, and theories and ideas for extending children's thinking.
- As part of professional development, one of the research associates will video interactions between adults and children for later analysis. Digital photographs and observations will continue to be recorded for later analysis.
- The playcentre aims to evaluate our environment and interactions in 3 months time.
- The playcentre will discuss using COI funds to allow employment of a reliever when a member needs to be freed to participate in the research.

Benefits of action research

Parents said that taking part as researchers in the baseline data collection had been a valuable experience. Parents who were involved in the research process said they were empowered by this. They thought they were using and developing their talents as educators of children, writers, analysts, interviewers, observers using the process quality rating scale, and as presenters at hui.

1. Introduction

In May 2003, Wilton Playcentre was selected as one of six designated Centres of Innovation (COI) aimed at showcasing "excellence and innovation" in early childhood education. A governmental vision is that:

> Centres of Innovation foster research and development in the ECE sector and reflect New Zealand's heritage of ingenuity and innovation. The centres capitalise on the experiences of those most likely to produce the best ideas – the people working in ECE services. The programme sees ECE teachers combining their skills with the complementary skills of researchers. Their resulting work means innovation is quantified and tested before being captured in a format suitable for replication throughout the sector. The regular change in the research cycle allows the exploration, documentation and sharing of a diverse range of skills and practices that continues to extend the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Crown, 2002, p. 15).

Pam Cubey and Linda Mitchell from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) are the research associates for Wilton Playcentre, providing research and professional development expertise throughout the project.

Centres of Innovation are required to:

- provide effective approaches to improve early childhood learning and teaching based on *Te Whāriki;*
- carry out action research to explore the effects of innovative approaches to learning and teaching and to develop resources to share with the early childhood sector; and
- share knowledge, understanding, and models of good practice with colleagues and parents/ whānau via a dissemination programme.

This report examines the first action research cycle at Wilton Playcentre. It provides baseline data on the research questions about how Wilton Playcentre engages parents and sustains a community of learners, how Wilton Playcentre provides continuity and quality across sessions, and pedagogical approaches (including use of schemas and learning stories) and children's learning. In order to investigate processes of change for parents and children, we will continue to collect and analyse data during subsequent action research cycles and to document our findings. At the end of the Centre of Innovation project, we will collect data comparable to data gathered in this baseline phase. This will enable us to evaluate the "playcentre journey" as well as changes associated with the action research spirals and being a Centre of Innovation.

What is special about playcentre?[1]

Playcentre is a unique innovation, run as a parent co-operative, which occupies a special place in the early childhood education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand:

> There is nothing like it in the world. A uniquely New Zealand way of educating families (Stover, 1998, p. 1).

Playcentres are designed to create the opportunity for parents and children to share and play together, and to provide learning opportunities for the parents, too. Parents organise and supervise their playcentre, and attend courses and seminars to learn more about how children learn, and how adults can assist. They:

> . . . become more competent as planners, committee members and community workers. Many parents find Playcentre experience can be a training for later employment outside the home. . . . A Playcentre becomes a community of families working together for mutual support and friendship. It fosters a better understanding of a most important job—parenthood (Somerset, 1986, p.11).

It is clear that Somerset believed playcentre was about children and families working together as a community of learners, for the benefit of all the people involved, not just the children. Playcentres operate successfully, in diverse communities, all over the country.

Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (Crown, 2002) emphasises the need to provide "better support for parents and whānau providing early childhood education in licensed and chartered centres" (p. 1) and to offer opportunities for "greater empowerment of parents and whānau to be involved in their children's early learning" (p. 6). Playcentres offer this empowerment, and research into the operation of playcentres and how this enriches the lives of children and their families can be used to inform practice both within the playcentre community and in other services.

In our proposal to become a Centre of Innovation we treated the playcentre itself as the "innovation". Over the early months of being a Centre of Innovation we refined the research objectives and developed the research design. The research focuses on three areas of investigation:

- parent engagement and sustaining a community of learning;
- pedagogical approaches and children's learning; and
- continuity and quality across settings.

The development of a collaborative working relationship between the research associates and Wilton Playcentre members, the establishment of an advisory group, and the research design and methodology for collection of baseline data in our first action research cycle are described in

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[1]   This section is adapted from Wilton Playcentre's proposal to be a Centre of Innovation.

Section 2. In Section 3 we describe our initial research findings on Wilton Playcentre's three areas of investigation at the start of our journey as a Centre of Innovation.

The data gathered in this action research cycle and examined in this report were used by playcentre members to plan long-term goals and their next action research cycle. In the Conclusion, we identify issues arising from the research that will be considered next, and how we intend to approach them.

2. Methodology

Wilton Playcentre is a parent co-operative, operating in ways that enable every family member to participate and contribute from the base of their own skills and experience. An important principle for us was to continue this style of operation in developing our research design and research instruments, data collection, writing research reports, and disseminating findings. In following this principle, we identified the need to share tasks amongst the playcentre members in order to draw on skills and make tasks manageable, while providing our research associates with a point of contact for each phase of the project. Another principle was to ensure that all playcentre members had the opportunity to be regularly updated about the project and to take roles according to their circumstances and wishes. Over the course of the 3-year COI cycle, some families will leave and others will join, and there will be a need to bring new families on board with the work.

We resolved that tasks related to the COI work would be done by small subgroups of playcentre members who had volunteered to work on specific tasks. Also, one or two people would be designated contact people for each phase.

The first phase of our COI research had identifiable tasks for which we sought volunteers:

- research design, including refining research questions, developing a relationship agreement, designing research instruments and gaining ethics approval;
- field research, including gathering consent forms, distributing and collecting surveys, collecting documentation, undertaking interviews and rating process quality;
- writing and analysis; and
- interview: every playcentre family participated in the research by either one or both partners taking part in the group interview of playcentre members and most families filled in the survey.

Relationship agreement

One of the first tasks of the research design group was to develop a "relationship agreement", setting out the basis for our relationship. The relationship agreement sets out our intention to work collaboratively, our appreciation of the time constraints and range of expertise of playcentre members, and our acknowledgement that playcentre members will want different levels and types of involvement. We stated our intention to work in a manner that developed capacity and confidence and drew on strengths and interests. The relationship agreement specified key roles

within the relationship, principles underpinning the working relationship, and our commitments to the COI project.

We regarded the agreement as useful in clarifying principles and roles from the start and as a reference should any problems arise. We intend to review the agreement annually.

Advisory group

We established an advisory group in our first few months as a COI. The role of the advisory group is to provide guidance on our research design and action research cycles, and to review our research instruments. Advisory group members were chosen for their understanding of the playcentre movement and their relationship with the Wilton Playcentre community. Advisory group members are:

- Fay Clarke, Wellington Playcentre Association life member;
- Bronwyn Drennan, Wellington Playcentre Association;
- Marie Ellis, Playcentre Federation and Wellington Playcentre Association;
- Roy Hoerara, Bicultural Co-ordinator, Wellington Playcentre Association;
- Brenda Little, Wellington Playcentre Association;
- Anne Meade, Centre of Innovation Co-ordinator;
- Clare Rumble, Board of Trustees, Otari School; and
- Kate Thornton, Wellington College of Education and Wilton Playcentre life member.

The advisory group has met once to review our research proposal and research instruments.

Research questions

The research design group refined the research questions that had been drafted by the playcentre for the COI proposal.

The research is designed to provide an investigation and analysis of:

- parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners;
- pedagogical approaches (including the use of schemas and learning stories) and children's learning in the Wilton Playcentre journey through the course of the Centre of Innovation project; and
- the role of documentation in maintaining continuity and quality across playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre.

Specific research questions are:

1. What beliefs, practices, and systems contribute to building a strong learning community and high quality early childhood education in Wilton Playcentre?

2. In what ways does Wilton Playcentre engage parents to:

   - be enthusiastic participants in playcentre;
   - be educators of children;
   - be active learners themselves;
   - contribute to running the playcentre; and
   - gain and give support for each other in their role in learning?

3. In what ways does understanding of schemas enable parents to support, extend, and enrich children's learning at home and in the playcentre?

4. In what ways does understanding of learning stories enable parents to support, extend, and enrich children's learning at home and in the playcentre?

5. In what ways do data collection, documentation, planning, and evaluation support parents in maintaining continuity and quality: (a) across playcentre sessions; and (b) between home and playcentre?

The research questions are being addressed through baseline and final phase data collection, and ongoing cycles of action research involving finding a focus, data gathering, analysis and critical reflection, taking action, further data gathering, evaluating, refining the focus, etc. These action research spirals are being followed throughout the course of the COI project. Each stage of the action research cycle will be documented in order to provide research-based knowledge. Methods of data collection vary according to tasks and these are being decided during the course of the project. A video recorder, digital camera, and printer bought with COI funds, are new ways in which we are documenting teaching and learning.

Baseline data collection

The aim of the baseline data collection was to collect information so that we could document the current operation of the centre and collect evidence on the areas to be addressed in the research questions (parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners; the role of documentation in maintaining continuity and quality across playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre; and pedagogical approaches, including the use of schemas and learning stories, and children's learning in the Wilton Playcentre journey through the course of the Centre of Innovation project). We examined the data to determine our long-term plans and next action research cycle. In addition, we intend to use the data for comparison with data collected in our third year as a Centre of Innovation.

In developing research instruments, the research design group discussed the information that needed to be gathered to respond to the research questions, options for gathering data, and content for research instruments. A similar process was followed for consent forms and the information

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sheet. These were then discussed at the Wilton Playcentre advisory group meeting and further revised.

All playcentre members were given copies of the drafts of the research design, research instruments, consent forms, and information sheet. After discussion, these drafts were finalised.

Data collected in the first phase were:

- documentation on how Wilton Playcentre currently operates;
- ratings of process quality at Wilton Playcentre;
- a survey of Wilton Playcentre members to obtain a profile, and a group interview;
- interviews with team leaders, and past and current education officers; and
- interviews with Wellington Playcentre Association and the New Zealand Playcentre Federation.

Interviewers were trained by research associate Pam Cubey, and given notes from NZCER about probing, prompting, and note taking.

The NZCER research associates trained the playcentre field researchers to use the rating scale before the first session that they were to rate. Each of the NZCER research associates carried out ratings of process quality alongside the playcentre field researchers so that ratings could be compared. The raters reached agreement about their ratings at the end of seven sessions that were rated. In the eighth, though there was no time for discussion, the raters largely reached agreement.

Ethics approval

The research design group developed an ethics consent proposal and information sheet about the research. A lot of time was spent discussing ethical considerations. We were aware that as Wilton Playcentre is a Centre of Innovation, participants could not be guaranteed anonymity and needed to give consent or decline, with an understanding of the implications of doing this. One consent form was for permission from families and whānau for observations, video and audio tapes, and children's work to be included in the project. We thought it was important to provide families with the option of giving consent for each individual item and purpose, as some families could be happy about one purpose but not another. The second consent form was for Wilton Playcentre parents and whānau, Wellington Playcentre Association, and New Zealand Playcentre Federation members to be interviewed. The information sheet and consent forms were given to families prior to any data collection about their child or interviews with them. They were also given a copy of the interview schedule before the interview took place.

Ethics approval from the NZCER ethics committee was granted on 29 September 2003.

The information sheet is included in Appendix 1, and the consent forms in Appendix 2.

Research instruments

Baseline data were gathered in November–December 2003.

Profile of current operation

In the baseline phase, we collected documentation from playcentre records, including the RS61E (July return), information on organisational features (how the playcentre operates—sessions, rosters, roles, and responsibilities), licensing, funding, charters, and a physical description.

Survey of parents/caregivers

We gathered information through the survey of parents/caregivers on:

- family households and reasons for choosing playcentre;
- child/ren's attendance at playcentre;
- parental employment, unpaid work, and family income; and
- involvement of parents/caregivers in playcentre.

Appendix 3 includes the survey of parents/caregivers. Fourteen of the 16 families completed the survey.

Measure of process quality

This measure of process quality built on the Competent Children early childhood education rating scale as extended in the NZCER and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust evaluation of equity funding, focusing on the items which have been identified as making a long-term contribution to children's competency levels, and incorporating other items related to interactions with babies and toddlers. One advantage of the NZCER scale was that it helped parents in learning about and making ratings of process quality. This could contribute to parents' understanding of process quality as well as providing research evidence of this. The rating scale and cover sheet are included in Appendix 4.

Wilton Playcentre members and NZCER research associates (working in pairs, and one group of three) did the ratings of process quality. We rated a session on each of the playcentre operating days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday). We did a second rating on these days at least a week later (eight ratings altogether). This enabled us to collect data during two sessions supervised by each of the four playcentre teams.

Interviews with playcentre members

- NZCER research associates carried out a group interview with playcentre members to canvass views on Wilton Playcentre philosophy, views of quality and participation, training/

professional development, and the playcentre experience. The reason the research associates (rather than playcentre members) undertook this interview was to enable all playcentre members to be interviewed.

- Two Wilton Playcentre members interviewed team leaders on processes used for assessment, planning, documentation, and continuity for children between teams in the different sessions and between home and playcentre.

- A Wilton Playcentre member interviewed the two playcentre education officers (past and current) for information about training, support for training, and barriers to training.

- A Wilton Playcentre member arranged for Wellington Playcentre Association representatives to provide a written response to questions about playcentre philosophy, views of quality and participation, professional development, and the playcentre experience. These association representatives wanted to answer our questions in this manner rather than through an interview because it enabled a range of people to be involved.

- A Wilton Playcentre member interviewed the New Zealand Playcentre Federation education standing committee about involvement in the COI project and support for playcentres.

Data on children's experiences

Wilton Playcentre members gathered data on children's experiences and learning through observations, photographs, and documentation.

Each of the interview schedules is included in Appendix 5.

3. Profile of children, parents, and playcentre

Through the survey of playcentre members, playcentre records, and the interview with past and current education officers, we created a profile of Wilton Playcentre children and parents/caregivers, views about playcentre and its impact on families, parent training and professional development, and parent involvement in the playcentre. Wilton Playcentre is a member of the Wellington Playcentre Association, which is affiliated to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation. Interviews with representatives of these organisations helped set Wilton Playcentre's COI programme in a broader context. In this section we describe these characteristics, practices, views, and aspirations.

Children and their attendance at playcentre

All 14 of the families which responded to the survey had two parents/caregivers. The number of people living in the family home ranged from three to five. Most families had two children. Altogether there were 22 children under 5 years of age, ranging in age from small babies to 4-year-olds.

Twenty children from the 14 families were enrolled in playcentre. Eight families had one child attending and six families had two. Not all were enrolled for every session of the week. Four children were enrolled 4 days a week, eight children were enrolled 3 days a week, four children were enrolled 2 days a week, and four children were enrolled 1 day a week. Sixteen were enrolled on Monday, 12 were enrolled on Tuesday and Thursday, and nine were enrolled on Friday.

Six children regularly attended another early childhood education service. Two 3-year-old twins were enrolled in a kindergarten and another playcentre, two children were enrolled in the university crèche (one of the mothers worked at the university, the other mother studied) and one child was enrolled in a community education and care centre. (There was no response about where the sixth child went.)

Two families wanted their child/ren to attend more hours than they were currently attending, one because the parent attended university three mornings a week and the other because of study commitments. Both were using the university crèche as well as Wilton Playcentre.

The length of time children had been at playcentre was: up to 12 months for six children, 1–2 years for nine children, 2–3 years for three children, and 3 years or more for two children. Most families (11) wanted their child/ren to attend playcentre until they went to school. Their reasons included the benefits of playcentre for both parents and children, the continuity for the child, and

because Wilton Playcentre is local and is in the child's community. One parent wanted their child to go to kindergarten and another who was unsure about how long her child would stay, was considering kindergarten because of work commitments.

Nine of the 14 families had chosen local schools for their child (Otari, Northland, and Karori). Others were unsure at this stage. Reasons for choosing local schools were:

- locality and convenience, i.e. proximity to home, the school was part of the community, older siblings already attended; and
- qualities of the school itself, e.g. the school was regarded as "small and friendly", as having good school values and leadership, the whānau grouping was liked, the philosophy was seen to "follow on from playcentre philosophy", the school emphasised "respect for self, others and the environment", the school had a "very good ERO report".

Family characteristics

Twenty-eight parents/caregivers (15 females and 13 males) answered survey questions about themselves.

