SPECIAL SECTION ON “THE QUALITY JOURNEY”

Introduction

Helen Hedges, Associate Guest Editor

This year, New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education is pleased to include a special section on the The Quality Journey/He Haerenga Whai Hua. Plenty of research evidence exists that quality early childhood education has positive long-term benefits for young children. Considerations of quality have tended to be synonymous with evaluative measures as a way to “capture”, “measure” or “assure” quality. Changes in research on quality have reflected changing theoretical and research paradigms. From a search for universal quantitative variables that could be applied across contexts, to a move towards research methodologies that reveals complexities, often through small-scale qualitative studies, quality has become viewed as a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept.

In keeping with this more dynamic view, quality has therefore in recent times been viewed as a journey, or a goal to be aspired to, that can be adapted and/or changed flexibly in response to context. To this end, a framework can assist in the process of developing and documenting quality. The Ministry of Education framework, The Quality Journey/He Haerenga Whai Hua, was issued in 1999. This document brings together the key concepts of Te Whariki and Quality in Action, including specific reference to the mandated Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices. It defines a quality improvement system and sets out steps and processes by which this may be used as a process of self review in three key areas: 1) teaching, learning and development, 2) adult communication and 3) collaboration and organisational management. Throughout the strategic plan Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki a thrust towards quality is evident. Self review is a current focus of Ministry of Education initiatives.

We have come to recognise that quality and quality assurance in early childhood is most usefully analysed from a perspective in which people, processes and leadership become the generators of quality in a particular setting. The authors in this section of the journal extend this theme in their original contributions to our literature.

Liz Depree and Karen Hayward followed up the journey that nine centres had taken in their first efforts at self review two years previously and report this in the first article in the special section. They stress the importance of quality as a goal to be strived for and actively maintained in a cyclic process and identify four key strategies for long-term maintenance of change. This is essential reading for teachers, managers, professional support providers and policy makers.
In the second article, Anne Grey suggests that quality evolves as an implicit part of the process of change where teachers regularly reflect collaboratively and critically on their practices. Leadership is vital to facilitate and motivate the process of self review. Grey identifies the personal and professional qualities of leadership in two case studies.

In *Turning the Kaleidoscope on Quality*, Jayne White describes her investigation into the perceptions of quality held by staff in family day care settings in relation to the home-based edition of *The Quality Journey/He Haerenga What Hua* (Ministry of Education, 2000). Investigating home-based caregivers’ views supports the contextual nature of quality, in keeping with the diversity valued in the early childhood sector in New Zealand.

We are pleased to include this special section. The three articles were submitted separately (not invited), and we organised them into this section. All of the articles in the Special Section were blind peer-reviewed before acceptance. We are certain you will find them insightful and thought-provoking.
Successes, Barriers and Enablers to Maintaining Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Services in New Zealand

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Abstract
This reports on findings from follow-up research conducted in 2002, tracking the journey of nine early childhood centres that had conducted a quality improvement review of practices in 2000. The purpose of the research was to identify successes, barriers and enablers to maintaining quality improvement. All the centres had been successful at maintaining change. Common threads contributing to successful maintenance were the inclusion of parents, children and teachers, strong leadership, and the development of management systems and professional development systems to maintain change.

Introduction
The New Zealand Ministry of Education’s 10-year strategic plan for early childhood Pathways to the Future: Nga huarahi Arataki (Ministry of Education, 2002) has three core goals: increasing participation in quality early childhood services, improving quality of early childhood services, and promoting collaborative relationships between key stakeholders within the early childhood community and beyond. The significant emphasis in the plan on improving quality strongly indicates the need for early childhood services to ensure that planning strategies include consideration of ongoing change that leads to improvement.

Our experience of working alongside early childhood teachers as they worked through the quality review guidelines in another Ministry document, The Quality Journey (Ministry of Education, 1999) demonstrated to us the resource’s usefulness for facilitating change and encouraging a culture of self-improvement in early childhood settings. The document, according to its introduction, “offers a helping hand along the road towards improving quality. It assists early childhood management and educators to establish quality improvement systems. Such systems are centred on programmes of regular quality reviews” (p. 5).

In 2000, we facilitated professional development using The Quality Journey resource with 10 Christchurch early childhood centres, nine of which completed an action research cycle that led to the development of action plans designed to facilitate changes to practice (Depree & Hayward, 2000). In 2002, we revisited the nine centres to identify how effectively they had maintained the changes to practice outlined in their action plans of 2000. The Quality Journey stresses that undertaking the quality improvement review outlined in the document should enable centres to “affirm, change or abandon aspects (policies, objectives or practices) to improve
outcomes” (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 16). The aim of our follow-up research was to ascertain how well the nine centres had maintained changes to practice over a two-year period, and also to identify the successes, enablers and barriers that had influenced maintenance of these changes.

**Literature Review**

This brief review focuses on approaches to quality improvement within the context of The Quality Journey resource. It also documents literature related to the change process in educational settings. Together, the two highlight the importance of the change process when considering improvements to quality.

**Quality improvement**

When defining different aspects of quality improvement, Williams (1995, as cited in Fleer & Kennedy, 2000) identified three approaches to improving quality in organisational settings: total quality, quality assurance and quality control. Total quality involves all parties within an organization, while quality control focuses on meeting objective standards. Quality assurance lies between these two in that it includes aspects of both total quality and quality control. Our experience in working with The Quality Journey resource with early childhood teachers and management highlights that the framework provides a total quality approach that involves in-depth consultation with all key stakeholders who have an interest in the topic for review. A key feature of The Quality Journey model is that all stakeholders undertake professional development within a reflective culture, on a mutually agreed goal.