Nineteen parents/caregivers were in paid employment, being paid to work for the following hours:

- under 10 hours   1
- 16–20 hours   1
- 20–29 hours   4
- 30–39 hours   5
- 40–49 hours   6
- variable (0–25 hours)   1
- no response (but in paid employment)   1

Seven parents/caregivers did unpaid voluntary work in addition to playcentre. Their voluntary work included helping at school (three), being a "friend of Plunket", helping Barnardos, toy library work, and sports coaching.

The majority of respondents who were in paid employment were working in professional occupations which reflected their highest academic qualifications. Twenty-five parents held a tertiary qualification, whether or not they were in paid employment.

Training and professional development

There was extensive involvement in ongoing training with 12 of the parents/caregivers currently involved in further formal study or training. For eight of these people, this was New Zealand

Playcentre Federation training.[2] A tally of the training showed that 15 playcentre members had completed Playcentre Federation's Course 1, with one in training, 10 had completed Course 2 with three in training, four had completed Course 3, and three are working on Course 4. This count includes all completed courses, not just the highest level completed.

A range of courses had been done by parents in the preceding 12 months. Ten people participated in a First Aid Course at the beginning of the year, which means that now most people who participate in the playcentre sessions as duty parents have current first aid knowledge. Eleven of the 18 member families are actively training and the playcentre "got onto Course 1 fairly promptly as we worked in with Ngaio Playcentre". The playcentre has five or six members working on Course 3.

The professional development which has occurred over the past 12 months is:

- training around the COI project. This has included a workshop on action research and the research methodology, two schema workshops, and training of observers and interviewers for the research;
- a scrapbook evening to discuss portfolios and data collection on children's learning;
- a 2-night "Te Reo Māori" course for playcentre members; and
- Wellington College of Education's spring research seminar, "Collaborative Relationships", which was attended by two members.

Some playcentre members attended workshops and courses solely out of interest rather than to further their own training.

Newer members of the playcentre are helped by an experienced person/s to understand the practice and operation of the playcentre, and a buddy system is in place to ensure new members know about professional development opportunities.

External support for training processes takes place through regional and national structures at association and federation levels. Books are published by the federation and sold through the playcentre shop. An association education team is responsible for maintaining the quality of training.

Barriers to training and professional development

Time, family responsibilities, and workload/other commitments were described as personal barriers to parents/caregivers undertaking training and professional development. Barriers included:

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[2] New Zealand Playcentre Federation courses are: Course 1, Introducing playcentre; Course 2, The playcentre way; Course 3, Playcentre sessions; Course 4, Playcentre practice; Course 5, Playcentre in context.

- tiredness;
- new babies;
- babysitting problems;
- clashes with other commitments and partners' commitments;
- own children in session (especially hard-to-do observations); and
- not wanting to have multiple nights out.

Other barriers related to the nature or availability of courses or companionship on the course:

- being the only one at that training level;
- courses filling up on the first/second days of the term;
- time-consuming assignments (particularly in higher-level courses, i.e. Courses 3 and 4);
- delay in receiving course confirmation after completing the course; and
- not all courses are offered every term.

People need to juggle their lives to fit in time to attend meetings, workshops, and courses and they need to be self-motivated:

> The Education Officer needs to find a balance between being encouraging and being pushy. Individual circumstances need to be taken into consideration.

Despite barriers, the figures show a very high uptake of professional development and training amongst the Wilton Playcentre families.

Reasons for choosing playcentre and benefits of playcentre

The most frequent reasons families gave in the survey (n=14) for choosing playcentre were the opportunity to be involved in their child's learning and the value of playcentre for their child. These parents expressed liking the "involvement with my child's learning" (9 families), "children's interactions with others" (3), that playcentre provides a "variety of play activities, including messy play" (3), "education from birth to 5" (2), that there is "freedom to stay beyond 5 years" and "that my child was happy on our enquiry visit" (1).

Some playcentre families chose playcentre because of broader benefits to themselves as well as their child. Six families chose playcentre because they could be involved in a supportive community, 4 liked the playcentre philosophy, 1 liked the availability of training sessions, and 1 wrote of a belief that playcentre is the best type of ECE.

Pragmatic reasons also featured: being close to home (6); and affordability (1). There were some personal reasons for choosing playcentre: playcentre was recommended by others (3); "I went there"; and "My mother got a lot out of playcentre and so did I."

Families identified important benefits of playcentre for themselves and their family:

- opportunities for families to learn through playcentre education courses and through "adult role modelling" for the benefit of children, e.g. "training has allowed me to learn so much about children that I would never have learned otherwise—it has been invaluable", "educating and extending ourselves and so nurturing and feeding children's development", "playcentre changed my mind about children and education" (14);
- the educational experiences offered at playcentre and the manner in which other playcentre members work with the children, e.g. child-initiated play, the variety of activities, the opportunity to learn social skills, children learning from other adults and children (4); and "consistent approach by all", "other adults get to know my child well", and "motivated input to sessions by caring adults" (10);
- being part of a supportive community, e.g. having "a sense of whānau", regarding playcentre as "a home away from home for big and small", and "interacting with like minded people" (10); and
- some practical benefits of playcentre: siblings can attend together and "education is available earlier than at kindergarten" (2).

A further question asked "What impact has playcentre had on your family life? Has it changed the way you see things and/or the way you do things?"

The majority of responses pointed to a greater understanding of children's development, of how children learn and of adults' role in learning, and a change in parents' thinking, resulting in a more relaxed attitude to what the children did in their play:

> . . . letting my child take risks, without me saying 'Be careful.'

> . . . letting my children determine what to do by providing tools and letting them explore as opposed to doing things for them or asking them to do something.

> . . . if he wants to scribble on a drawing he's done, I let him.

> . . . trying to take more time to explain things and involve the children.

Parents thought the increased understanding helped them realise the importance of their parental role and helped them bring out the best in children.

Also mentioned was more confidence working with other children and those older than their own and dads being involved. Support in breastfeeding was appreciated by one mother.

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Wilton Playcentre operation

Playcentre sessions operate on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday,[3] and Friday from 9.15am to 11.45am in school terms only.

> Wilton Playcentre is a fully licensed early childhood facility which welcomes the whole family. Our playcentre is run as a co-operative, which means we as parents, share the responsibilities of planning, working with the children, equipping and maintaining our playcentre.

> Wilton Playcentre endorses Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa/ New Zealand and we are committed to supporting biculturalism in our children's play and our centre (*Welcome to Wilton Playcentre* leaflet).

Sessions are for children from birth to 6 years. While a child is under 2½ years old a parent or caregiver attends the session with them.

Sessions are run by a team of parents/caregivers who are responsible for the same session every week. A minimum commitment for each family is participation in one duty session per week, unless parents are on maternity leave. Parents/caregivers are required to undertake Course 1 playcentre training within 6 months of joining. They are encouraged to undertake further training and attend a Paediatric First Aid course funded by the playcentre or by the Wellington Playcentre Association. When parents/caregivers begin doing a duty morning they are assigned a buddy who is another playcentre member, to help with understanding and to offer support. Parents/caregivers are also required to attend a playcentre session meeting once a term to discuss children's progress and other matters about running sessions.

Some members are elected annually to offices such as president, treasurer, and education officer, and the playcentre is managed through business meetings which all families are expected to participate in. With funding from the COI project, Wilton Playcentre appointed a paid part-time administrator to help with the extra work of being a COI and to relieve some of the workload so that people could undertake COI activities.

Fees are $15 per term for one session per week, $30 for two sessions per week, $45 for three sessions per week, and $60 for four sessions per week. Any siblings also attending a session will be free.

> The playcentre philosophy regards playcentres as "a family concept that recognises that children can fulfil their potential most successfully when their parents/caregivers understand and participate in the learning process. We believe that parents/caregivers are the first and best educators of their children" (Wellington Playcentre Association leaflet *Welcome to Playcentre*).

The philosophy emphasises child-initiated play, children learning at their own pace and level, having time to complete activities to their satisfaction, and exploring and experimenting. Another

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[3] The Thursday session did not operate in 2004.

emphasis is on younger children watching and learning from older children and older children learning nurturing and leadership skills.

Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, is used in planning and evaluation.

Children are encouraged to look after each other and the environment.

Wellington Playcentre Association

Wilton Playcentre is a member of the Wellington Playcentre Association. The association is represented on the COI advisory group, but representatives of the association did not see the association as having a role in influencing how the playcentre carries out the COI programme apart from the advice provided through the advisory group. Playcentre associations support playcentres in major aspects of their operation, including administering bulk funding and providing training. The Wellington Playcentre Association representatives said they support every centre through administration, parent education, property provision, equipment, health and safety and financial support, and through the "centre supporter function". The role of this person is to keep in touch with the playcentre, and "act as a sounding board and a place we can turn to for support and advice if we have some issues in our centre that we are finding difficult". The association representatives said they encourage all centres to undertake research.

They hope that the COI project will "show how great playcentre is". They see it as another opportunity to validate playcentre philosophy and promote it to the early childhood community and the public. They would like the validation to show "that playcentre provides an excellent early childhood service for families, children and parents/caregivers and whānau".

The association offers local playcentres training that leads to the Playcentre Education Diploma (approved and accredited by NZQA), and workshops and topics "necessary to work in a co-operative, manage a centre and run quality sessions for our children". Association representatives said that training "events" available as part of the diploma include: child development; positive guidance; te reo Māori; Te Titiriti o Waitangi; the social child; adult learning styles; health and safety; planning and evaluation; faces of racism; extending children's thinking; how to run a workshop; the adult's role; communication skills; play areas (e.g. clay, carpentry, collage, painting, books, family, playdough, junk construction, science, physical, sand, water, finger-paint, manipulatives, blocks, cooking); and curriculum areas (e.g. science, music, mathematics, literacy).

Wellington Playcentre Association provides a centre support team to help "at risk" centres by working with them to develop an action plan for the centre to gain stability and bring in resources as appropriate. "Always the objective is to empower the centre concerned."

New Zealand Playcentre Federation

The New Zealand Playcentre Federation is the national organisation to which all playcentres are affiliated through their associations. Federation representatives hope that several things will be achieved through the COI programme:

- gaining a better idea of what "quality" may mean in the context of Wilton Playcentre, and publicising Wilton Playcentre, and playcentres in general to the wider world. Representatives thought that the extent of parent involvement in playcentre is itself an innovative practice; and
- showing playcentre to be a credible option, not just a preparation, for kindergarten. They would like the research to show the strength of playcentre.

Federation representatives emphasised that playcentres all reflect their communities and they said that conclusions about quality cannot be too broad. While it is positive for playcentre that Wilton is a COI, they cautioned that Wilton Playcentre should not be seen as "a blueprint or the model of what a playcentre is". They pointed out that different playcentres have different ways of doing things, including having different supervision models.

4. Parent engagement and sustaining a community of learning

One area of investigation through the course of the Centre of Innovation programme is parent engagement and sustaining a community of learning. In particular, we are exploring the following questions:

- What beliefs, practices, and systems contribute to building a strong learning community and high-quality early childhood education in Wilton Playcentre?
- In what ways does Wilton Playcentre engage parents to:
  - be enthusiastic participants in playcentre;
  - be educators of children;
  - be active learners themselves;
  - contribute to running the playcentre; and
  - gain and give support for each other in their role in learning?

The survey showed that there was a high level of involvement of parents/caregivers in the previous 4 weeks in the programme (16 parents participated in parent help or being "duty parents", setting up, resource preparation, excursions, and/or evaluation and planning; 12 had been involved in administration; 11 had been involved in management; 11 had been involved in planning, policy development, committee meetings, committee work, and COI work; and five had been involved in maintenance of buildings, grounds, and equipment. Many partners provided childcare to enable their partner to go to meetings or undertake other playcentre work—15 parents/caregivers did this.

Wilton Playcentre has a pool of experienced parents/caregivers to draw on. Sixteen people had at some time held positions of responsibility within the playcentre. It was not unusual for members who had been at the playcentre for more than a year to have held a range of positions. Some positions are shared between two people (e.g. that of president). With such a small number of families on the roll, most currently have some position of responsibility.

In this section, we draw on data from our survey of parents/caregivers, the group interview of Wilton Playcentre members, the interview with team leaders, and the interview with education officers to describe what the meaning and basis for this involvement is and how Wilton Playcentre currently engages parents to build a "community of learners".

Beliefs

What does Wilton Playcentre really value? Asking this question at the group interview of playcentre members produced an outpouring of responses. The values that are really important embody the playcentre philosophy and underpin parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners. Many parents spoke of a very strong desire to play an active role in their child's early childhood education. Being learners themselves was seen as contributing to this role and beneficial to the adult learner and the child:

> Parents are valued as first teachers. These days all that stress on adults being professionals. Playcentre proves **we** can do it.

> [I like] the fact that I can be involved in the early childhood experience of my kids – I am *there* for it versus picking them up and hearing about it.

> Extending and expanding ourselves enables us to nurture and feed our children's development.

Playcentre members appreciated what playcentre provides for their children and themselves. There were many examples of how playcentre has contributed to changed attitudes and family values about how children learn best, and how playcentre has contributed to parenting skills:

> I was concentrating on keeping R clean and then I learnt to relax.

> Playcentre shifted my own views around what I do with children – not so much shifting my boundaries, but my ideas.

> I realise that children have a reason to do things. I am better now at letting him do what he wants to do.

> Realising what stage they are at and what they can do. It's easy to underestimate what they can do.

> I am better able to talk about children's art, e.g. describing 'Oh, it's a lovely shade of green.' I wouldn't have done that before.

Playcentre validates the role of parents. Increased confidence in themselves resulted from parents being encouraged to take on responsibilities in an area they may not have had the opportunity to work in before. This was identified as especially true of people not working in paid employment:

> At home, as a mother, very few people say you are doing a good job.

> Playcentre validates the choices you make and the job you are doing at home.

Practices and systems

Training and professional support and development

The experience of participating in the educational programme, working alongside playcentre members who are good role models of effective practice, sharing knowledge of children's learning and development, and participation in training courses and professional development are factors that, in combination, support understanding of children's learning and contribute to parenting skills.

Playcentre training, professional development, and peer support play a critical role in strengthening parents as learners themselves. Playcentre members pinpointed the benefits of informal mentoring, where experienced people pass on skills and knowledge to others. A lot is "on the spot learning" while participating in the session on a duty day. This learning is regarded as very supportive, encouraging, and empowering. Formal training through doing a course or taking part in professional development, benefit the learner and the playcentre. "Each loop [of training] gets deeper and leads to fuller understanding." The picture is of a collaborative group of people who, in combination, contribute in different ways to all aspects of playcentre life. Through training, professional development, professional support, and experience over time, skills develop and people gain in confidence:

> Training has allowed me to learn so much about children that I would never have learnt otherwise. This has been invaluable.

> My parenting has improved through training.

> Understanding schemas has enriched my understanding of children's play.

> People become more and more able and more and more involved.

> I love the passing on the history from generation to generation of learner. Like now, to a newcomer I seem quite knowledgeable (laughs) but thanks to [the team leader], I can pass it on when others are struggling or finding things difficult, and then they will do so too. It's like, when you receive a gift – you can pass it on.

> It's not one person on their own. Working as a team we share insights and reflections.

> When you work in a group there is a wide set of skills.

> Adults scaffold each other. The first time I set up an activity, no child came to it. Someone helped me. Eventually I grew in confidence and then others look to you.

Barriers to people being learners were identified as tiredness and insufficient time for assignments for busy parents of young children. At times it is almost impossible to carry out assignment observations when parents' own children are in the "clingy mode".

Sense of community

A sense of belonging to the playcentre community of families helps parents/caregivers to have support and confidence in themselves as learners and educators. There are caring and respectful relationships among adults and children, and no one is excluded from participation. A culture of "community" has developed over the history of the playcentre and there is a view that the past contributes positively to the present. A life member of Wilton Playcentre is respected for her wisdom and contributions and is invited to the annual general meeting and to act as an adviser on some work, including this COI project. There is an enduring culture of high standards of training, care, quality, education, and skills, built from the past and extended in the present:

> The centre looks after people, values people. There is space to be involved.

> Our history is valued, there is pride in maintaining things, keeping continuity, valuing each other and the children. Once in playcentre I want to keep up to that level.

> I was struck about the history of this playcentre. It catches you up and you can see the development of quality.

Children are regarded as members and active participants within the community of learners:

> The overriding values are children and their learning. They have a voice.

> They are treated as special individuals, every one of them. There is the intensity of really knowing the children.

> Our children have security to engage with adults like we would within the family, or even more so.

The motivated input to the sessions by interested and caring adults, friendship with others who also value the playcentre philosophy, the consistent approach by all to children's behaviour and learning were seen as sustaining the playcentre community:

> Other adults and children get to know my child – what he likes and dislikes – we become a close knit community.

There is also a sense of "wider community", of Wilton Playcentre being located in Wilton, of children knowing where each other lives and who their families are.

One issue that was discussed in the group interview was the involvement of non-duty parents. Many of these are fathers and there was a view that "the more men there are the easier it becomes". Two parents spoke of some discomfort for non-duty parents who are not involved as duty parents:

> Sometimes you feel left out as if you are missing out. You don't have a finger on the pulse anymore. You don't have such a sense of belonging. [Parent on maternity leave]

> It's a confidence thing. [My partner who did not spend time at playcentre as a duty parent] wanted me to come with him to playcentre. He felt very nervous. It's an unfamiliar environment.

Team leaders had ideas for developing good relationships amongst parents. These included: being welcomed as you arrive; having an information officer and social occasions; having a president who is a good communicator; having a respectful positive regard; inviting new people to your home to make them feel like part of the community; and others having an interest in your personal life. These things "make you feel valued":

> Having a feeling of shared responsibility.

Supportive conditions for a community of learners

Excellent adult:child ratios were identified as supporting a good learning environment for children by enabling duty team members to put into practice what they had learned.

Playcentre members said parents became active learners themselves by listening to more experienced members and observing their interactions with children. Education programmes, workshops, session meetings, evaluation, sharing experiences, and brainstorming also extended parents' competence and confidence in working with the children:

> You pick up so much from others' modelling. You do get drawn into it. You see skills and techniques.

Freedom for parent educators running as a co-operative to "change what they do not like" parallels the way "any good teacher changes their ways if what is happening is not effective". Such freedom, therefore, was seen as encouraging self-review.

The playcentre infrastructure provides a solid base of support. The infrastructure includes the established mechanisms (e.g. office-holding positions, policies, resources like library books) within Wilton Playcentre for parent engagement in the management of the playcentre, the education programme, and the social life of the playcentre. The Wellington Playcentre Association provides immense support, especially for training and professional development, networking, funding, and policy development.

5. Pedagogical approaches and children's learning

Our second area of investigation is teaching and learning approaches (including the use of schemas and learning stories) and children's learning in the Wilton Playcentre journey through the Centre of Innovation project. In particular we are starting with the following questions:

- In what ways does understanding of schemas enable parents to support, extend, and enrich children's learning at home and in the playcentre?
- In what ways does understanding of learning stories enable parents to support, extend, and enrich children's learning at home and in the playcentre?

In this section we examine the use of schemas and learning stories and data from the ratings of quality, the interview with team leaders and education officers, the survey of parents, and documentation from the playcentre to describe Wilton Playcentre's approach to pedagogy at the start of the COI programme.

In order to set a context for this approach to pedagogy, we started by considering playcentre members' hopes and aspirations for children's learning and development that were expressed in the group interview of playcentre members.

Hopes and aspirations for children's learning

Parents appreciated the playcentre for providing opportunities for children to flourish and grow, be creative, and learn to love learning. Children were never "squashed". Several mentioned the acceptance of messy play, which was not always so easy to provide in the home. Parents thought playcentre valued children as individuals and encouraged children to be participants, to have a voice:

> Here they are treated as special individuals, every one of them. There is the intensity of really knowing the children.

> Children are valued as people who can make decisions and have desires and needs.

> Our children have security to engage with adults like we would within the family or even more so.

> We create an environment and help children to ask for what they need and what they want to explore.

When parents were asked to prioritise three things they hoped children learn at playcentre, they identified areas that showed a strong commitment to children's wellbeing, to fostering children's learning dispositions, knowledge, and skills, and to becoming active participants in society.

They wanted children to have a sense of belonging, to have strong self-esteem and empathy, and to respect others, themselves, and the environment. Wilton Playcentre rules "Person, Play, Property: Don't hurt another child. Don't destroy others' play. Don't destroy materials and equipment" encourage children to look after and respect one another. Respect extends to responsibility for the environment and is part of the playcentre philosophy:

> It comes back to respect. What is respect for the environment? e.g. in their play everything has a right to be—don't go around destroying trees and so on.

Within the playcentre programme children become involved with recycling, the worm farm, composting, and growing things in the garden. There are limits and children are helped to learn what is appropriate in different situations:

> We allow children to use lots of materials but not to waste them or be destructive.

Parents hoped children would be excited about learning, maximise and extend their knowledge, skills, and areas of interest, and be "confident that they can learn". They hoped children would make good choices in decision making, be able to work at their own pace, develop good social and communication skills, and be able to interact with a wide range of children:

> To develop a zest for learning, learn about having fun and being imaginative, enjoying things about life.

> To have a sense of being a community, turangawaewae—a place to stand and belong to.

> To understand that everyone is human and to treat everyone with respect.

Role of parents as educators

Playcentre members identified an important role for adults in encouraging children to persevere with activities they find difficult.

Helen helps Emma transport her buggy up the stairs. Emma has a goal in mind, and is persisting in achieving it by enlisting Helen's help. The playcentre is inclusive of all children and the very young have their rightful place.

Parents said they get to know the children well and this knowledge helps them gauge what will interest children and what encouragement is needed.

Martha reading to a very intent audience. Laevers (1996) says that we know when children are learning from signals such as concentration, satisfaction, and being absorbed in what they are doing. He calls these involvement signals. These children are deeply engaged in the story. Their facial expression tells us the children are watching and listening intently.

Parents engage in co-construction with the children:

> We talk it over: 'What do you think we should do?' Use encouragement to get children thinking and then see them proud and pleased.

> At the carpentry table, if a nail keeps falling over you talk about it: 'What are you going to do about it?'

> It's about respect for their ideas, having a shared philosophy. Early in the piece was the message to let children work it out for themselves.

At times it is a matter of getting children to use their own knowledge and see how it is used:

> My daughter wanted me to draw a car for her. I had read *Magic Places* so said, 'What does a car have?' She said 'Wheels.' 'Well then, how many?' and off she started.

Framing conditions to support learning

Parents were asked what structures there are in place to encourage children to talk and think about their experiences and learning. They said the following practices support such thinking and talking: the use of open-ended questions by adults; high adult:child ratios; storyboards; projects which cross over sessions; using digital camera photos to discuss the morning's activities at morning tea time; encouraging children to talk; and the skills of the adults.

Reuben was posting balls through the tube. A small ball came out at the bottom. But when Reuben posted a tennis ball, it did not appear. Reuben looked up the tube from the bottom and down from the top. No ball appeared. He tried poking with a small stick. Helen suggested a larger stick, which she gave to him. She is as interested as Reuben in the outcome. In this learning episode, Reuben is working on problems and experimenting with solutions. Helen is guiding Reuben and participating with him in this activity. This episode illustrates two aspects of process quality.

Good adult:child ratios help parents to work closely with children and respond to them. Useful approaches were identified as adult modelling, helping and supporting children to express how they feel when they are upset, and listening to what they say:

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Don't just say 'Don't do that.' Ask the child what they could have done instead. Give them the words.

Use their feelings and emotions. Often I say: 'Do you remember when X did that to you and how did you feel?'

Equity of opportunity

Equity of opportunity for children is supported by high adult:child ratios, knowing the children well, careful observation, noting children who want a turn in some form of play, arranging things to capture the interest of different children and accepting different children's styles and interests as appropriate. It was felt that the programme evaluation by the team at the end of each session reveals any problems. The evaluation form has a useful question: "Was there anyone for whom the programme did not work today?" The discussion leads to planning how to deal with such problems.

Session meetings when children's progress is discussed with the parents can also address questions of equity of opportunity. Vivian Gussin Paley's approach in *You Can't say you Can't Play* (1992) was mentioned:

We have had some examples of exclusion. With our ratios we can sort something out.

When there is adversity we learn from discussion. There is a system in place in case of such difficulties.

Assessment

There are two main approaches to assessment at Wilton Playcentre. One is use of a learning stories framework; the other is analysis of children's schemas. Both learning stories and schemas require adults to make close observations of the children, and the data gathered about children draw heavily on both formal and informal observations. Informal assessment is an everyday occurrence, and particularly valuable in a setting where all the adults know the children well.

Learning stories

Wilton Playcentre uses the computer-based learning story format developed by the Ministry of Education's Educational Leadership Project and is based on Carr, M., May, H., Podmore, V., Cubey, P., Hatherly, A., & Macartney, B. (2000) learning stories framework:

A Learning Story is a documented account of a child's learning event, structured around five key behaviours: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or a feeling, and taking responsibility (or another point of view). These Learning Stories accumulate over time, and are used by practitioners for individual

planning: to move a child on to the next step in the story structure, to make any one step more complex, or to encourage positive Learning Stories to become a habit, a disposition, and an expectation. Each step in the story structure reflects well-defined skills and understandings, specific to the programme and to the context within the programme (the particular interest); the steps parallel the strands of the early childhood curriculum (Carr et al., 2000, p. 7).

An example of a learning story taken by one of the playcentre fathers for Nicholas (nearly 4 years old) is set out below. The learning story was a handwritten narrative, written while the father was on duty and based on his close observation of Nicholas.

Observation

		DISPOSITIONS EXAMPLES OR CUES	A LEARNING STORY
belonging mana whenua	TAKING AN INTEREST	Finding an interest *here* - a topic, an activity, a role. Recognising the familiar, enjoying the unfamiliar. Coping with change.	*[handwritten learning story — see original]* Nicholas is busy at the out-side table — a melange of glory is being worked around and colour is added on. He reaches for new colours
wellbeing mana atua	BEING INVOLVED	Paying attention for a sustained period, feeling safe, trusing others. Being playful with others and/or materials.	and explores the changing texture. Nicholas asks for some more glory, then adds new colours in. A self-selected quick break for
exploration mana aotūroa	PERSISTING WITH DIFFICULTY	Setting and choosing difficult tasks. Using a range of strategies to solve problems when "stuck" *(be specific)*	then back at the table, adding some coloured water to mix. Transporting / interaction with
communication te reo	EXPRESSING AN IDEA OF A FEELING	In a range of ways (specify); for example: oral language, gesture, music, art, writing, using numbers and patterns, telling stories.	coloured water together in hurry with a little help - of a team working
contribution mana tangata	TAKING RESPONSIBILITY	Responding to others, to stories, and imagined events, ensuring that things are fair, self-evaluating, helping others, contributing to programme.	*[handwritten text continues]*

Short Term Review	What Next?
[handwritten] Key consolidation of belonging, teamwork, verbal interaction, questioning of others, ascertaining their wishes via engagement. Also v. focussed in play, and being quite responsive to others, and children's requests. Extending whilst remaining verbal and fun play.	*[handwritten]* More messy play. ? Science / water experiments
Question: What learning did I think went on here (ie the main point(s) of the learning story)?	Question: How might we encourage this interest, ability, strategy, disposition, story to • be more complex • appear in different areas or activities in the programme How might we encourage the "next" step in the learning story framework?

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The short-term review summarises the team's views on the learning that occurred for Nicholas, and the notes on "What next?" suggest how the learning can be extended. This team followed up these suggestions in subsequent sessions. The father draws links to *Te Whāriki* and to schemas in his observation, and the *Te Whāriki* linkages are extended in the short-term review.

Schemas

"Schemas" are described in the playcentre documentation as:

> . . . observable, repetitive patterns of behaviour in children's play. For children who are pre-verbal observing schemas is an easy way for showing parents and caregivers of young children and other adults on session with them what things they are interested in so their play can be extended and enriched, and their vocabulary extended as the words to explain what is happening are scaffolded by the parent/caregivers. Some examples of common schemas are dynamic vertical (e.g. showing an interest in moving materials as well as themselves vertically), trajectory (e.g. enjoying squirting water with hoses and squeezy bottles, sawing wood, throwing balls), enclosure (e.g. putting things in buckets and other containers, building enclosures with blocks), transporting (e.g. moving items from one place to another, pushing a buggy, pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with some items to another part of the centre and dumping them), transforming (e.g. colour changes, dressing up in costumes, making volcanoes, sand changing to mud, mixing potions). Often more than one schema is used at the same time, e.g. a child dressed as a dragon pushing a buggy around the playcentre could mean the child is interested in both transporting and transforming schemas.

> From time to time we observe some children who seem like butterflies flitting from one activity to another. If you look closely they could be investigating the same schema using different materials, e.g. putting playdough in a closed container and then in the oven, wrapping a present at the collage table, crawling inside a crawl tunnel and then falling asleep in the barrel swing could be investigating an enclosing schema. Another example is a boy who moves from doing a jigsaw puzzle to the train set and connects up some tracks and then moves off to the carpentry table where he attempts to join two pieces of wood—he could be investigating a connecting schema. If children's schemas are recognised, this understanding will be used in programme planning and implementation.

The playcentre team works out activities which will capture the interest of certain children who have an interest in common. Quite often the team uses interest in schemas for group planning, e.g. potions for lots of transformers.

One team leader said she uses her knowledge based on workshops she has attended to pinpoint schemas and plan activities around them. Others said that they have a hunch which schemas are being explored, particularly if materials are being used in interesting and creative ways, and they plan activities using this schema to see if their hunch is correct.

An example of children exploring an enveloping schema, notes about the exploration, commentary from the children's mothers, and a discussion of how the children's enveloping interests are extended are illustrated below.

Exploring an enveloping schema
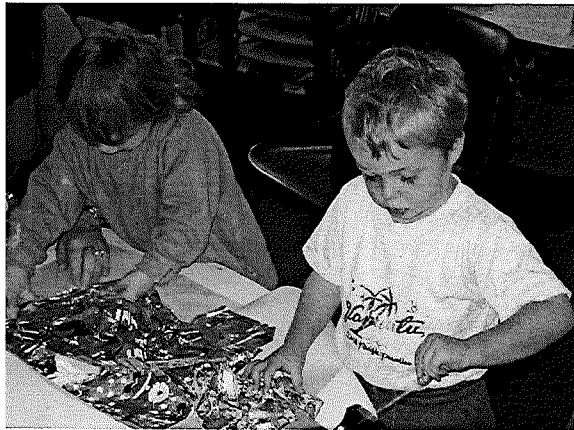
Josie and Nicholas are intent on wrapping and covering the items under the shiny paper, and taping the paper down. Josie persists with difficulty and finally enlists and directs adult assistance. Josie tells Nikolien (Josie's mother) where to put her fingers, so she can apply the tape herself, without the paper sliding away from her.

The wrapping was planned by the playcentre team for that day as an activity in response to the interest of these two children in enveloping schema. This interest had been noticed by the mothers of each of these children, both in the playcentre and at home. Both parents reported on these interests and how they are extended.

Nikolien, Josie's mother, wrote:

> Josie and Nicholas both do lots of enveloping and transforming as well. They like to wear the dragon hoods and cloaks, and run around. Josie also loves to wrap her dolls in blankets, cover her tummy with flannels in the bath, stuff things into bags and carry them about and she adores the barrel swing too. Nicholas also loves things like covering his hands and toys in messy play goop, playing with strips of newspaper – hiding underneath and jumping up, and also covering other children with it. Nicholas also makes huts at home with the cushions.
>
> Both Nicholas and Josie also have a strong interest in transforming, and like lots of mixing, messy play, baking etc. Because there are a group of children with these interests, we (our team) try to include something for them every week – either an enveloping thing like wrapping, tents, mosquito nets hanging up, huts, big boxes etc, or something like gloop, finger-paint or potions. Both Nicholas and Josie like to have their faces painted, which explores both their enveloping and transforming schemas, and their fantasy play. Yesterday they both wanted to be dragons. Josie often chooses to be a tiger. Nicholas was talking to me yesterday about how he paints his Mummy's face, but I don't have my face painted!

Nicholas's mother, Melissa, wrote:

> Nicholas does lots of enveloping at home also. Hid about 30 little dinosaurs under a cushion the other day and told me not to sit on it because they were asleep there. Likes to pile the cushions over him and then have someone find him. Yesterday he wrapped himself up in his blanket on the bed while he was supposed to be getting dressed. He wanted someone to come and find him but he actually fell asleep! Often builds little enclosures/houses for a

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variety of plastic animals, either with large blocks or little cuisenaire rods. We often make forts with tables, chairs and a big blanket over the whole thing. Annie and Nicholas often take food in there and dolls etc. Loves face painting and dressing up but only in animal masks, hats etc. He got a full-length lion suit for Christmas which he thinks is just the business.