A challenge was made to the early childhood sector by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) to consider quality beyond a standardised recipe for all to reach. Rather than considering quality as a product of pre-specified outcomes, the authors suggested that we should view quality through a postmodernist lens - as a concept that is socially constructed without a single correct answer and that is produced through what they term “the discourse of meaning making” (p. 87). This view was supported in The Quality Journey resource:

A high-quality early childhood service is one in which every day, for every child (regardless of ethnicity, gender, ability, age or background), there are opportunities for thinking, play, excitement, and lots of interactions with adults. However, the search for high quality is a journey, not an arrival, so it is always a continuing challenge (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 5).

Morgan (1996) outlined four levels of quality, ranging from harmful, unacceptable quality through to good-enough quality, good quality and excellent quality. Morgan believed that while regulatory requirements on their own prevent harmful,
 unacceptable quality, they will only ever provide good-enough quality and to achieve good or excellent quality, early childhood services need to be sufficiently motivated and committed to meeting more than the minimum requirements. Grey (1999) believed that internal motivation for good or excellent quality is embedded in a vision based on the values and beliefs of all stakeholders in the early childhood service.

Smith (1996) described the importance of considering the value perspectives of all stakeholders, including children. She discussed the concept of subjectivity and objectivity in relation to quality. Smith contended that “subjective accounts involve perspectives on the nature of quality which come from thinking persons, and objective accounts involve the nature of quality as it exists, independent of the way we think about it” (p. 81). This view on subjectivity was affirmed by Maloney and Barblett (2002), who believed that reflection on practice involving all stakeholders is the key to forming a subjective values-based vision. They asserted that “the idea is to examine personal philosophies, confront challenges, change long-held views and analyse, deconstruct and reconceptualise good practice” (p. 16). This process presumably affirms the importance of change, not only for practices but also values and beliefs, in the search for quality improvement.

### The Change Process

Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe and Waters-Marsh (2001) defined change as a process of making things different. Whitaker (1993) argued that change within is a process that requires new knowledge and skills to move from a present state to a future state and that learning, accordingly, is central to this process. He contended that many people within educational settings view change as a threat rather than an opportunity to improve quality and that the key to dispelling fear of change is to encourage a culture of reflective practice.

In contemplating change to practice through reflection, Stoll (1999) stated that the right place to begin the change process was from within the individual. Developing an internal capacity to cope with the complexity and unpredictability of change was vital to school improvement. She argued that “reflective self-analysis and inquiry-mindedness” (p. 519) are central to school improvement.

When exploring the multidimensional nature of change, McGill (2002) stated that there is an inter-relationship between four big M’s: materials, methods, morals and mortals. Although all four are necessary for change to occur, McGill maintained that the success of change is reliant on the actions, thoughts and values of the mortals involved in the change. We concur with this view. Also, it is our experience that mortals in a leadership role in early childhood services contribute significantly to how successfully change is managed and maintained.
Senge (1990, as cited in Fullan, 1993), stated that the real leverage for change is viewing the inter-relationships rather than the cause and effect of change. Fullan acknowledged the complexity of the change process and maintained the importance of viewing change as “an overlapping series of dynamically complex phenomena” (p. 113) rather than a linear cause and effect process. Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe and Walters-Marsh (2001) agreed with this concept by identifying first order and second order change. They defined first order change as “linear and continuous” and second order change as “multidimensional, multilevel, discontinuous and radical” (p. 700).

In order to study actual change processes, we conducted a follow-up study of 9 early childhood centres that had conducted a quality improvement review of practices in 2000. The purpose of the research was to identify successes, barriers, and enablers to the quality journeys of these centres.

Method

Participants

A letter inviting participation in the follow-up research was sent to the nine centres that had completed a quality improvement review in 2000. Each centre was asked to self-select representatives who would respond to a written questionnaire and structured interview. To ensure reliability of data we asked that the representatives include, to the greatest extent possible, those management and teaching personnel who had participated in the 2000 professional development and were still involved in the centre in 2002. Nineteen participants were involved in the follow-up research in 2002 (13 teaching staff and 6 management personnel), all of who had been involved in the 2000 professional development. All participants completed the questionnaire and took part in the interview.

Procedures

The written questionnaire in 2002 requested the same information as was gathered from each centre in 2000. This included the location of the centre, the type of centre, the hours of operation, the weeks of the year open, the number of children currently enrolled, the number of full and part time staff and their relevant qualifications. A comparative analysis of these enabled identification of significant changes that had occurred during the two-year period. The 2002 questionnaire also asked participants to rate, on a four-point Likert scale, how well they thought the centre had maintained the action plan changes. The scale ranged from “very well maintained” to “not very well maintained”. The data obtained from the questionnaire were compared with the data gathered during the 2000 professional development to determine changes across the two years that might have had a bearing on each centre’s ability to maintain the changes identified in their action plans.
The structured group interview conducted as part of the 2002 follow-up research consisted of five set questions designed to elicit participants’ views of the types of changes that had worked and/or not worked, and the reasons for these. A structured approach was used in an effort to produce reliable and valid data across all centres. The participants were interviewed as a group in their own centre settings. During the interview, one of us acted as scribe and the other as interviewer to ensure objectivity and consistency in the data collection. The questions asked were:

1. How well have you been able to implement the action plan you drew up in 2000?
2. What changes have been successful and why?
3. What factors have enabled you to maintain the changes?
4. Have there been any barriers to maintaining these changes?
5. What further professional development have you accessed that has supported you to maintain the changes?