These excerpts illustrate parents' understanding of schemas and how the playcentre uses the knowledge as a basis for planning. Nikolien's description shows a close understanding of a child who is not her own. Melissa demonstrates how her understanding of Nicholas's interests in enveloping schema enables her to appreciate and extend these interests at home. The episode provides insight into how the playcentre members maintain continuity and quality across settings of home and playcentre and between playcentre sessions. Core mechanisms are the parents' common understanding about child development and learning (in this case, schemas), and their knowledge of how to act on this understanding to promote learning.

Informal assessment

This includes:

- team members sharing information "on the wing" about the children and programme provisions during the sessions. Sessions are very busy so there is only time for a quick exchange about specific children or the programme. It is common for quick conversations and observations to be shared. Morning tea time is convenient for this.
- "thinking" by team members when working with a child. A team leader said:
  There's also the informal stuff you do in each conversation with a child. There's a whole lot of stuff in your mind that's not documented. It's not formal assessment and planning, but it is assessment and planning because you're thinking about the interaction you're having with that child, what you know about that child and it reflects in your conversation with the child all the time.

  A large number of informal assessments are made by playcentre members in working with children throughout each day.
- parents and team members sharing information verbally about the children; and
- feedback between centre members participating in the programme and those who are away from the centre.

Ratings of process quality

There were four main reasons why we wanted to obtain ratings of process quality within Wilton Playcentre. One aim was to gain a picture of the aspects of early childhood on which Wilton Playcentre rated highly and those where the ratings were lower. The ratings would provide useful data to help us pinpoint areas where we could celebrate our work, and other areas where we could usefully develop further and so lift aspects of quality. The data from the ratings could be helpful

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in determining the goals for the action research focus. This would feed into our goal of enhancing pedagogical approaches and children's learning.

A second aim was to find out the usefulness of training parents/caregivers to use the rating scale. We were interested in knowing about the experiences of the raters themselves. Were there any spin-offs in regard to their own understanding of teaching and learning within the playcentre setting, or of their role as parent educators?

Thirdly, we wanted to consider data across the four playcentre teams to feed into our goal of promoting continuity and quality across sessions. We analysed the ratings on each of the aspects of quality and looked at comparisons between the sessions, bearing in mind that this was the end of a busy year and the end of the fourth term.

Finally, we want to track ratings over the period of time as a Centre of Innovation.

The highest possible rating is 5, and the lowest possible rating is 1. In Table 1 below, we have identified the items on which Wilton Playcentre as a whole scored highly (i.e. the average ratings across all eight playcentre sessions were higher than 4.5).

Table 1 **Quality ratings higher than 4.5**

Adult:child interaction	Child:child interaction	Adult:adult interaction	Curriculum	Resources
Adults are responsive to individual children	Children support and co-operate with one another in language and actions	Adults interact respectfully and positively with each other	Non-sex stereotyped play among children is observed	There are enough age-appropriate toys/books/equip-ment to avoid problems of waiting, competing, and fighting for scarce resources
Adults model and encourage children to use positive reinforcement, explanation and encouragement as guidance/ discipline techniques			There is evidence that the setting is inclusive of all children (new item in 2003)	Equipment and activities encourage fine motor skill development
Adults model/guide children within the context of centre activities			Children can complete activities	A balance is achieved between assuring the safety of infants and toddlers and allowing them access to equipment and experiences (new item in 2003)
			Children can select their own activities from a variety of learning areas	The needs of parents and toddlers are well met (new item in 2003)

The items in italics are those identified in the Competent Children study that continue to show positive associations with children's competencies at age 10, after taking family income and maternal qualification levels into account (Wylie & Thompson, 2003).

The picture here is of the playcentre as a well-equipped and caring environment, where values of support, co-operation, and respect for all participants, adults, and children are evident. Children are given credit as independent thinkers and learners, and adults are playing a responsive and guiding role within the playcentre. Some general comments:

> Adults are very focused on children and their activities.
>
> Adults are constantly polite and respectful in conversation with children, as well as affectionate.
>
> This morning every activity inside had adults sitting and working with the children, engaging them in talking about what they were doing.
>
> No pressure to stop for morning tea but when the call comes most race happily to the table.

While ratings on adult responsiveness were high, in one session, a shift to greater adult responsiveness and deeper children's involvement was observed when after morning tea, a group of older children was taken to the park and younger children stayed in a smaller group at the centre.

In Table 2 below, we identify items on which Wilton Playcentre scored close to average or lower across all sessions (3.25 or lower).

Table 2 **Quality ratings 3.25 or lower**

Curriculum
Tikanga Māori and/or te reo Māori is evident.
There is evidence of the recognition/acceptance of the cultures of children at the centre. The ethnicity of the children at the playcentre is taken into account and their cultures represented.
There is evidence of children's creativity and art work.
The centre is a print-saturated environment.

The lowest items were "Tikanga Māori and/or te reo Māori is evident" and "There is evidence of recognition/acceptance of the cultures of children at the centre". In some sessions, some adults used odd words in Māori or sang a song, but there was not strong evidence of te reo or tikanga Māori. Parents at the playcentre were not aware of children's ethnic identification, although they knew that some families had a parent(s) who was not New Zealand Pākehā. The environment had very little print at child's eye level and there was little or no encouragement for exploring thoughts, experiences, and ideas through using symbols.

A group of items had ratings which differed across session days, e.g. between the ratings on the two Tuesdays compared with the ratings on the two Mondays. These items seem to indicate a

level of cognitive challenge and questioning approaches for sustained conversations and to encourage children to find their own answers.

Table 3 **Items with variable (high and low ratings) across session days**

Adults ask open-ended questions.
Children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas and symbols.
Stories are read/told/shared.
Children can work on problems and experiment with solutions themselves.

There was usually at least one story told during each session time, but two sessions received low ratings of 2. Only a few adults moved beyond the printed word, asked and answered questions, or made connections with the child's world. Raters observed that some people in the playcentre were very good at encouraging exploration and joining in, but others were not so good.

In the final section, we discuss how the ratings have been used by playcentre parents to evaluate their programme and plan their next action research cycle.

The adult:child ratios observed at the playcentre on these eight sessions were very good. The highest ratio of adults to children was 1 adult to 1.7 children and the lowest was 1 adult to 4.25 children.
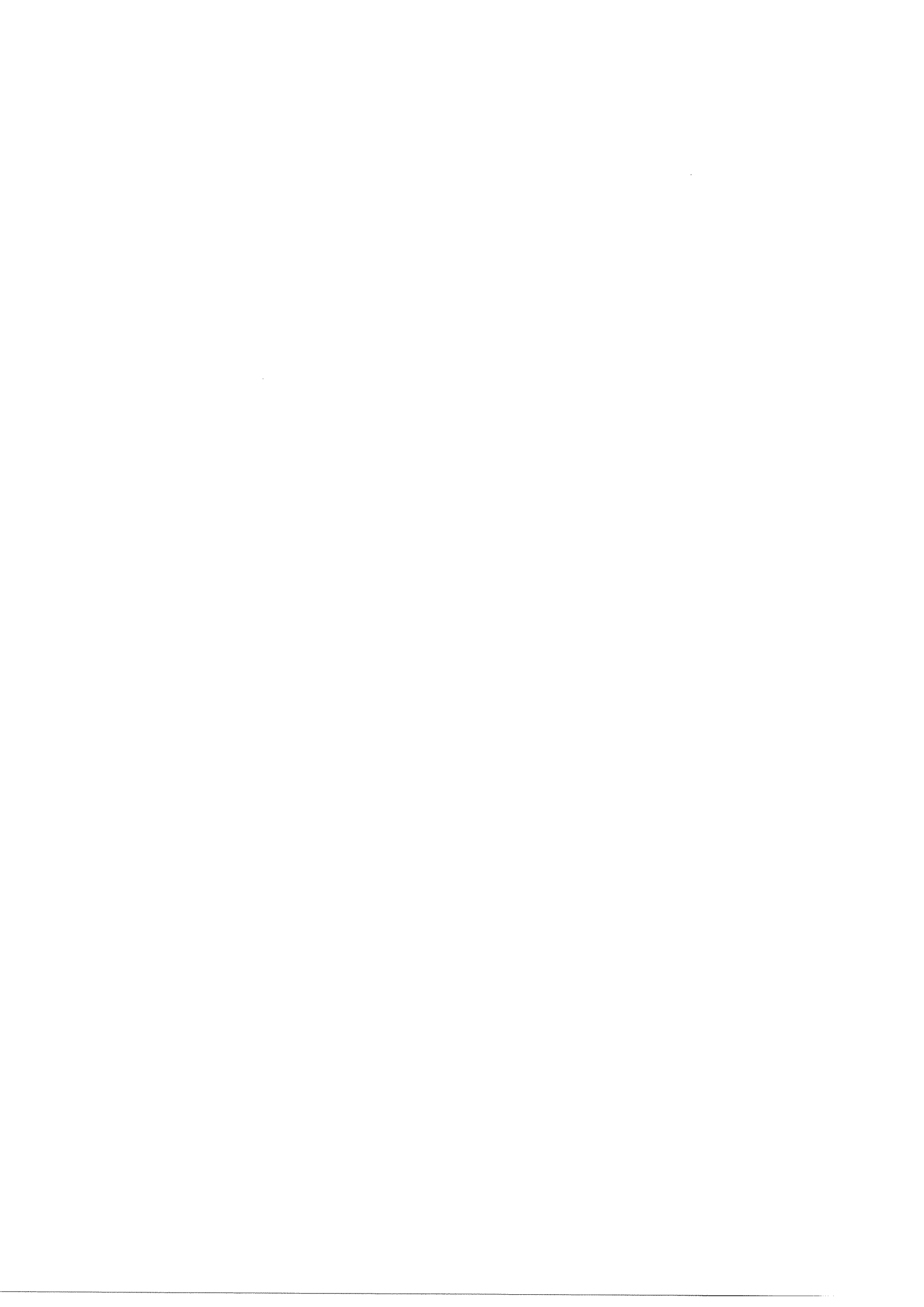
6. Continuity and quality across settings

Our third area of investigation is about how the playcentre maintains continuity and quality across playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre. In particular, we are exploring:

- In what ways does data collection, documentation, planning, and evaluation support parents in maintaining continuity and quality: (a) across playcentre sessions; and (b) between home and playcentre?

The group interview with team leaders, and information from the playcentre, showed current practice within the playcentre and how this is perceived by the team leaders.

Parents' shared knowledge of schemas, learning stories, child development and learning, and of each other's children

Parents' understanding of schemas and learning stories, their shared knowledge of child development and learning, and their knowledge of each other's children help provide continuity between settings. This knowledge and understanding, the parents' participation in the programme, and children's involvement in the playcentre programme, are powerful mechanisms for ensuring continuity between playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre.

Team members are familiar with each other's children and have friendships outside the playcentre. They often have the opportunity to observe the children outside the centre, for example, on a trip to the gardens with the child's parent. The need for as much formal documentation as is done in quality kindergartens and childcare centres is not so necessary in this close-knit centre with its small number of families, where parents are actively involved every week in the teams, planning and running the sessions (unless on maternity leave). Thus most parents get to know the children and each other well and participate in the end-of-session evaluations. Knowledge is strengthened by their observations of children during sessions. The daily verbal sharing of information and children playing in each other's homes make for continuity between home and playcentre.

Parents and team members share information about children

> I try to convey what I found interesting and what the children found interesting. It's usually verbal but I try to take lots of photos too so that for children who aren't being observed if there's something really good going on, there's some record of that time for that child. . . . I think that's a really important part of the community of Wilton Playcentre. It's not just about the child. It's really good for adults to feel good about it as well as benefits for the child. (Team leader)

> If there's something that I think is really good I'll find it and put it in front of the parent's face. (Team leader)

Team leaders identified lots of different ways in which they found out about children's experiences, interests, and learning at home, including talking with parents and children at the centre, session meetings, drop-off and pick-ups, looking at portfolios, social occasions in and outside the centre, conversation while passing on telephone tree messages, and swapping duty days, which brought them in contact with a different group of children.

Team leaders said they let parents know about children's experiences, interests, and learning during the session and who was involved, by: taking photos of anything particularly interesting to show parents later; telling parents positive things about their kids at pick-up time; and letting parents know if there had been a problem.

The team leaders said there are problems in getting feedback from new team members who do not know what information would be useful to pass on and who often have young children themselves who take up much of their time and attention. Feedback was regarded as important:

> You can never get enough feedback – I always wish there's more.

Continuity between playcentre and school

Team leaders said there are no formalised structures in place to support continuity between playcentre and school. Parents are responsible for taking their children on school visits and could show the teachers the child's playcentre portfolios if they wanted to. One team leader suggested "veteran days" at the playcentre, and another that members talk to each other about which of the local schools they are sending their children to.

Team organisation

The team leaders described organisation of responsibilities across each team:

> It makes sense to share the responsibility around as much as possible.

Jobs are identified on the first session of each term and team members then choose which job they want to do. Jobs include: "seeing that observations get done, planning a settling activity, morning tea rosters, writing up the session meeting notes and writing on the whiteboard things that worked well during that session".

Team leaders' ideas for ensuring that playcentre members work together as a team to get the best out of people were: sharing jobs; telling someone they've done a good job; trying to get people involved in something which interests them; being flexible; learning from more experienced team members; supporting and understanding members; and valuing all contributions:

> I suppose unlike a workplace where there is an expectation of 110 percent, because we are all volunteers there is an unspoken understanding that you all do the best you can.

Documenting learning

Team members largely use observations and photographs to document children's learning.

Observations

Observations of individual children are done on a roster basis, usually one child per session, so that every child is observed at least once a term. A team member (not always the same one) takes responsibility for this and records the observation on a learning story form. Note is taken of the child's interests and schemas. The team leader or the member responsible informs the rest of the team who the target child is so that they can be aware of that child during the session and bring their thoughts about him/her to the evaluation. After the session evaluation, the form is put in the child's portfolio.

Time interval observations or observations of a particular area of play are undertaken as issues arise.

Photographs

Use of photographs is a developing form of documentation. Photographs of children are taken during sessions. These sometimes reflect the observations. Sometimes they are put in the child's portfolio book with an accompanying short description.

With the purchase of the digital camera and printer, the use of photographs is increasing and parents and children can see them during or at the end of the session:

> The parents can use that picture as a scaffold, talking with the child about what happened at the centre. (Team leader)

Parents are still experimenting with the camera, the printer, and the computer, purchased for the COI project. For example, on a few occasions the computer has been set up towards the end of the session and parents arriving to collect their children can see a sequence of photos taken during the session giving them an idea of what their children have been doing. One parent, using the memory card, produced 16 photos which the team then considered when evaluating the session. In the year ahead, different possibilities with these new technologies will be explored to improve documentation and communication across sessions and between playcentre and home.

Keeping documentation and records of planning and assessment

Portfolios and clear files

Some documentation about interests in schemas and learning stories, children's work, and records of planning and assessment for individual children, are kept in portfolios and clear files. Before the purchase of a digital camera, photographs were put into the parent "pockets" near the entrance to the centre. Parents were encouraged to put them in their child's portfolios/scrapbooks. Now clear file folders, in which it is easy to insert written observations and photos, are being used. They are easily accessed in a box near the centre entrance.

Parents choose whether and to what extent they want to contribute to the portfolios with items from home.

Photograph display board

Each child's photo is mounted on one corner of a blank A4 sheet and the parents provide information about children's interests and schemas. Sometimes extra information may be added after discussion with other members who have worked with the child. These are mounted on a wall where team members can update their knowledge about the children.

In reality, parents said that children's interests move on within even short periods of time. Updating the displays is time-consuming and they often lack currency. The usefulness of the displays for passing on information is questionable, although they may be useful as mementos.

Evaluation

Evaluation happens through:

- session evaluations by each team at the conclusion of each playcentre session;
- session meetings, held each term, where parents discuss the development and learning of their children with team leaders; and
- notes made every day on two whiteboards about children and activities during the session.

The quality rating scale used for this research has contributed to evaluation.

Session evaluations

The end-of-session evaluation is the main method team leaders use to assess what was happening during the session and to plan for future sessions. This happens after every playcentre session. Collaboration in this evaluation is important because often adults are working with one child or a group of children, and different adults are working with a different group of children.

At the end of each session, the day's observations are discussed. The team members first settle their own children at a nearby table with lunches from home. Then they work through a "session planning" sheet which the centre has developed over some years with much discussion and trialling. The evaluation sheet is headed with the date and day, and a list of the five *Te Whāriki* strands. There is space to record responses to the following:

- Today's learning stories.
- How did the planning points from last week work?
- General – What did you notice about particular children? How did the activities go? Was there any child for whom the session did not work so well?
- From what you observed today, and from notes on the play board on what the children are interested in on other sessions, plan for next week.