*Research Limitation*

Although all nine centres from the 2000 study chose to participate in the 2002 follow-up research, a number of families were no longer attending the centres and a high turnover of centre personnel resulted in a limited availability of participants to interview. In addition, of the 36 centre personnel who could have been involved in the 2002 interview process, only 19 participants were available due to the constraints of time and money. These factors must be acknowledged as a limitation when interpreting the findings.

*Results*

*Questionnaire*

Comparison of the same baseline data from 2000 and 2002 showed that the location, type of centre and hours of operation had generally remained constant for all nine centres. The most notable change in the data sets across the two years was that related to qualifications. Teachers holding a Bachelor of Education increased from two to 11, while teachers with a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) decreased slightly from 43 to 39, a possible reflection of early childhood teachers upgrading qualifications (Hedges, 2001) or newly employed teachers holding higher qualifications.

*Interview*
In the sections that follow, results from the interview are reported in relation to each question asked.

1. How well have you been able to implement the Action Plan you drew up in 2000?

All participants said that the action plans developed during the 2000 professional development and revisited during the follow-up research had been successfully maintained. These opinions were validated by the ratings asked for in the questionnaire. Two centres rated their action plans as very well maintained, five as well maintained, and two as maintained.

2. What changes have been successful and why?

Although each of the nine centres chose a different area relating to their centre to review, the responses of the participants revealed common threads contributing to the successful maintenance of change. These were the inclusion of parents, children and teachers throughout the review and change process as well as the development of systems designed to support the successful maintenance of change.

Parents. Participants in eight of the centres reported that their partnership with parents had been enhanced as a result of the review. By implementing changes that took direct account of parents’ views, wishes and needs, the centres had helped ensure parental support for their practices, which doubtless had served to maintain those practices. The changes included increased opportunities for involvement in the centre, an increased understanding by parents of centre bicultural practices, a strengthening of behaviour management strategies between the home and the centre, a new and wider range of parent education opportunities, and improved feedback between parents and teachers on children’s learning and development through profile books.

Communication systems with parents also had been enhanced. Improvements included parent newsletters and daily communication through notebooks and whiteboards. One centre noted that parents were now initiating contacts with teachers in relation to their child’s learning and development.

Children. Participants in six centres noted successes in relation to outcomes for children. One participant said that children were making increasing use of improved bicultural resources and were verbalising Maori-language phrases:

“Children have learnt a respect for protocols of Tikanga Maori and developed their own waiata. They are leading karakia and waiata at mat time – this has encouraged leadership in the older children.”

Participants at another centre commented that children were more competent and taking responsibility for self-correcting their own behaviour. They also reported a revisiting of centre rules during group times for the children. Participants in a centre
whose focus for review was to help children develop emergent literacy skills had observed, since implementing its action plan, children developing an awareness that print has meaning by using their own sign-in attendance book and thereby modelling parents’ daily practice. A literacy table was encouraging children’s emergent writing skills and the book area was now seen as more workable with a higher use. Participants in three centres that chose to review their assessment procedures noted that children now had more opportunities to contribute to documentation in their individual profile books. As well, systems had been put in place to ensure that teachers regularly assessed all children.

**Teachers.** Participants in 7 centres noted the successful maintenance of change in relation to teachers. Many of these successes related to teamwork. A participant from one of these centres observed “shared values, beliefs and vision on emergent literacy have enabled teachers to work as a team”. Participants in two of the other seven centres commented that being able to reflect with colleagues on centre practice and to observe role modeling by other teachers were factors in supporting the maintenance of change. They also considered it important for teachers to have opportunities for discourse on current trends and practices in relation to their topic. Participants from another centre noted that teachers were better able to support one another and were more consistent when applying behaviour management strategies with the children. These teachers were following through on agreed behaviour management strategies, irrespective of how long it took to achieve a positive outcome for children, and they reported gaining confidence in this area.

The participants in a centre that chose to look at how it could foster biculturalism in daily teacher practice stated that budget systems had been developed to support this improved practice and that the teachers now had a stronger commitment to moving beyond tokenism. Each staff meeting was seeing the introduction of new language phrases and new teachers were being encouraged to take part in the bicultural initiative.

The participant of one centre noted successful change to teacher practice. This person commented, “Teachers have become reflective in thinking about literacy when working alongside children and introducing literacy concepts into outdoor play.”

**Management systems.** The interview comments highlighted the importance of management systems in supporting the successful maintenance of change. All centres identified improved systems that had been put in place or reviewed over the two-year period. Three centres highlighted the importance of curriculum management systems for implementing assessment, planning and evaluation. As the participant of one of these centres said, “Simplification of the programme planning system has been a big factor in maintaining this change.” Staff from another centre commented on how changes to its time management system had given teachers
greater flexibility in planning and implementing quality experiences for individual children. As well, the supervisor was now providing extra non-contact time for teachers to continue working on children’s profile books.

Participants from four centres identified that changes to budget systems had led to the allocation of money to help meet the improvement goals outlined in the action plans. This situation had allowed extra resources to be purchased and enabled teachers to review the environment they were offering children and to make changes in relation to the availability and amount of equipment provided.

One centre’s topic for review focused on employing people to promote quality practice. Review of personnel systems had ensured new job descriptions were more task specific and lifted the professional standard. Staff at this centre considered that it had successfully clarified the process of “who we want to employ and why.”

In summarising the success of maintaining the changes made as a result of the 2000 professional development, a participant from one centre stated, “The culture of the organisation has changed.” This comment was implicitly made by the participants in all centres as they reflected on the changes that had occurred for parents, children, and teachers as a result of implementing the quality improvement action plans.

3. What factors have enabled you to maintain the changes?

The analysis of responses to this question identified common aspects across all nine centres that enabled change to be maintained. These were leadership, access to ongoing professional development, and management systems.

Leadership. Participants in five centres identified leadership as an enabling factor. This included leadership shown by private owners and supervisors as well as a head teacher providing a role model to other teachers. In addition, those in a leadership role were often seen as facilitating a team approach to the change process. Part of this team approach involved developing shared values, beliefs and vision on the topic chosen for review. A participant from one centre said,

“One hundred percent of teachers are on board with the vision, beliefs and values in relation to our topic. Before, only 80 per cent were.”

As well as developing teamwork, individual teachers were being motivated to emerge as leaders in facilitating change. In one centre, three teachers were said to have empowered new teachers to lead a workshop for parents on the curriculum offered to the children.

Professional development. Participants in five centres identified professional development support as an important factor enabling the maintenance of change. The support of a professional development facilitator was particularly applauded. The objective view that a facilitator brought to the process and her ability to help
plan a structure and timeline for the change process were seen as crucial success factors.

Over the two-year period, seven centres had requested varying amounts of professional development support to undertake a second quality improvement review using *The Quality Journey* resource. This practice appeared to have not only consolidated the process of quality improvement reviews but also confirmed the usefulness of engaging outside professional support.

Management systems. Participants in seven centres commented that the development and refinement of existing management systems had contributed to the maintenance of change. These systems included employment policies, staffing rosters, staff meeting times, non-contact time for teachers, assessment systems and budgeting for information technology resources and equipment resources.

Participants in six of the nine centres commented on the usefulness of *The Quality Journey* document in providing a structured framework for review, noting in particular its clear guidelines for collecting and documenting data. One participant described *The Quality Journey* as “a fantastic resource. By being supported in the process, the methodology is in place.” Comments like this confirmed quality improvement reviews as a successful method of encouraging and developing a culture of change designed to improve quality.

4. Have there been any barriers to maintaining these changes?

Analysis of the participants’ answers to this question identified eight barriers to maintaining change. These were high teacher turnover, insufficient time to both maintain and implement systems, limitations of space and buildings, limited access to appropriate resources, lack of money, limited access to technology, lack of confidence by teachers, and differing philosophies within a team.

The high teacher turnover over the two-year period, as identified from the data analysis, was a barrier for all centres except one. However, despite this only one centre had experienced a change to a staff member in a key leadership role over the two-year period. Participants in four centres highlighted insufficient time as a common barrier and participants in three centres noted that teachers’ lack of confidence in writing centre newsletters, facilitating parent education evenings and documenting children’s learning and development had limited their ability to maintain change.

5. What further professional development have you accessed that has supported you to maintain the changes?

Participants in all nine centres had participated in some form of further professional development since the time of the 2000 review, and this often related to their chosen review topics. Participants in seven of the nine centres reported that teachers had
accessed individual professional development, professional readings or other professional development opportunities, and participants in four of the nine centres said that their teachers were involved in qualification upgrades. The participants in these centres acknowledged that these activities had affirmed their action plans and contributed to the success of maintaining change.

**Discussion**

Four key strategies that enabled centres to successfully maintain change emerged from analysis of the above findings. These were the inclusion of all stakeholders in the change process, strong leadership, the provision of efficient quality-based management systems and planning for professional development.

**Inclusion of stakeholders in the change process**

Stakeholders involved in the 2000 professional development were teachers, management, parents and children. For Grey (1999), the provision of excellent quality within early childhood centres requires all stakeholders to be involved in determining the centre’s vision and ongoing improvements. *The Quality Journey* (Ministry of Education, 1999) strongly promoted the inclusion of all stakeholders in the review process. [The process] “is designed to involve management, educators, and parents/whanau in reviews of their services in order to evaluate and improve quality” (p. 4). Powell (1998) also promoted enhanced partnerships with parents and particularly stressed the need for centres to place emphasis on listening to the views, needs and concerns of parents. Katz (1993) stated the importance of the child’s view, deeming it particularly important to any initiatives designed to effect quality improvements in early childhood programmes. Smith (1996) introduced the concept of children as important stakeholders within an early childhood centre.

As a result of including teachers, management, parents and children in the review process, all nine centres brought to it a total quality approach of the kind promoted by Williams (1995, as cited in Fleer & Kennedy, 2000). According to Williams, this approach involves all parties, unlike “quality control”, which requires staff to meet objective standards. Similarly, Maloney and Barblett (2002) argued that when all stakeholders have opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process and to voice their views, a subjective vision for the centre will be established. Rodd (1998), however, cautions that once centre goals have been identified in this manner, leadership must ensure achievement of the goals.
Strong leadership

A notable trend emerging from the findings was the importance of leadership in maintaining change. Rodd (1998) viewed leaders as pivotal to instigating change that brings improved quality for both children and adults. One aspect of leadership highlighted during the interviews was the importance of one person taking a strong leadership role throughout the review process. In most cases, this person was the owner/manager of the centre, but some centres preferred a team approach and nominated one person as the key contact person to liaise with the professional development facilitator. Comments made by centre personnel indicated that this style of leadership not only encouraged teamwork, let teachers feel supported and empowered and allowed personal growth to occur, but also increased opportunities for teachers to develop and articulate their philosophies, values and beliefs in relation to their chosen topic for review.

One of Matthews and Grant’s (2001) six guiding principles for effective teacher development is networking (with colleagues) of the kind that offers opportunities for critical reflection and thinking. Opportunities for ongoing critical reflection and thinking allow teachers to evaluate their own values and beliefs in relation to early childhood pedagogy and to make a valid contribution to the development of a centre vision relating to quality. Stoll (1999) supports this view, maintaining that lasting change must begin within the individual.