Mostly the team evaluates from what they have observed but they may also pass on comments made by other parents present at the session or attending other sessions, or gather information from parents on arrival and departure. These evaluations usually take about half an hour.

If a child has been observed using the learning story form, or schemas have been identified, the team will discuss what has been observed and agree on what plans can be devised for the child.

All this is recorded on the evaluation sheet and placed in the folder under the particular session day. This folder is easily accessible to all teams, and parents attending more than one session can act as a link across them. This is one way of providing continuity:

> At times I've gone through and read the session notes to find out about my child.

At the start of the next session, a team member writes up the planning points from the team's previous session's evaluation, including the goals arising from the evaluation and the name of the

child to be observed, and draws the rest of the team's attention to it. It may be used as a quick reference during the session.

A whiteboard is used to note children's interests after the session evaluation. Most notes are about group activities that were enjoyed, e.g. "enjoyed making a volcano in the sandpit", or "dinosaurs were popular today". They are left for the next day's team to refer to. These notes have the potential to contribute to continuity between sessions, but their current focus on activities means that they cannot contribute to continuity in respect to schemas or learning stories.

Parent session meetings

Parent session meetings are held about once a term and are open to all parents. The parents are encouraged to bring information about their own child, along with photos of the child. The observations on the child are available. All parents present can contribute their knowledge of each child and as a group acquire a fuller picture of the children which aids each person's effectiveness with them during sessions. This sharing can be a supportive experience for the parents, who said they find it useful. The information is absorbed by them as parent educators. These meetings tend to go on quite late into the evening to ensure that each parent present has the opportunity to have a good discussion on their own child. Notes from these meetings are documented and circulated to all members of the centre, whether at the meeting or not.

Suggestions for evaluation and self-review

Self-review occurs mainly through the session evaluations. Team leaders also found it useful to use training opportunities and assignments to focus on an aspect to review. They thought useful support could come from input from the more experienced members in the form of evaluation and modelling, taking time to visit other playcentres, and having a visitor to Wilton Playcentre. They said such input helped them to reflect on their own practices.

Team leaders thought a useful tool for examining the effectiveness of their programme would be to compare planning points and session notes to see if any children were consistently missing out on adult interaction. An indicator that the programme was not suiting all needs could be that children were unhappy in the session or there were problems. Critical reflection about the session was seen as an important process in leading to insight and positive change:

> It's okay to say the session didn't go well. This helps us to re-evaluate.

Challenges

In the interviews with team leaders some challenges about documentation were identified. It is not easy to be consistent with data collection. Lots of things can, and at times do, interfere with the formal data collection in a parent-run playcentre: team members' children may be very tired at the

end of the sessions; children get ill; parents get ill; mothers become pregnant; there are many demands on parents beyond the sessions; not everyone turns up to all the meetings; the partners who are acting as the child-minders may also have evening commitments; childcare cannot always be arranged; and there is no non-teaching, non-child contact time to update portfolios. Some people have many evening meetings, as well as training meetings and assignments.

As a result, some portfolios are slender on documentation, a child is not always observed on every session, the photo board system can become out of date, and at some session evaluations there is less time to think about a child or group of children before the team works with them the next week. It is hard to find time for follow-up and to evaluate the planning for individual children. People get tired.

Experienced members move on when their children leave playcentre (only four remain who were involved in earlier professional development with Wellington College of Education) and new parents join. Most new parents have children who are under 2½ years old, and since they have to stay in the session with their child, there may be many inexperienced parents present in one session.

Another challenge to ensure that documentation is valid and useful is to help all new members to understand and feel confident about their role as parent educators, and to have sufficient knowledge about observation, *Te Whāriki,* learning stories, and schemas. This takes time and happens gradually with support and modelling from more experienced members.

Looking at the present evaluation records and children's learning story observations, one of the research associates, who some years back was involved in professional development with the centre in the areas of learning and teaching stories and schemas, felt that it would be worthwhile to provide opportunities for parents to update on these topics in the coming year. This is because some of the observations are not identifying children's dispositions and schemas as clearly as in the past.

Ways to strengthen even greater continuity of approaches specifically related to children's learning and development through using schemas and learning stories will be explored further and will contribute to addressing the research questions.

7. Conclusion

The findings described in this report were discussed at two meetings of playcentre members in February and March 2004. The purpose of these discussions was to analyse the key issues and themes that came through the data, to decide what would be addressed in the long term, to decide what the next action research cycle would have as a focus, and to plan this action research cycle. Playcentre members described what their participation as researchers meant for them. This conclusion describes the analysis and decisions reached by the playcentre members with the research associates, and the value of action research using the NZCER research tools.

We recognised the very positive learning environment that Wilton Playcentre has created for children and adults. The engagement of parents in educating their children and the shared values that children are active and enquiring learners and participants in society are supported by the training and mentoring available for adults, and some pedagogical practices in the playcentre. We were impressed by the consistently high ratings for adult responsiveness and the role adults play in guiding children and encouraging children within the context of the playcentre. The values for children to become independent thinkers are reflected in the autonomy that children are given to select and complete activities.

The members and research associates pinpointed some broad and some specific areas where analysis of data had highlighted that positive changes could be made. There was considerable discussion about where the next action research cycle should focus. The areas that were highlighted related to pedagogical approaches and specific curriculum areas.

Pedagogical approaches

All playcentre members are keen to improve their approaches to pedagogy. The areas they highlighted were:

- extending children's creative thinking, especially through asking open-ended questions;
- sharpening the focus in observations of children to identify deep involvement and exploring schemas;
- finding effective ways to write up observations as narrative learning stories;
- better linking of planning and evaluation to *Te Whāriki;* and

- reconsidering ways in which documentation is kept, especially whether photo boards are necessary.

There was a view that there needs to be a better focus on what the playcentre wants to achieve from observations. Observations need to be focused on curriculum, children's learning and interests in schemas. There needs to be greater interrogation of the observation data in the team planning sessions, from the vantage point of children's learning.

An item highlighted in the rating scale that people are keen to work on is improving the questioning approach (especially asking open-ended questions) to encourage sustained conversations and extend children's thinking. Playcentre members are keen to learn how they can extend children's thinking through asking open-ended questions and through scaffolding learning.

Members want to work on improving the depth and quality of planning for delivering *Te Whāriki*. Improving the depth and quality of planning would involve making better linkage to evaluation. Schemas need to be a focus.

Members thought that the photo boards may be redundant because they are not kept current.

Programme

The ratings on the process quality scale highlighted programme areas where the playcentre could make improvements. These were:

- encouraging children to explore mathematical ideas and symbols;
- enhancing story-telling;
- te reo and tikanga Māori;
- recognition of the cultures of all children at the playcentre; and
- developing a print-saturated environment.

The programme areas that members want to work on in the immediate term are:

- providing a print-saturated environment and encouraging literacy; and
- reflecting the cultures of all children at the playcentre.

Some older members reminisced about times when there were many older girls at the playcentre and they provided opportunities for children to engage in writing activities, such as making books and posting letters. They thought that providing writing opportunities could link in with a broader focus on literacy and telling stories in ways that encouraged children to participate and make connections with their own experiences. Providing a print-saturated environment and encouraging print awareness could include exposure to different writing systems, which would link with the goal of reflecting the cultures of all children at the playcentre.

Support for action research

Ways to gain professional knowledge and make positive changes to practice were discussed. The research associates thought that continuing to extend theoretical and content knowledge was important. Ongoing training would always be necessary, especially as new people join the playcentre. They suggested using video to record interactions and then analysing these video recordings in a group session so that different perspectives were heard in relation to the areas of focus. The research associates noted that there were many successful examples of effective professional development that took such approaches. Both research associates had recently written a best evidence synthesis on characteristics of effective professional development (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003) and drew attention to the value of practitioners gaining theoretical and content knowledge, analysing data from their own setting, and critiquing their own practice.

Members thought that observing others working with children would be useful. The experience of observing a whole session to make the quality ratings had been an eye-opener, leading to much insight and understanding. Having such opportunities on a regular basis would be beneficial.

Next action research focus

The next action research and specific plans for it were decided at the second meeting in March 2004. The goals are:

- The centre will provide a print-saturated environment.
- Adults will take advantage of many opportunities to interact with children using appropriate open-ended questions to extend children's thinking.
- Parents will continue to identify, enrich, and extend children's schemas and look for clues to schemas in their early writing and mark making.
- Parents will evaluate how the use of open-ended questions helps their understanding of children's thinking and learning.
- During the course of the research, parents will aim to find ways to write narrative learning stories in a manageable way:

> This will also allow us to build on what we are already good at—quality interactions and a positive learning environment.

The action plan for achieving these research goals was developed using a "Gap Analysis" approach, involving brainstorming about the future state (where the playcentre is aiming to be) with an improved print-saturated environment and more sustained adult:child conversations through effective use of questioning at our meeting in March 2004. We decided:

- We will take photographs and record what the playcentre environment currently looks like.
- We will take "a fresh look at the physical environment" from the perspective of a child's eye, including asking children, and considering how to enhance the level of print saturation and

opportunities for children's writing, mark making, and story telling. The "revamp" will include consideration of wall displays, storage, and resources. We aim to provide inviting spaces where children can be involved in writing and mark making. Space will be provided for display of child-focused print and child's work at child eye level. Members will visit other centres to gather ideas for displaying children's work and developing the print-saturated environment. Plans will be developed and the revamp will occur during the Easter break 2004.

- In the second term we will hold workshops and discussions on early writing, mark making, and literacy, and the relationship of schemas to literacy and numeracy, schemas-learning stories, and adult questioning.
- As part of documentation for professional development, one of the research associates will video interactions between adults and children, and children engaged in writing and literacy activities. Digital photographs and observations will continue to be recorded for later analysis.
- We aim to evaluate our environment and interactions in 3 months time.
- The playcentre will discuss using COI funds to allow employment of a reliever when a member needs to be freed to participate in the research.

Benefits of action research

Taking part as researchers in the baseline data collection has been a valuable experience. Parents who were involved in the research process said they were empowered by this. They said they are using and developing their talents as educators of children, writers, analysts, interviewers, observers using the process quality rating scale, and presenters at hui.

A mother wrote:

> I found the whole process of starting off in the research design team and ending up writing the report . . . very satisfying from an academic point of view. I've studied education papers and English at University as part of my BA in English Literature, but being part of the process made it all come alive. Another thing that it did, it made me focus on my pre-children strengths and passions, i.e. teaching, researching and writing, and combined them in a project that enhanced my self-esteem as a person and as a mother. Now I am no longer just a stay-at-home Mum and can answer the question 'What else do you do?' by talking about my involvement in the COI project instead of having conversations halted when I say I'm a full-time stay-at-home Mum to my two preschoolers. Instead of making me want to leave the playcentre due to the increased workload of being part of the project, it has actually made me energized as a person and determined to stay on to see the project to its conclusion in two years time.

Another mother wrote:

> Never before have we taken the opportunity to, firstly, discuss in a group what we really value about playcentre, and secondly, observe and rate each of our sessions to determine what we're doing well and what we could be doing better.

While time consuming, the whole exercise has been extremely worthwhile. As individuals we found the group interview satisfying because we had the opportunity to talk freely about something we value—our children's early education, and something we love—playcentre. One parent said: 'Talking about what I love about playcentre and hearing other people echo my thoughts and feelings reaffirmed why I chose playcentre for my children.'

Another said: 'You realise how strong your playcentre community is when you all get together and share similar views and experiences. We just don't usually give ourselves the opportunity to talk about that in a group.'

For our centre this collection of baseline data, especially the rating of each session, is invaluable. In February, our families met to discuss what changes we now want to make at the centre and what our next research spiral will focus on. We decided to work on creating a more print-saturated environment, and, through professional development and possibly videoing each other, will also try to improve our own questioning skills when we are interacting with the children.

Ideas we may look at for creating more print at children's eye level include: labelling items around the centre; creating special areas for children to use pens and pencils for drawing, symbol making and writing—with sharpened pencils!; incorporating symbol making into other games; and more story telling. More new ideas will inevitably flourish as we focus on this particular theme. We'll be open to trying them and then incorporate into the sessions what feels right for our centre.

Other centres may find this exercise equally rewarding. Obviously we were prompted to do it because we are part of the COI project, but having done it and reaped the results, we can highly recommend others doing something similar. You sure find out a lot about your centre. It's great to give yourselves a pat on the back and feel reassured that a lot of your work is top quality, but equally important to know where you can do better. There is always something that can be improved.
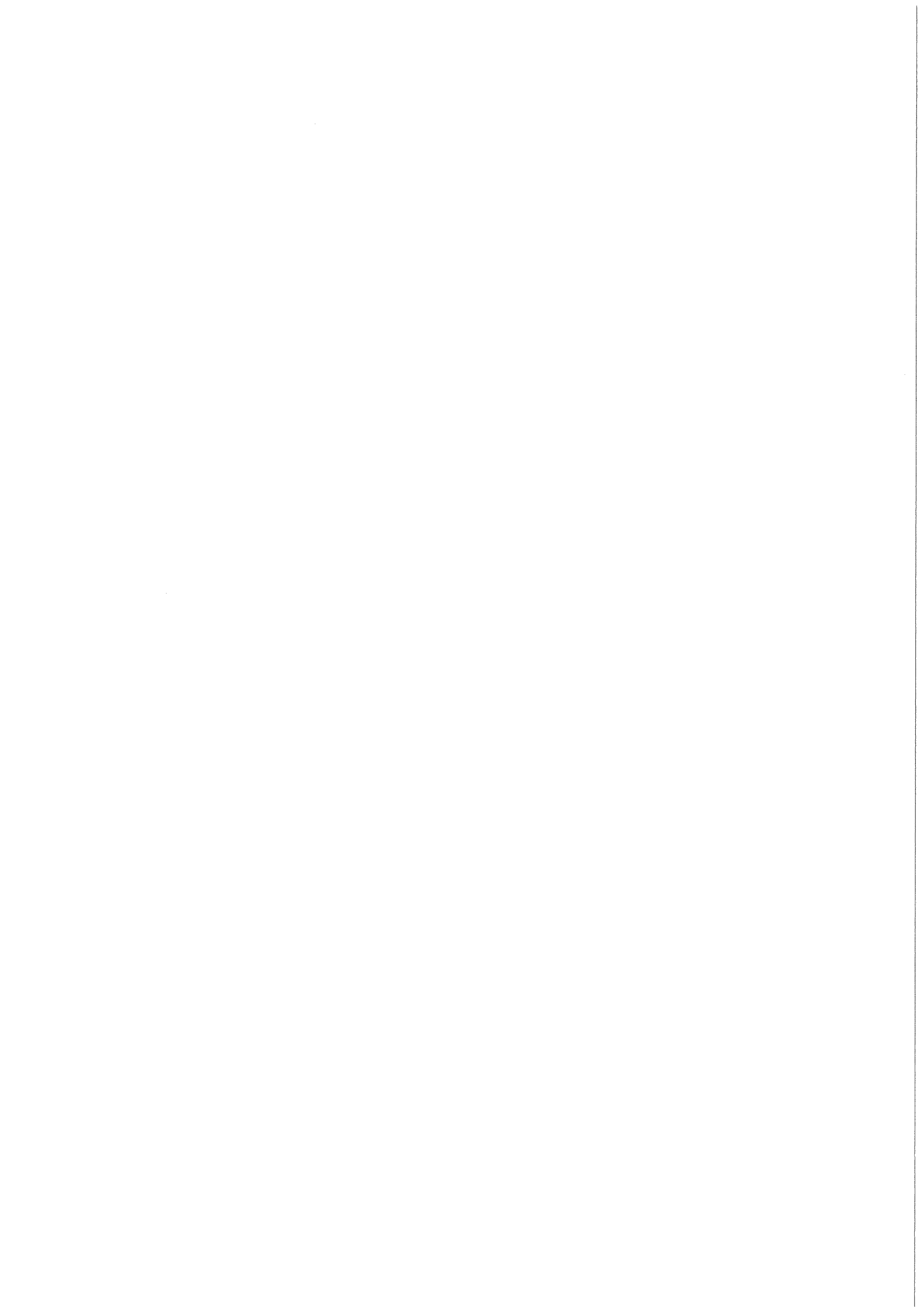
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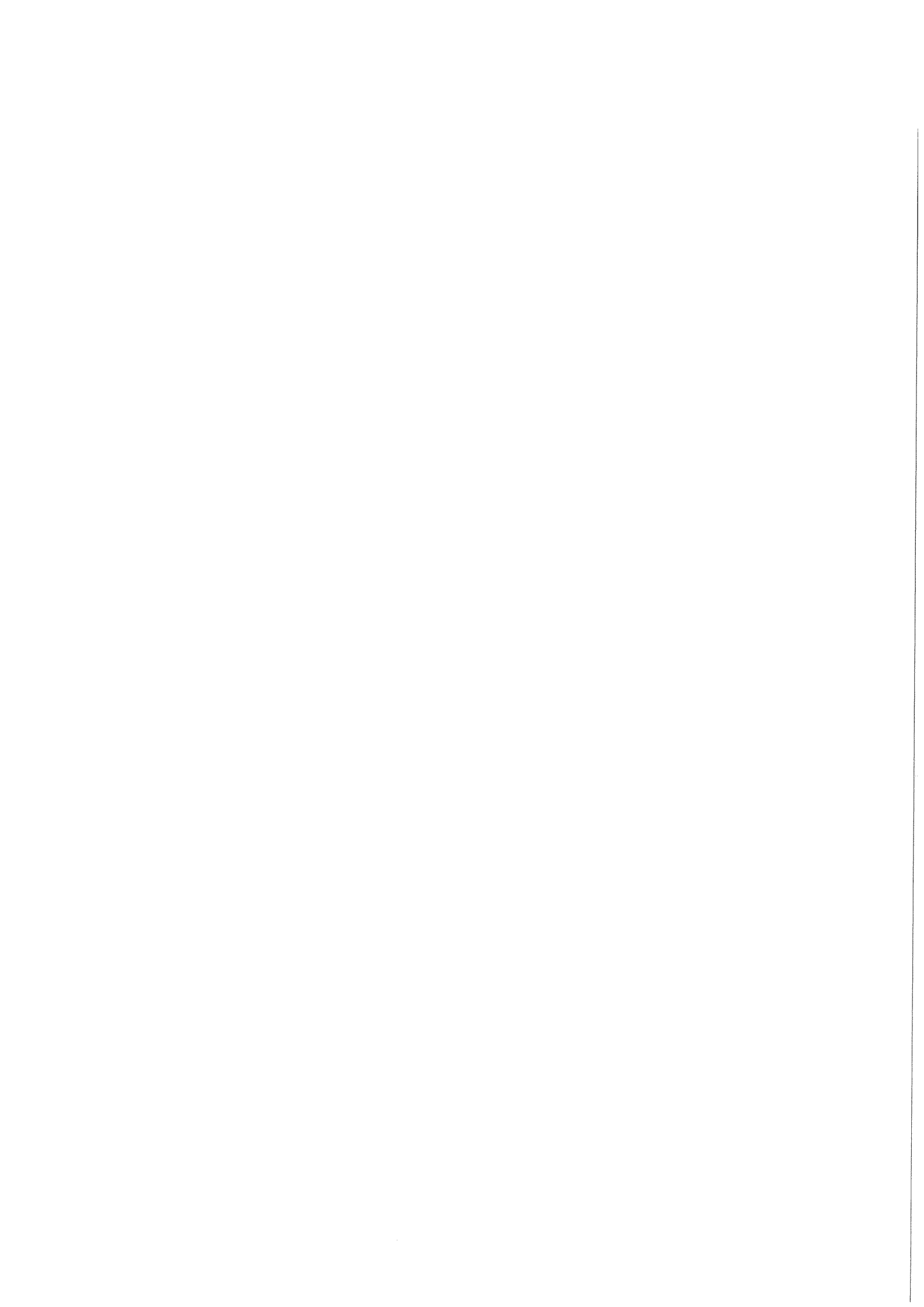
Appendix 1: Wilton Playcentre Centre of Innovation project 2003 – 2005 Information Sheet