McGill (2002) believed that mortals play an important leadership role in ensuring the success of change. Although she argues that mortals and morals are the more challenging factors of the four Big M’s of change, the challenge becomes more manageable when methods and materials support mortals. Commitment to and modelling of pedagogical ideals and administrative practices by those in managerial positions within the centres thus seems vital to effective maintenance of the change process.

Management systems

Although all centres were required to have a strong organisational groundwork in place before undertaking a quality improvement review in 2000, the study’s findings indicate that the review process generally resulted in a strengthening and further enhancement of management systems. Many centres identified a number of materials and methods commensurate with McGill’s (2002) Big M’s of change that supported the successful maintenance of change. These included budgeting for resources and non-contact time, clear job descriptions, written formats for programme planning, a system for regular assessment of individual children and documented guidelines for policies and procedures. Some innovations relating to materials and methods that might at first look seem relatively minor, appear to have had a marked influence on the maintenance of change. For example, one centre’s purchase of a digital camera impacted positively on the quality of the system used to
assess each child. Matthews and Grant (2001) would probably applaud this change, as they believe that access to information technology enhances teachers’ skills and general professional development.

**Professional development**

Matthews and Grant (2001) argue that access to professional development, including readings on current theory and practice, is essential for ongoing improvement in early childhood centres, while Hedges (2001) observed that exposure to new theories of teaching and learning brought about by early childhood staff upgrading their qualifications enhanced the professional standing and pedagogical practices of early childhood education. Burt and Davison (1998) claimed that outside help enhances educators’ professional development and, in turn, their ability to implement and maintain quality-based changes.

During our 2000 professional development with the centres (Depree & Hayward, 2000), we incorporated a component of teaching related to each centre’s review topic, an intervention was in accord with the principles espoused by the researchers cited in the previous paragraph. All centre participants commented favourably on access to ongoing professional development, indicating that all nine centres were encouraging a culture of practitioner research.

The seven centres that undertook a subsequent quality improvement review after the 2000 professional development demonstrated a commitment to continuous quality improvement. This is in line with the suggestion in *The Quality Journey*’s that a quality improvement system must be planned and systematic (Ministry of Education, 1999). Centre staff stated that the process of collecting data during the 2000 quality improvement review had motivated and enthused them to repeat the exercise. The data was also a foundation for them to return to and reflect on over the ensuing two-year period. Moreover, the undertaking of subsequent reviews had allowed them to consolidate the rigour of the review cycle and enhance their action research skills. Grey (2002) commented that documenting achievements and improvements extends the professional horizons of early childhood teachers.

It seems that the initial professional development undertaken in 2000 may have encouraged the centres to adopt a culture of “inquiry-mindedness” as advocated by Stoll (1999). In discussing the importance of teacher development, Halsall (1998) confirms this notion of inquiry-mindedness by arguing that an approach that allows teachers to collaboratively identify their own goals and reflect on their own experiences helps maintain improvements. Fetterman’s (1996, as cited in Grey, 2002) theory that self-review is an empowering process for teachers when they own the what, how and why of the review also supports advisability of involving teachers in the process of their professional development. Certainly, it is our view that the **Plan>Do>Study>Act>** cycle outlined in *The Quality Journey* enabled centre
teachers and management personnel to be actively involved in and own the process of their quality improvement review.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

The results from the 2002 follow-up research indicated that all changes to practice implemented through the quality improvement review action plans of the nine early childhood centres were successfully maintained over the two-year period.

The four strategies identified as influencing the positive maintenance of change in the centres were the inclusion of all stakeholders in the change process, strong and stable leadership, the provision of effective management systems, and access to professional development. These four strategies match not only the effective change maintenance strategies but also the quality enhancing initiatives detailed in the literature. The successful outcomes for the nine centres strongly indicated the usefulness of *The Quality Journey* resource as an effective tool that facilitated early childhood centres to initiate, manage and maintain the change process arising from their quality improvement reviews. It is also a resource that encouraged a culture of ongoing research by enabling teachers to become more reflective in their practice in the manner advocated by Bennett (1998) and Stoll (1999).

A particularly strong feature of this research process, as evident in our findings, is that it requires the collection of data. These data form a basis for ongoing reflection on the part of centre personnel that appeared to facilitate and maintain positive changes to centre practice – a process that if it continues should help ensure realisation of some of the objectives of the Ministry of Education’s strategic 10-year plan for early childhood services in New Zealand.

There is a need to further explore how quality improvement reviews could enhance the ongoing development of a research culture and encourage teachers and management personnel to be reflective about their practice based on the gathering of data. This would significantly enhance a research culture within early childhood services whereby research informs practice and practice informs research.

The development and implementation of new self-review guidelines by the Ministry of Education will encourage ongoing reflective practice linked to quality improvements. Ongoing reviews are “best seen as an integral part of a service’s life” *The Quality Journey* (p. 13).

**References**


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**About the Authors**

Liz Depree and Karen Hayward are currently working in the professional development contract at the Christchurch College of Education. Since the release of *The Quality Journey Resource* in 1999, they have been involved with many early childhood centres in implementing quality improvement reviews based on the action research model outlined in the document. An interest in educational management and leadership has led them both to complete the National Diploma in Educational Management and a Master of Education (Tasmania).
The Quality Journey: Is There a Leader at the Helm?

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Abstract
This research project explores the role of the leader in early childhood centre self-review in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Two case studies of centres that had successfully completed self-review in the previous twelve-month period were undertaken. The leader of each centre was interviewed, the participants in the self-review were involved in a group discussion on the role of the leader, and the documentation pertinent to the review was examined. It was found that both leaders laid the foundations for self review by shaping a centre culture based on reflective practice together with on-going meaningful professional development, collaborative relationships and a responsiveness to the community. Centre leaders demonstrated personal characteristics such as fairness, integrity, courage and collegiality, which motivated the participants to commit to the review process. Both leaders also conducted the review process in a way that empowered the participants.