Researchers: *Wilton Playcentre members, 3a Gloucester St, Wilton*
Phone (04) 475 8361
Linda Mitchell and Pam Cubey, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington
Phone (04) 802 1443

Wilton Playcentre is one of six early childhood education centres designated by the Ministry of Education as a Centre of Innovation for the period 2003–2005. Centres of Innovation receive additional funding from the Ministry of Education to:

- research and develop their innovative approach to improve teaching and learning in early childhood education; and
- act as "showcases" of competent practice in learning and teaching by disseminating information about the practice and effects.

Wilton Playcentre is investigating and analysing:

- parent engagement and sustaining a community of learners;
- the role of documentation in maintaining continuity and quality across playcentre sessions and between home and playcentre;
- pedagogical approaches (including the use of schemas and learning stories) and children's learning in the Wilton Playcentre journey through the course of the Centre of Innovation project.

We hope the research will also yield information on what constitutes quality in a playcentre setting, contribute to changing public perceptions of the value of playcentre and the benefits for children of parent engagement in children's learning in playcentre, provide insight into conditions to support teaching and learning in a playcentre setting, and inform the development of policy.

In order to investigate playcentre approaches to teaching and learning and processes of change for parents, whānau and children, we intend to collect data at the beginning of the Centre of Innovation work in 2003 (baseline data collection) and at the end of the project in 2005 (final data collection). This will supplement data gathered in the course of the project through action research cycles. This will enable us to address the research questions as well as changes associated with the action research focus and being a Centre of Innovation.

Baseline data collection 2003

Profile of current operation

Documentation including the RS61E (July return), information on organisational features (how the playcentre operates – sessions, rosters, roles and responsibilities), licensing, funding, charters and physical description will be collected from playcentre records. The education officer will be asked to provide information about training, support for training and barriers to training.

Survey of families

NZCER will gather information through a survey of parents/caregivers on family households and reasons for choosing playcentre, views of benefits of playcentre, child/ren's attendance at playcentre, parental employment, unpaid work and family income, involvement of parents/caregivers in playcentre and playcentre training.

Interviews with playcentre members

- NZCER will carry out a group interview with playcentre members to canvass views on Wilton Playcentre philosophy, views of quality and participation, training/professional development and the playcentre experience.
- Wilton Playcentre members will interview team leaders on processes used for assessment, planning, documentation, and continuity for children between teams in the different sessions and between home and playcentre.
- Wilton Playcentre members will interview Wellington Playcentre Association and the NZ Playcentre Federation about the playcentre philosophy, views of quality and participation, professional development and the playcentre experience.

Measure of process quality

Wilton Playcentre members and NZCER will gather a measure of process quality by rating the playcentre on two days. The rating scale builds on the NZCER Competent Children early childhood education rating scale, focusing on the items which have been identified as making a long-term contribution to children's competency levels, and incorporating other items related to interactions with babies and toddlers. An advantage of this scale is its usefulness for parents in learning about and making ratings of process quality. This could contribute to parents' understanding of process quality as well as providing research evidence of this.

Data on children's experiences

Wilton Playcentre members and NZCER will gather data on children's experiences and learning through observations, photographs, video-tape and audio-tape recordings, documentation and examples of children's work.

Action research spirals 2003–2005

Action research spirals of finding a focus, data gathering, analysis and critical reflection, taking action, further data gathering, evaluating, refining the focus etc will be followed through the course of the Centre of Innovation project. We will document each stage of the action research cycle in order to provide evidence for our report. Throughout the action research spirals, we intend to investigate teaching actions and children's learning within the playcentre setting, views of playcentre members and documentation of playcentre processes. The first action research topic will be about understanding and use of schemas in teaching and learning and photographic documentation.

Final data collection 2005

Final data collection using modified measures from the baseline data collection.

Advisory group

An advisory group will be asked for feedback on the project design, approach and analysis. In addition to the researchers (Wilton Playcentre members and the NZCER researchers), the advisory group members are:

- Brenda Little, Wellington Playcentre Association
- Bronwyn Drennan, Wellington Playcentre Association
- Marie Ellis, Playcentre Federation and Wellington Playcentre Association
- Roy Hoerara, Bicultural Co-ordinator, Wellington Playcentre Association
- Anne Meade, Centre of Innovation Co-ordinator
- Fay Clarke, Wellington Playcentre Association life member
- Kate Thornton, Wellington College of Education and Wilton Playcentre life member
- Clare Rumble, Board of Trustees, Otari School

Consent to participate in the research

Participation in the research project is voluntary. Therefore all participants will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they understand the nature of the research and how the findings will be published and disseminated. Although individual people will not be identified unless they consent to this, Wilton Playcentre itself will be identified because it is a designated Centre of Innovation. Therefore complete confidentiality cannot be provided. Any participant may withdraw from the research project at any time.
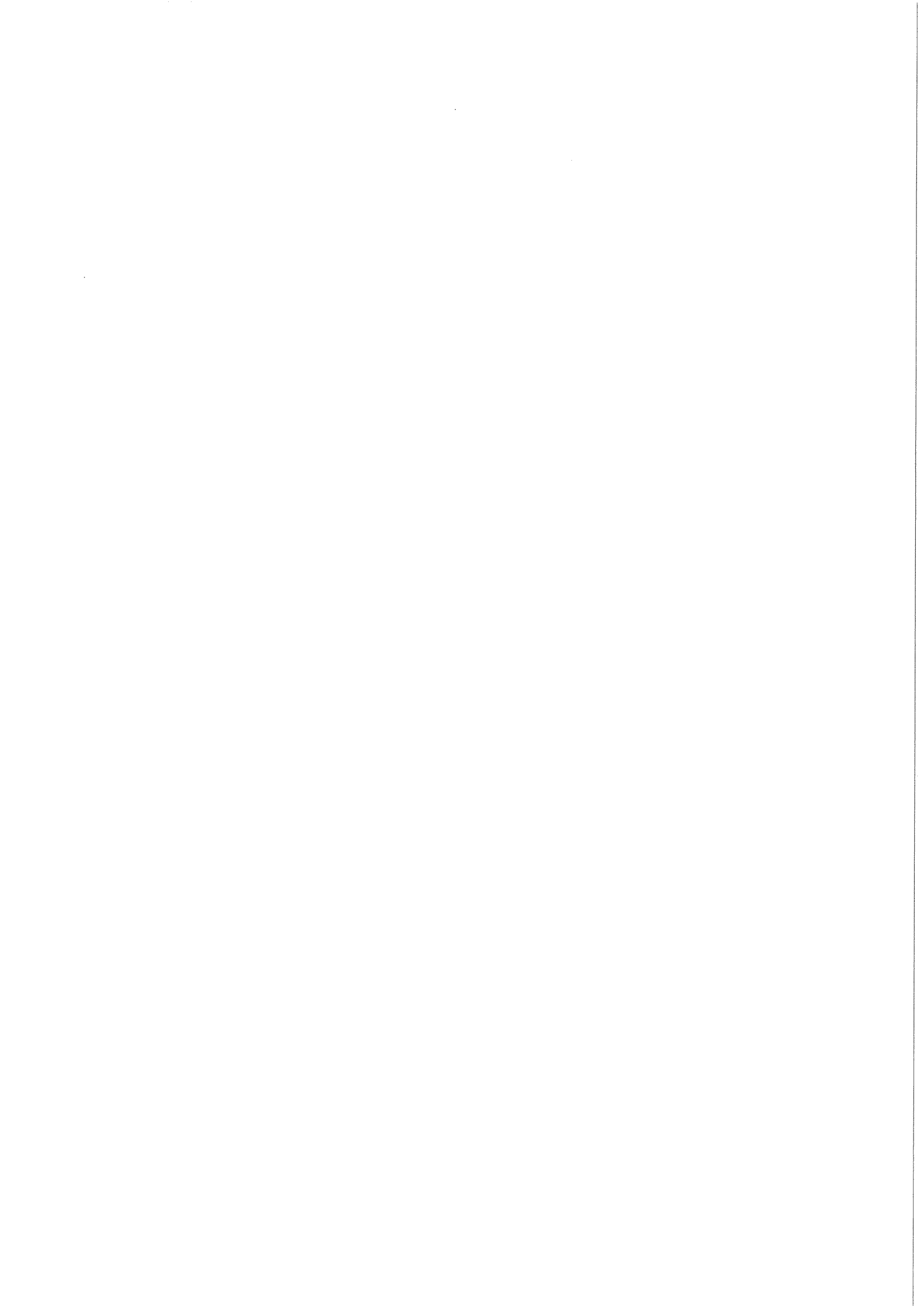
Appendix 2: Consent forms

Wilton Playcentre Centre of Innovation research consent form for interviews

Researchers: *Wilton Playcentre and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington*

- I understand I am being interviewed as part of research on how the beliefs, systems and practices of Wilton Playcentre, a designated centre of innovation, support parent involvement and a high quality teaching and learning environment. The research will be published in a variety of forms, including research reports, conference presentations and papers, and will be published in journals, booklets, articles and report forms and on the internet.
- The reasons for the research have been explained to me and I have had a chance to have any questions answered.
- My signature below shows that I understand the requirements of the research project and I have agreed to participate in the research.

Name   _____

Signature _____

Date   _____

Wilton Playcentre centre of innovation research

Researchers: *Wilton Playcentre and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington, Phone (04) 802 1443.*

CONSENT FROM FAMILIES AND WHANAU TO USE OBSERVATIONS, VIDEO AND AUDIO–TAPES, PHOTOGRAPHS AND CHILDREN'S WORK

Wilton Playcentre is a designated centre of innovation. Over three years the playcentre is investigating how its beliefs, systems and practices (including use of schemas) support parent involvement and build a high quality teaching and learning environment. Linda Mitchell and Pam Cubey from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research are working with playcentre members to provide research and professional development expertise throughout the project.

During the course of the research project, playcentre members and researchers may collect photographs, observations, video–tape and audio–tape recordings, documentation (which may include children's own words) and examples of children's work which shows the learning that is occurring. Some of these items may help show the ways in which Wilton Playcentre parents support and enrich children's learning and sustain continuity between playcentre sessions, and between home and playcentre. We would like your permission to use items collected about your child in the research.

CHILD'S FULL NAME:

_____

       (First name)   (Last name)

I give permission:	(Please circle that which applies)	
for observations of my child to be collected and analysed for this project.	YES	NO
for documentation and examples of my child's work to be collected and analysed for this project.	YES	NO
for photos of my child to be collected and analysed for this project.	YES	NO
for audio-taped and video-taped recordings of my child to be collected and analysed for this project.	YES	NO

We cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in publications about the project, because Wilton Playcentre itself will be named.

I give permission for items collected to be used:

(Please circle that which applies)

as an example in publications about the research	YES	NO
in presentations and articles about the project	YES	NO
as an examples on the Centre of Innovation website	YES	NO
as an example in professional development resources	YES	NO
in discussions with teachers, parents, teacher educators, government officials and others involved in early childhood Education	YES	NO

Tick this box if you would prefer to give permission for each and every individual item chosen ☐

Do you want your child's first name to be used? YES ☐ NO ☐

If you don't want your child's first name used please suggest another name

_____

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time

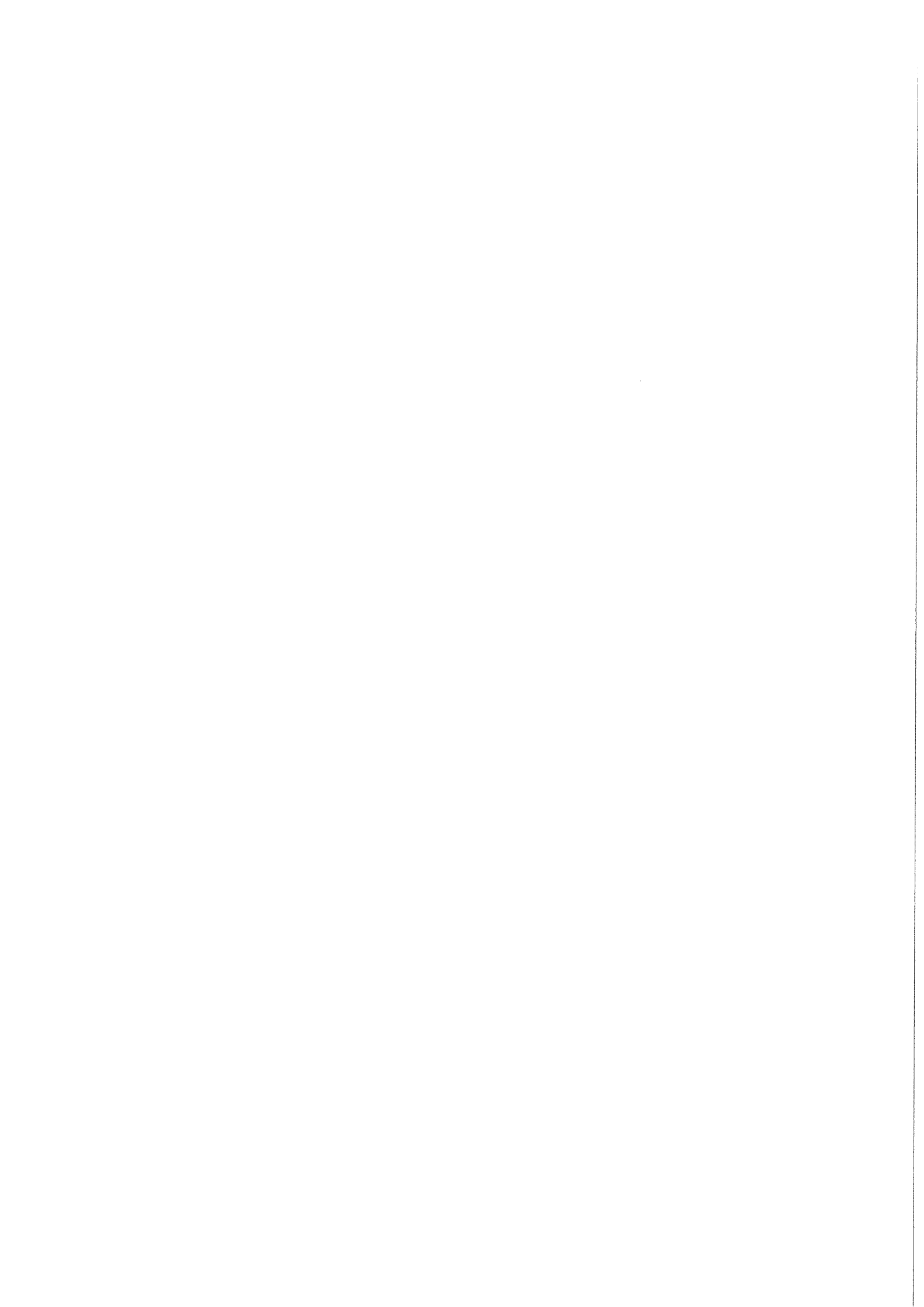PARENT/CAREGIVER'S FULL NAME:

_____

(Please print)   (First name)   (Last name)

SIGNATUR E: _____   DATE: _____

NAME OF CENTRE: _____

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Appendix 3: Survey of parents

Survey of Parents

Wilton Playcentre is a designated centre of innovation. Over three years the playcentre is investigating how its beliefs, systems and practices support parent involvement and build a high quality teaching and learning environment. Linda Mitchell and Pam Cubey from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research are working with the playcentre to provide research and professional development expertise throughout the project. The research will be published in a variety of forms, including research reports, conference presentations and papers, in journals, booklet, report forms, and on the internet.

As part of the research, we want to survey parents at the beginning and end of the project. The initial survey is about your child's attendance at playcentre, your family, your views of playcentre and your involvement in the playcentre. Answers to these questions will help us build a profile of parents and children at Wilton Playcentre. We invite you to complete the attached survey and post it to the researchers at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in the reply paid envelope attached. The individual survey responses will be kept confidential within the NZCER research group and will be used only for the research project.

> Your response will be scanned. To ensure that the scanner will read your answers correctly, *please give your responses by colouring in the bubbles.* The scanner will not read the responses correctly if you make ticks or crosses that go outside the bubbles. So mark your selection like this O and *not* like this O and *not* like this O. If you use a (soft) pencil, you can erase the mark should you want to change your answer.

Part A: Family background

1 Who lives in your family household? (*Select all that apply*)

   O First parent/caregiver   O Grandfather(s)   O Other family member(s)
   O Second parent/caregiver   O Uncle(s)   O Non-family member(s)
   O Grandmother(s)   O Aunt(s)   O Sibling(s) of child

2 How many people usually live in your household [the total number, including yourself and your child(ren)]? . . . .   ————

3 How many children usually live in your household (total number)? . . . .   ————

4 How many of these children are under 5? . . . .   ————

5 What were your 3 main reasons for choosing playcentre?

6 What do you think are the 3 most important benefits of playcentre to you and your family?

7 What impact has playcentre had on your family life? (Has it changed the way you see things, and/or the way you do things?)

8 How many of your children attend this playcentre?

   O 1   O 2

Please answer questions 9-14 for your first child, and questions 15-20 for your second child if applicable.

Part B: Child's attendance at playcentre - First child

9 What days of the week does your child attend playcentre?

O Monday   O Wednesday   O Friday

O Tuesday   O Thursday

10 Does your child attend any other early childhood education service?

   O Yes   O No

   (a) If yes, what type of service is it?

      O Kindergarten   O Homebased service   O Another playcentre

      O Childcare centre   O Kohanga reo   O Playgroup

      O Other: _____

4

11 Would you like your child to go to the playcentre for more hours than they do currently?

O Yes   O No

(a) If yes, why is your child not going for more hours?

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12 How long has your child attended Wilton Playcentre?

O 0-6 months   O 13-18 months   O 2-3 years
O 6-12 months   O 19-24 months   O 3 or more years

13 Do you intend your child to attend playcentre until he/she goes to school?

O Yes   O No

(a) If yes, what are your main reasons?

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(b) If no, where will she/he go from here?

_____

(c) What are your reasons for the intended change?

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14 What school would you like your child to attend?

_____

(a) What are your reasons for selecting this school?

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Child's attendance at playcentre - Second child

15 What days of the week does your child attend playcentre?

O Monday   O Wednesday   O Friday
O Tuesday   O Thursday

16 Does your child attend any other early childhood education service?

O Yes   O No

(a) If yes, what type of service is it?

O Kindergarten   O Homebased service   O Another playcentre
O Childcare centre   O Kohanga reo   O Playgroup
O Other: _____

17 Would you like your child to go to the playcentre for more hours than they do currently?

O Yes O No

(a) If yes, why is your child not going for more hours?

18 How long has your child attended Wilton Playcentre?

O 0-6 months   O 13-18 months   O 2-3 years
O 6-12 months   O 19-24 months   O 3 or more years

19 Do you intend your child to attend playcentre until he/she goes to school?

O Yes O No

(a) If yes, what are your main reasons?

(b) If no, where will she/he go from here?

(c) What are your reasons for the intended change?

20 What school would you like your child to attend?

(a) What are your reasons for selecting this school?

Part C: Parental Employment - First parent/caregiver

21 Your gender .... O Female O Male

22 Are you in paid employment? If not, please skip the next 4 questions. ...... O Yes O No

Respondents in paid employment to answer:

23 How many hours a week are you *paid* to work?

O Under 10 hours   O 20-29 hours   O 50-59 hours
O 11-15 hours   O 30-39 hours   O 60-69 hours
O 16-20 hours   O 40-49 hours   O 70 or more hours

24 On average, how many hours do you *actually* work in a typical week?

- O Under 10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 20-29 hours
- O 30-39 hours
- O 40-49 hours
- O 50-59 hours
- O 60-69 hours
- O 70 or more hours

25 At which time(s) of day and week do you usually work? (*Select all that apply*)

O Mornings   O Afternoons   O Evenings   O Nights   O Weekdays only   O Weekends

26 What is your occupation? _____

All respondents to answer:

27 What is your **highest** qualification? *(Select one)*

- O Higher degree (Hons - PhD)
- O Bachelor degree
- O Any teaching diploma
- O Other tertiary qualification (including diploma)
- O Other: _____
- O Trade qualification
- O UE/Bursary or equivalent
- O Fifth form/School Cert or equivalent
- O No formal qualification

28 Are you currently doing any formal study or training (e.g. towards a playcentre certificate, or other qualification)?

O Yes   O No

(a) If yes, please specify: _____

(b) *If yes*, how many hours do you spend in study or training in a typical week?

- O Under 5 hours
- O 5-10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 21-25 hours
- O 26-30 hours
- O 31 or more hours

29 Do you do any unpaid work for a group or individual who does not live in the household with you, apart from playcentre work?

- O Care of elderly relative(s)
- O School board
- O Other: _____
- O PTA
- O Community organisation

(a) On average, how many hours do you spend in unpaid work in a typical week?

- O Under 5 hours
- O 5-10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 21-25 hours
- O 26-30 hours
- O 31 or more hours

30 What was your total family before-tax income in 2002?

- O Less than $15,000 p.a.
- O $15,000-$19,999
- O $20,000-$24,999
- O $25,000-$29,999
- O $30,000-$39,999
- O $40,000-$49,999
- O $50,000-$59,999
- O $60,000-$69,999
- O $70,000 or over

Part B Parental Employment - Second parent/caregiver

31 Your gender . . . .   O Female   O Male

32 Are you in paid employment? If no, please skip the next 4 questions. . . . . .   O Yes   O No

Respondents in paid employment to answer:

33 How many hours a week are you *supposed* to work?

- O Under 10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 20-29 hours
- O 30-39 hours
- O 40-49 hours
- O 50-59 hours
- O 60-69 hours
- O 70 or more hours

34 On average, how many hours do you *actually* work in a typical week?

- O Under 10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 20-29 hours
- O 30-39 hours
- O 40-49 hours
- O 50-59 hours
- O 60-69 hours
- O 70 or more hours

35 At which time(s) of day and week do you usually work? (*Select all that apply*)

O Mornings   O Afternoons   O Evenings   O Nights   O Weekdays only   O Weekends

36 What is your occupation? _____

All respondents to answer:

37 What is your **highest** qualification? *(Select one)*

- O Higher degree (Hons - PhD)
- O Bachelor degree
- O Any teaching diploma
- O Other tertiary qualification (including diploma)
- O Other:
- O Trade qualification
- O UE/Bursary or equivalent
- O Fifth form/School Cert or equivalent
- O No formal qualification

38 Are you currently doing any formal study or training (e.g. towards a playcentre certificate, or other qualification)?

O Yes   O No

(a) If yes, please specify: _____

(b) *If yes*, how many hours do you spend in study or training in a typical week?

- O Under 5 hours
- O 5-10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 21-25 hours
- O 26-30 hours
- O 31 or more hours

39 Do you do any unpaid work for a group or individual who does not live in the household with you, apart from playcentre work?

- O Care of elderly relative(s)
- O School board
- O Other:
- O PTA
- O Community organisation

(a) On average, how many hours do you spend in unpaid work in a typical week?

- O Under 5 hours
- O 5-10 hours
- O 11-15 hours
- O 16-20 hours
- O 21-25 hours
- O 26-30 hours
- O 31 or more hours

Part C: Involvement in the playcentre - First parent/caregiver

40 What involvement did you have in the playcentre in the last *four weeks*?

O   Involvement in the programme (parent help, setting up/cleaning up, resource preparation, excursions, assisting with children with special needs, evaluation and planning)
O   Administration (correspondence, filling in forms, finance, phone calls, emails)
O   Maintenance (grounds, repairs to buildings and equipment, equipment upkeep)
O   Management (planning, policy development, committee meetings, committee related work)
O   Training and professional development (seminars/training sessions)
O   Providing childcare to enable a partner to be involved
O   Had no involvement

41 During your time at playcentre, have you held any positions of responsibility (eg education officer, correspondence, health & safety team member, information officer, president) within the playcentre?

O Yes   O No

(a) If so, please specify what positions, and when:

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(b) Please list the year and course title for any playcentre training you have undertaken:

_____

_____

_____

_____

(c) Please list the year and course title of *any* other adult education courses you have undertaken:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Involvement in the playcentre - Second parent/caregiver

42 What involvement did you have in the playcentre in the last *four weeks*?

O   Involvement in the programme (parent help, setting up/cleaning up, resource preparation, excursions, assisting with children with special needs, evaluation and planning)
O   Administration (correspondence, filling in forms, finance, phone calls, emails)
O   Maintenance (grounds, repairs to buildings and equipment, equipment upkeep)
O   Management (planning, policy development, committee meetings, committee related work)
O   Training and professional development (seminars/training sessions)
O   Providing childcare to enable a partner to be involved
O   Had no involvement

43 During your time at playcentre, have you held any positions of responsibility (eg education officer, correspondence, health & safety team member, information officer, president) within the playcentre?

O Yes   O No

44 In the last year, have you held any positions (eg education officer, secretary, president) within the playcentre?

○ Yes   ○ No

(a) If so, please specify what positions, and when:

(b) Please list the year and course title for any playcentre training you have undertaken:

_____

_____

_____

_____

(c) Please list the year and course title of *any* other adult education courses you have undertaken:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for filling in this survey for the Centre of Innovation Project!

Appendix 4: Wilton Playcentre rating scale

Guidelines for administration of rating scale

The Centre Rating reflects what is observed throughout an <u>entire</u> visit. For this reason, it is best to wait until the end of the session before providing your final rating for each variable. You will need to check on children's ethnicity before you do the rating of item 9.

COVER SHEET: Fill in all details in space provided.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ADULTS PRESENT: Count the total number of adults present who are responsible for children. Visitors, for example, would not be included in this count.

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN PRESENT: It can sometimes be difficult to count exact numbers. Count all of the children who are there after you have been at the playcentre for half an hour. If an educator takes the roll during your visit, ask him/her for their count, to check against yours.

RESPONSIBLE ADULT-CHILD RATIO: This can be calculated after the visit.

OBSERVATIONS/SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: If relevant, add notes that might provide some background to what was observed on that particular day. Include, for example, the presence of visitors, a greater than average number of children absent due to illness, odd weather conditions (e.g. very hot/very cold) or anything else out of the ordinary. This information will not be coded.

THE RATING SCALE: All variables are rated on a 1 to 5 rating scale:

1 = not all like/never   2 = very little like/hardly ever   3 = somewhat like/occasionally

4 = much like/often   5 = very much like/always

ELABORATION:

The 1 to 5 ratings are used to rate whether or not the characteristics described in the main heading describe what is observed at the playcentre:

     1 = This description is not at all like this playcentre. What is being described never happened during the visit.

     2 = This description is very little like this playcentre. What is being described hardly ever happened during the visit.

3 = This description is somewhat like this playcentre. What is being described sometimes happened during the visit.

4 = This description is much like this playcentre. What is being described happened often, i.e. on a regular basis throughout the visit.

5 = This description is very much like this playcentre. What is being described happened all the time during the visit.

At the end of the visit, all variables should have a rating.

Double ratings (e.g. 4 - 5) are not acceptable.

A   Educators: Child Interaction

1   Educators are responsive to children

Educators ignore children's requests; are oblivious to their needs.

5   Educators respond quickly and directly to children and adapt their responses according to the children's styles and abilities. Educators provide support, focused attention, physical proximity and verbal encouragement as appropriate. Educators are alert to signs of stress in children's behaviour, and guide children in expressing their emotions. Awhi tētahi i tētahi; educators challenge Mokopuna to find solutions; educators explain cultural situations to the Mokopuna; educators comfort the Mokopuna when he/she is upset and unable to resolve the situation.

2   Educators model - and encourage children to use - positive reinforcement, explanation and encouragement as guidance/discipline techniques

Educators consistently do three or more of the following when guidance or discipline is needed: blame, threaten, use harsh language, belittle or degrade children, place children in solitary confinement, immobilise them, deprive them of food, drink, warmth, shelter or protection.

5   Educators set clear limits. They guide and/or discipline using reinforcement, explanation and/or encouragement. Children are provided with opportunities to develop social skills such as cooperating, helping, negotiating and talking to solve interpersonal problems Tuakana/teina care and support is encouraged and reinforced. Educators support children in being assertive while rationalising and talking through conflict. Educators support children to take on the view point of others. He tapu te tangata – educators discourage the belittling of one another and focus on manaaki tangata – looking after each other as the whānau unit.

Educators frequently praise and use positive body language to encourage and reinforce tikanga.

3 Educators model/guide children within the context of centre activities

1   Children are left to choose all of their own activities, with absolutely no guidance or feedback from the educators.

5   Educators move among the children to encourage involvement with materials and activities. They interact with children by asking questions, offering suggestions, and adding more complex ideas. They offer active guidance and encouragement in activities that are appropriate for individual children, and the centre philosophy and cultural context, e.g. kōhanga reo in relation to mihimihi, karakia, waiata, tuakana/teina. As appropriate, educators prepare the environment and encourage children to learn through new experiences such as active exploration and interaction with other adults, other children and new materials

4 Educators ask open-ended questions that encourage children to choose their own answers

1   No open-ended questions are heard. Frequent use of instructional reo.

5   Educators take advantage of many opportunities to extend children's thinking by asking open-ended questions which encourage creative thinking. Educators offer opportunities for children to come up with a range of different answers, to encourage thinking and creativity. Children are encouraged to be creative and consider alternative answers. Educators interact with the Mokopuna through stimulating conversation – korerorero. Educators discuss situations, events and activities and encourage responses. They frequently incorporate new vocabulary – ngā kupu hou.