Introduction
In 1999, the Ministry of Education issued The Quality Journey: He Haerenga Whai Hua to all licensed early childhood centres to offer assistance to early childhood services in establishing quality improvement processes. This process by which early childhood services evaluate their own effectiveness in order to improve practice has become known as self review (Education Review Office, 2002). Self-review has been described as an on-going process of carefully planned stages that allows an organisation to realise its vision (Schollum & Ingram, 1991). While The Quality Journey (MOE, 1999) outlined the process of self-review, it made no mention of the role of educational leadership in facilitating this process.

Self-review implies change for improvement and so involves leading for change, a key role for those professionals who are committed to a high standard of early childhood education (Rodd, 1998). Literature suggests that leadership has a key role to play in quality improvement (Kagan & Bowman, 1997) and that leaders can become the gatekeepers to quality by being threatened by collaborative, inclusionary processes, such as self-review (Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992).

As self review is new to early childhood education, there is little written about the role the leader plays. This situation prompted the research question: What is the role of the leader in relation to self review in early childhood in Aotearoa/New Zealand? The aims of this research project were to: explore the role of the leader in self review in early childhood education from the leader’s perspective, from the
follower’s perspective, and explore any issues arising from the process of self review.

Research Design

Case study methodology was chosen so that qualitative data could be used to describe, understand and explain the leader’s role in self review (Yin, 1994). It was envisaged that the research would give voice to the participants to describe their experiences of the leader’s role in self review from their own perspectives so that a framework for understanding this role could be formed (Merriam, 1998).

Two separate early childhood centres were studied the “Rimu Centre” and the “Kauri Centre”. The criteria used for selection of centres was that the centres had successfully completed a review in the last year, that the review was completed by the staff as a team rather than by an individual, and that the staffing in each centre had not changed, so that those that completed the review were still involved in the centre to participate in the research.

The researcher visited the centre on two separate occasions – to interview the leader and to record a group discussion by the staff involved in the review process on the role of the leader. Both the interview and the group discussion took the form of semi-structured interviews. The resulting dialogue was audio-taped, transcribed by the researcher, and returned to the participants to have the accuracy confirmed. The questions asked of the leaders and the staff were the same, so as to gain the different perspectives on the role of the leader. The questions were:

- Describe the self review/ reviews that you undertook.
- What was your role in this review?
- What were the issues and challenges in the self-review process?
- What were the advantages and benefits of self-review for you?

In addition, the leader was asked how she perceived her role in the process, while the participants were asked to describe the kind of leader they worked with and the role of that leader in the self review process.

As well as the interviews and the group discussions in each centre, the researcher looked at the documentation of the self review in both centres. In this way, a triangulated approach to collecting data was adopted: the leader was interviewed; on a separate occasion the staff members involved in the self review process took part in a group interview, and the review documents themselves were studied. It was hoped that by gathering the data from these three perspectives the study would have greater validity (Yin, 1994).
The Case Studies

**The Kauri Centre**

The Kauri Centre is a community-based mixed-aged sessional centre in a suburban area. It was founded by the current leader, is non-profit making, and 130 children attend each week. The centre environment is well-maintained, and tidy and the centre efficiently managed. The Kauri Centre has established a culture that supports professional development of staff, both as a team and individually. Both the leader and the staff of the Kauri Centre had a vision for their centre that they want to be. The leader said simply that:

> As a leader I try to demonstrate, and encourage with the rest of the team to be the best that we can.

The staff members reported that they had developed a collective vision, revisited from time to time. A staff member said that:

> We thought of it as our philosophy, but it is more what we want to achieve and what we want to do differently.

The Kauri Centre tries to complete two reviews a year. Topics for review are selected from a needs analysis completed at the beginning of each year that identifies the strengths and areas of concern in the centre. The topics have included: "Is our teaching effective for children with non-English-speaking backgrounds?" and "Is our outdoor learning environment appropriate for mixed age sessions?" The staff members reported that incorporating self-review into practice had improved both their practice and their communication with parents.

When asked to describe her role, the leader of the Kauri Centre said:

> I am seen as the leader of the centre. I like to think of us all as a team, that we all work together. I am not a great supporter of hierarchy or anything like that, I like collaborative leadership.

The staff described the role of the leader as follows:

> I feel there are things she needs to be complete leader in…but we work as a team. We also have shared leadership…she will never make a decision on her own without asking for our opinion and getting input from all of us.

The leader described her role in self-review as a co-ordinator who encourages others to think of appropriate topics for review, but that her role was also one of instigator, as it was often necessary for her to direct the team to do "the things that really need to happen".

The Kauri leader says:
I try not to be too bossy! I try to get people to come up with the ideas themselves, but…it is me remembering to, you know, pull it all together.

The participants described the leader’s role in self-review as being very collaborative.

I think when parents talk about things a lot with us then we need to address that issue…We all gave our reasons why we wanted to do that, and she said “Right!”…so we all had input.

When asked about the issues involved in undertaking a self-review, the leader of the Kauri centre reported that for her, the main issue was accepting the fact that improvement was needed:

Initially, it is hard accepting that you are not doing things properly, particularly if it is your system that was put in place. I think it takes a lot of courage and honesty to be able to say, we have been doing this for years and it is not just working, is it?…and asking for feedback, constructive feedback from the community and taking it on board without taking offence, you know, and realising it is a positive thing.