5 Educators participate with children in activities and play

1   Educators monitor children's play but do not join in it at all.

5   Educators frequently join in children's activities (both individual and group), offer materials or information to facilitate play and learning around a particular theme. May enter into role plays with children, continue their interests throughout session. Educators encourage children to initiate activities and extend these activities by e.g. scaffolding, extending, discussion, modelling, or playing (Tuakana/teina concept). Educators encourage the Mokopuna to lead cultural activities such as mihimihi, karakia, waiata. Educators frequently acknowledge Mokopuna for initiating leadership in cultural activities. Educators frequently acknowledge the child's whakapapa – Mana Tangata.

B   Adult: Adult Interactions

6   Adults interact respectfully and positively with each other

1   Whānau and volunteers are not incorporated into activities. Staff/kaiako ignore or are abrupt with other adults. Staff/kaiako do not support each other, e.g. through positive comment.

5   Whānau and volunteers are fully included in activities. Good communication among adults is observed. All adults treat each other with respect and are positive towards each other. – Manaaki tangata, He tapu te tangata. Kaumatua are present in the kohanga and are acknowledged. Kaumatua actively participate in strengthening and extending te reo Māori with adult learners. Adults are seen practicing tuakana/teina support. Adult learners are seen speaking te reo Māori. Adults greet parents, children and visitors as they arrive and help them feel they belong.

C   Child: Child interactions

7   Children support and co-operate with one another in language and actions

1   Children regularly tease, bully, fight with, threaten and/or in other ways unsettle other children. There is absolutely no co-operation among children.

5   Children are seen to share, extend comfort to other children, offer to help or in other ways support and co-operate with each other – manaaki tangata.. Children use negotiating tactics to solve interpersonal problems. No fighting, teasing, name-calling or other verbal or physical aggression is evident. Children take responsibility for the well-being of other children Mana Tangata. Mokopuna are seen comforting other children when they are upset, hugging and praising other children and adults. Mokopuna are observed speaking te reo Māori and incorporating new vocabulary into their conversations. Mokopuna demonstrate appropriate cultural behaviour for each activity. Mokopuna achieve a new skill with the support of another child(ren). Mokopuna share with others. There is evidence of children using their initiative and leading activities.

D   Curriculum

8   Tikanga Māori (culture) and/or te reo Māori (language) is evident

1   There is no evidence of tikanga or te reo Māori.

5   Māori language and culture form an essential part of the regular programme. Waiata, mihi, and other language activities occur regularly. Resources and practices reflect Māori culture, language, values and beliefs. There are books with Māori legends and Māori characters, posters, toys, puzzles and murals reflecting positive Māori images. Customs such as sharing food with visitors are incorporated into the programme; culturally inappropriate practices (such as sitting on tables where food is handled) are never seen. Te reo Māori is used 80% of the time or more by adults. Children interact in te reo Māori.

9   Non sex-stereotyped play among children is observed

1   Boys and girls always play separately, the two never mix.

5   There is a good balance of boys and girls in different activities: climbing equipment, cooking, carpentry, family corner. Stereotypical groupings are rare, e.g. boys in one corner, girls in another. Role-play is not sex-stereotyped e.g. both boys and girls assume roles such as doctor, police officer, fire safety officer, nurse. However, mokopuna may demonstrate traditional cultural roles in tikanga Māori practices in kohanga reo.

10   There is evidence of recognition/acceptance of the cultures of children at the playcentre. The ethnicity of the children at the Early Childhood Service are taken into account and their cultures are represented.

1   There is no evidence of recognition/acceptance of the cultures of the children at this Early Childhood Service.

5   Resources and practices reflect the culture, language, values and beliefs of the children at the Early Childhood Service (e.g. pictures, clothes, books, puzzles, toys, foods, items from other cultures available in family area, dolls representing different ethnic groups). Customs from other cultures are incorporated into the programme; culturally inappropriate practices are discouraged. Resources representing varying cultures and ethnic backgrounds are available. Educators extend children's experiences to include knowledge of other cultures. Educators encourage respect, acceptance and appreciation of differences and similarities amongst cultures. Indicators of affirmation of cultures within the community include values and customs being supported, parents/whanau invited to share aspects of their culture with other children, welcome notices and newsletter items in other languages.

There is evidence that the family and culture of each child is respected e.g. children in kohanga reo know their whakapapa, children are encouraged to share happenings and objects from home, parents and family are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the programme.

11 There is evidence that the setting is inclusive of all children

1   The programme is not tailored to the interests, knowledge and abilities of each child. Some children are observed to be excluded from play and activities, and adults make no effort to challenge this. Belittling or discriminatory language is not addressed or is reinforced by adults.

5   Adults help children to feel positive about themselves and others. Adults address discriminatory behaviour and negative attitudes e.g. if child is excluded from play, if children compare themselves with others in a way that is belittling, if children stereotype others. Young children are encouraged to be assertive and to stand up for themselves and others. Children are encouraged to play together, co-operate and support each other. There are appropriate activities for different age groups. Adults know the children well and build on the interests, knowledge and abilities of each child through the learning programme. This may include a special programme or adapted programme if this is needed. All children have access to activities. Specialist or extra assistance is provided when a need for this is identified.

12 Children are encouraged to explore mathematical ideas and symbols

1   No mathematical ideas or representation through symbols is observed.

5   Adults pick up on children's mathematical ideas and extend them. Tasks are meaningful to the child and enjoyable. Adults encourage children to use mathematics for a variety of purposes, e.g. classifying, exploring quantity, counting, timing, patterning – tukutuku, kowhaiwhai, labelling, e.g. in kōhanga reo, kaiako use place values of numbers, e.g. units such as tens and ones. Using spatial words – raro, runga, waho, roto, waenganui, muri, mua, nui, iti, roa, poto, konei, kona, kora, koatu ra. Sorting and labelling – whanau groupings.

13 Children are allowed to complete activities

1   Children must finish all activities when adults dictate. There is a regimented, inflexible schedule.

5   Children have complete control over when activities are to be completed. Adults respect the needs of different children to complete activities according to their own schedules.

Mokopuna demonstrate that they know the daily routine and take responsibility for making a transition from one activity to another.

14 Children can select their own activities from a variety of learning areas

1   There is an extremely limited range of activities for the children to choose from - less than three at most times.

5   Children can self-select from a wide a range of available activities. Some activities are set up or changed from session to session to attract attention and stimulate interest. Learning areas provide many different opportunities for children to develop their skills, including gross and fine motor activities, cognitive-language activities, creative activities (artwork, collage etc), science and nature activities, music activities, cultural activities and possibly others.

15 Children work on problems and experiment with solutions themselves

1   Children are not observed doing any problem-solving themselves.

5   Experimentation and problem-solving are observed, e.g. children demonstrating "if this/then that" logic, weighing alternatives, reasoning comparing data, and sequencing events. Children are observed resolving problems together.

16 Children engage in child-initiated creative play

(e.g. storytelling, singing, pretend play, drama, making music)

1   No creative play whatsoever is observed.

5   Frequent creative play is observed, over a wide range of activities, e.g. story-telling, singing, pretend play, making music drama is done by both boys and girls. Adults encourage creative play and extend it (e.g. in kohanga reo Mokopuna are encouraged for telling their own stories, re-telling past events or stories).

17 Stories are read/told/shared

1   No stories are read, told or shared during the observation period.

5   Both children and adults share stories/books. Children are observed (either together or alone) reading or sharing stories. Story-sharing sessions occur at least once during the observation period and more than one story is shared. Children are actively encouraged to join in when the story-telling is going on, e.g. to ask and answer questions about the story. Adults make connections between the child's world and the story, and move

beyond the story to ask for thoughts about characters, behaviour and motivation. Stories may be told through songs and dance.

18 There is evidence of children's creativity and artwork

1   There is absolutely no evidence of children's artwork or creativity in the early childhood service.

5   Paintings, collage, drawing, print-making, weaving, carving, constructing, cutting and stitching are being done during a large proportion of the session and by many children at this early childhood service. Artwork and creativity should be visible on walls, at or just above children's eye level. Artwork shows no evidence of children following adult templates - `child's hand did the work'. There are a variety of activities observed such as pretend play, carpentry, story-telling, drama, dancing and music-making.

19 The centre is a "print-saturated" environment

1   There is no evidence of print whatsoever: no books, no posters, no other forms of writing.

5   The early childhood service is very print focused and encourages print awareness. Children are encouraged to listen to and read stories, look at books, and be aware of print in use. Print is visible on a variety of surfaces (e.g. posters, packets, charts, containers etc.) Much of the print is child-focused. Print should be visible at children's eye-level or just above. A range of books is readily accessible to children.

Children are encouraged to explore thoughts, experiences and ideas through using symbols, e.g. print, pictures, shapes, words, models and photographs. A range of writing materials is readily accessible to children. Children are observed to engage in writing or pretend writing. Children are encouraged and praised for writing their own name

E Resources

20 There are enough age appropriate toys/books/equipment (resources) to avoid problems of waiting, competing, and fighting for scarce resources

1   There are very few resources and children are constantly fighting over those that are available.

5   No competing or waiting is seen.

21 Equipment and activities encourage fine motor skills development

1   There are no fine motor equipment or activities seen whatsoever.

5   There is a wide range of equipment and materials that encourage fine motor skills available. Items such as scissors, manipulative materials, Lego, Duplo, blocks, pegboards, threading, weaving, are available and easily accessible by children. Equipment is well-maintained, e.g. all puzzle pieces are available, there appear to be no missing parts.

22 Equipment and activities encourage gross motor skills development

1   There are no gross motor equipment or activities seen whatsoever.

5   There is a wide range of equipment and materials that encourage gross motor skills available. Equipment and materials that encourage large muscle co-ordination are available, e.g. balls, riding toys, climbing frames; opportunities for balancing, jumping etc − as well as for kohanga reo − haka, poi, ti rakau titi torea. Equipment is easily accessible by children and well-maintained, e.g. climbing frames have no broken edges, balls are pumped up.

Safety versus freedom

1   A balance is achieved between ensuring the safety of infants and toddlers and allowing them access to equipment and experiences so that they can choose what they need to begin an activity independently as soon as they are able. Little or no regard to safety and /or access to an extremely limited range of equipment only.

5   A very good variety of accessible and safe experiences and resources, both indoors and out (e.g. treasure baskets, materials for heuristic play, low mirrors and pictures at floor level, books, natural as well as plastic objects, balls, sensory experiences, equipment for climbing, sliding and swinging). These are well supervised

24 Provision for parents of infants and toddlers. The needs of parents of very young children are well met

1   The centre has minimal provision for the needs of parents and their infants and toddlers, both interpersonal and practical.

5   Very good provision. Parents/ caregivers of infants and toddlers are warmly greeted, introduced to others and informed of the centre programme and provision for very young children. Other parents/ caregivers offer to take responsibility for the child(ren) while the parent has a break (e.g. or a cup of tea or to spend time with an older child). There are comfortable facilities for nappy changing, toileting, infant sleeping, breast and bottle feeding.

Wilton Playcentre rating scale cover sheet

1. Date: _____   2. Time of Day: a) AM   b) PM

3.   Visit No. _____

                 Weather: _____Researcher: _____

(count after half an hour at the centre)

4. _____   Adults (on duty list) working with children as part of the programme
5. _____   Kaumatua
6. _____   Parents/Helpers/Kaiawhina
7. _____   Volunteers
8. _____   Relievers
9. _____   Others/Visitors
10. _____ Total number of adults
11. _____ Total number of girls present
12. _____ Total number of boys present
13. _____ Total number of children present (12 + 13)
14. _____ Total number of Adults interacting with children
15. _____ Total number of adults non-contact with children
16. _____ Total number of adults interacting with only one-two children (e.g. own child, special needs child)

Observations

_____

_____

_____

_____

Special Circumstances?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 5: Interview schedules

Preamble

Each of the interviews began with the following preamble:

Wilton Playcentre is a designated centre of innovation. Over three years the playcentre is investigating how its beliefs, systems and practices support parent involvement and build a high quality teaching and learning environment. Linda Mitchell and Pam Cubey from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research are working with the playcentre to provide research and professional development expertise throughout the project. The research findings will be published in a variety of forms, including research reports, conference presentations and papers, in journals, booklets, report forms, and on the internet.

As part of the research, we want to interview and collect information from playcentre members at the beginning and end of the project. The initial interview is to [describe purpose]. Answers to these questions will help us build understanding of current practices and issues.

Wilton Playcentre members group interview questions

Wilton Playcentre philosophy

What does Wilton Playcentre really value?

What systems and practices help Wilton Playcentre achieve quality education?

If you could prioritise 3 things you hope children learn from playcentre (e.g. in terms of domains of knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, skills) what would these be?

How does Wilton Playcentre encourage children to persevere with activities they find difficult?

How does Wilton Playcentre encourage children to look after and respect one another?

How does Wilton Playcentre encourage children to take responsibility for the environment?

How do you encourage equity of opportunity for children?

Building a learning community

How does Wilton Playcentre assist parents to be strongly involved in supporting and extending their children's learning?

How does Wilton Playcentre assist non-duty parents to be strongly involved in supporting and extending their children's learning? What other practices could help these parents to be involved?

What playcentre practices help parents to be active learners themselves?

What are barriers to parents and whānau being learners? What could help overcome these barriers?

Is there anything else you would like to say about building a "learning community"?

Wilton Playcentre team leaders interview questions

1. How do you organise responsibilities within your team?
2. How does your team go about assessment and planning for children's learning? Who is involved?
3. What data have you gathered in the last year to help you assess and plan? How did you use/are you using this data? Who was/is involved?
4. How do you go about identifying children's schemas? How do you use that knowledge in your programme planning and implementation?
5. How do you let each other know about children's experiences, interests and learning during the day? Who is involved?
6. How do you let parents know about children's experiences, interests and learning during the day? Who is involved?
7. How do you find out about children's experiences, interests and learning at home?
8. How does the process of self-review work in your playcentre?
9. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your programme?
10. How does the playcentre support continuity between home and playcentre?
11. How does the playcentre support continuity between playcentre and school?
12. What processes are there to encourage children to talk and think about their experiences and learning?
13. How do you monitor the health and safety of the environment?
14. How do you work together as a team to get the best out of team members?
15. How do you help develop good relationships among parents?

Wilton Playcentre education officers interview questions

Describe training of parents/caregivers in the last year, number participating, and the processes followed.

What professional development has occurred here in the last 12 months?

What support does the playcentre provide for professional development?

What external support is available for these training processes? Describe.

What barriers are there to parents/caregivers being learners and undertaking training? Professional development?

Wellington Playcentre Association interview questions

Centre of Innovation Project

What do you hope will be achieved through the centre of innovation project?

How are you involved in this?

How can you support Wilton Playcentre during the course of the project?

What can Wilton Playcentre do to encourage association and Federation engagement?

Do you have plans to utilise the research findings? If yes, what are these? If no, do you intend to make plans for this?

Training

What training courses do you offer local playcentres?

What support do your tutors receive to ensure their knowledge and skills is kept up-to-date?

What recognition do parents/caregivers receive for undertaking playcentre training?

Administration

Describe systems to support local playcentres in respect to:

- Licensing and chartering
- Distribution of bulk funding
- Funding for special projects
- Property maintenance and capital works
- Policy development
- "At risk" centres
- ERO visits
- Other

Resources

Describe resources to support playcentres with respect to:

- Equipment purchase
- Kits for office holders
- Library services
- Other

Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

New Zealand Playcentre Federation interview questions

Centre of Innovation Project

What do you hope will be achieved through the centre of innovation project?

How are you involved in this?

How can you support Wilton Playcentre during the course of the project?

What can Wilton Playcentre do to encourage association and Federation engagement?

Do you have plans to utilise the research findings? If yes, what are these? If no, do you intend to make plans for this?

Support for playcentres

1. What support (e.g. resources, research, education, forums for discussion, policy) do you offer playcentre?

Other

Are there any other issues you wish to raise?