When the leader of the Kauri Centre was asked if the self-review process was ever personally threatening, she replied that it had challenged her philosophy. The Kauri Centre staff reported that the main issue for them was having the self discipline to consistently complete the data gathering tasks. One said:

I can remember…having to make a special effort a couple of times to make sure that I watched and had something to write down…you have to have a bit of self-discipline about making yourself remember them.

Both the leader and the staff of the Kauri Centre claimed that there are great benefits to completing a self review. The leader described the benefits of self review like this:

when you have done a review you are much more efficient, and you’re looking at how you can improve, and I just think it has made our service a lot better, and it has made teachers aware of what they are doing, and the benefits of it.

One of the staff members said that self review had caused her to think more when planning and teaching. Another staff member said

it is very satisfying to actually see it all written down, and to say, this is what
it is like, you know, this is the question we posed, this is what is going to happen, and to actually see the difference.

The staff of the Kauri Centre believed that an additional benefit of self-review was that it enhanced relationships with parents. The parents have seen that when they have concerns, these have been addressed through self-review of practices.

As a final question, the leader of the Kauri centre was asked if she thought the self review would have been completed without her. She replied

they are all very willing participants…and they all contribute and give feedback about things, you know, that identify areas that they think are not working well… but I don’t think they would ever sit down and say “Oh! These are the things that I would self review!… they leave that to me.

The Rimu Centre

The Rimu Centre is located in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of a city. It is a privately owned centre that is licensed for children from the ages of 3 to 6 years old. It was also founded by the current leader. On entering the centre, it appears well organised and well managed. The leader and the centre staff had a clear vision:

we always felt that we wanted to do the very best job that we could, and that the children would be treated how we would want our own children to be treated.

The staff members say that part of the vision is a culture of listening, respect and the community. The staff regarded implementing the vision as a journey

we will continue on this journey… there is no real definite end, just a continual journey, we just keep building on what we have already got.

Part of the journey was being involved in professional development, as well as an emphasis on documentation to enable the centre to “look back”. Participants in the Rimu Centre regarded self-reviews as empowering, while the style of leadership at the Rimu Centre was described by the leader as collaborative:

I see myself believing that the teachers I work with want to do the right thing… my role is to set a good example and to keep us all steered in the right direction… I don’t tell them, we kind of get there together.
The staff regarded the leader of the Rimu Centre as being powerful and setting high standards, but said that she guided them:

She involves us, even though it is her centre, she involves us, and what we say is valued. She is not there teaching us, she is involving us in the process of management. So we are all learning skills.

The leader of the Rimu Centre believed her role in self review was that of a facilitator, as well as a participant:

I have to be prepared to make the resources available, so it is things like time and money, energy available for it to happen, and I think, just set the expectations that it will happen.

When asked about the issues involved in completing a self review, the staff emphasised the need for time for maintaining motivation, and the importance of having ground rules so that the self review process was regarded as positive. In addition, the leader of the Rimu Centre commented,

I believe one of the big issues is to actually be honest… Are we really trying to see what is happening? Are there some things that are harder to review than others? So things like looking at the outdoor area is easier than, how are we listening to children?

However, the leader of the Rimu Centre said that she had never personally felt threatened by the process, as it had brought the staff closer together because “that is where we are all going as a team.”

Both the leader and the staff regarded the self review as positive because it involved everyone and everyone had ownership of the process. A staff member commented

We know what our strengths are – because we all have strengths and weaknesses in different areas. So we can all work together and together make a full circle.

The leader also commented that one of the benefits of self-review was that it had given those involved self-confidence:

I think you feel more confident…It tells you what you are doing right, it tells you what you are doing wrong… if you are brave enough, the areas you need to review, you should come away feeling that you have done all you can, you have formally documented your practice, learnt something, set goals to improve and that it has improved your practice.
When asked if the self review would have taken place without her, the leader of the Rimu Centre replied:

I don’t think it would have happened in spite of me, or without me, which sounds a little big-headed, but I really don’t think it would have happened. I think it is the expectation that this is something worthwhile, and that we as a centre should work towards that, because I think, probably, perhaps it is easier just not to do it. But the expectation is, no, it will be done… it is setting this expectation that it will happen as well.

**The Importance of Organisational Culture**

The formation and management of an organisation’s culture is considered an important aspect of leadership (Schein, 1992). Both the leaders in this study have nurtured a culture that is collaborative and learning enriched, and the benefits of professional development are valued. This has been achieved through participating in professional development and reflecting on practice; both group interviews indicate that this happens on a regular basis in these centres. This is also indicated by the awareness of the benefits of performance appraisal.

The leader of a centre both shapes the organisational culture and is shaped by it (Hatherly, 1999). This is especially so if the leader is also the founder, as is the case in both these centres. The organisational culture that has evolved in both centres is inclusive. The staff members are included in the decision-making processes, feel respected and valued for their contributions. In the Kauri Centre the leader stated that she had learnt to view the programme from the differing perspectives of the parents and the teachers as well as her own, while the leader of the Rimu Centre listened to the concerns of the parents and negotiated a way to enhance their sense of belonging and community in the centre.

The importance of setting and maintaining high educational standards was also emphasised by both leaders. The leader of the Kauri Centre encouraged her staff to be “the best that we can be”, while the leader of the Rimu Centre emphasised that she had set a clear expectation for both staff and children. Both leaders emphasised the need for high standards and have taken responsibility for these standards being achieved. At the same time, a balance between the task of providing effective early childhood education and supporting the individual needs of those in the Centre was accomplished.

Maintaining a culture of continuous improvement depends on contextual factors such as staff stability (Hargreaves, 1994). To be effective, a teacher must not change jobs often, and must have on-site professional development, and support from management (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999). Both the leaders interviewed managed to
retain staff and so were able to rise above a vision of survival to build on the strengths that already existed in a centre. This pointed to the fact that one of the functions of the leader when implementing self-review is to create a centre that is a good place for staff, so that they are encouraged to stay. In this way, the centre was always able to improve and move forward by building on what it had achieved already.

Both leaders have also developed strong connections with the community. Although it is possible to complete a self-review without the involvement of the community, it is widely accepted that early childhood educators should work in partnership with parents and the community (Crompten, 1997). By being receptive to the feedback from the community about matters that could be better, and involving the community in the attempts to improve on these, both these leaders built a reputation of community leadership. It could be supposed that the leader, the staff of the centre and the community benefited from these strong links. The leader of the Kauri Centre recounted how the parents appreciated that the centre had reviewed aspects of their practice about which parents had concerns about, and that she had learnt to accept constructive criticism from the community without taking offence. In the Rimu Centre the Maori parents had painted a mural that depicted biculturalism as a result of those parents voicing their opinions to the leader that the centre did not reflect their culture. In addition, in the Rimu centre, the review of the outdoor area had involved feedback from parents and had resulted in the community participating in a working bee. Such involvement meant that the community had become “fellow dreamers….working on common goals in the quest for quality improvement, rather than target recipients” (Washington, 1997 p.66). By examining the organisational culture of both centres, it is evident that it formed supportive foundations on which to implement the review processes.

**Discussion of the Role of the Leader**

It would appear from the data that the quality journey does indeed need a leader at the helm. Leaders have been described as gate-keepers to quality (Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992) as they can choose to either embrace or resist quality improvement measures. It is suggested that these gate-keeping practices depend not only on the professional skills and abilities of the leaders, but also on the personal characteristics of the leaders involved. Neither of the leaders interviewed has closed the gate on self-review, but have instead opened it wide so that the centre as a whole can embark on the process.

The professional task of an early childhood leader is to provide excellent early childhood education programmes for children by making sound decisions while leading a team of teachers to work effectively together. In order to achieve this task, the leaders had nurtured learning enriched centres with importance placed on professional development and extending professional skills.
Both leaders in this study have ensured success in self-review by incorporating into the centre the structures and processes to facilitate reflective practice. The desire to continually improve practice is evident from participation in professional development, performance appraisal, and regular opportunities to discuss and debate a vision for the centre. In addition to this, the centre leaders had the foresight to recognise self-review as worthwhile, and were proactive in seeking professional development about it. Both leaders also took a positive stance in removing the barriers that would hinder the self-review process by holding extra meetings, making extra money available, and reminding the participants to remain on task.

All of the above can be viewed as part of the professional role of the leaders in both centres. However this professional role cannot be seen as separate to, or in isolation from, the personal characteristics of both leaders (Espinoza, 1997). The personal qualities that both these leaders demonstrated were a respect for their staff that was evident in the way that the staff felt that their opinions were valued. In both group discussions, the staff members similarly showed respect for their leaders. The Kauri Centre leader was described by the staff as an effective leader, a leader who works very hard on making sure that relationships are very positive, and a knowledgeable leader. The Rimu leader was described as fair and powerful, a people person, calm and positive and the staff knew that their opinions were valued. Both leaders had been able to build reciprocal trust and a shared purpose. Both leaders commented on the need to be brave as it takes courage to accept constructive criticism and to admit that professional practice needs improving.

It is also noteworthy that in both centres the completed self-reviews had been carefully documented in portfolios so as to provide a basis for further reflections and as a measurement of the improvements that have been achieved. As the leader of the Rimu Centre explains: “documenting means you can look back”.

Summary

This research project explored the role of the leader in self-review in early childhood education centres in New Zealand. Although this research project is comprised of only two case studies, insights were gained into the personal and professional attributes common to both leaders that enabled the self review process to be successfully implemented and completed.

Both these leaders epitomised were respect, collegiality, an ability to nurture supportive relationships among staff, as well as an ability to empower the staff to extend and enhance their skills. The leaders themselves spoke of the need to be brave, courageous and honest for self-review to be effective. Both were considered by their staff to be good leaders, who were always fair and positive. Although both leaders emphasised that they liked to adopt a team approach to work, they were both conscious that this was not always possible. At times when they were required either
to set or reset a standard or to initiate a course of action, both saw it as part of their role and were strong enough to do this.

Professionally, the leaders had nurtured a learning enriched context where professional development was valued. Both leaders had also created a strong sense of collaboration amongst the staff that could be drawn on in the self-review process. As founders of the centres they lead, both have been careful to create a culture shaped by professional development that is linked to the current understanding of best practice.

Reflective practice has been built into the structure of the centre by having regular meetings and performance appraisal procedures. Both leaders were able to recognise the benefits of self-review as a way of ensuring continuous improvement, and were able to empower the staff to participate in the process. The staff in each centre felt that their professional opinions were valued and that decision-making was shared amongst the team.

Self-review would be difficult to complete without staff stability. Because both leaders had managed to retain staff they could build on and improve the existing structures and processes. It could be assumed that staff continue in their jobs because the centre is a good place to work. The ability to create a good workplace to work in must be attributed to the leader’s skills in empowering and valuing staff.

Finally, both leaders had forged strong links with the community. Although this is not necessary for the successful completion of every self-review, some reviews do require the leader of a centre to accept constructive feedback on how the centre could be improved from the parent’s perspectives. Both leaders have shown that they are able to do this without taking offence.

In conclusion, the strategic plan for early childhood education in New Zealand, *Pathways to the future: Nga huarahi arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) has emphasised the importance of self-review by stating that one of the strategies for improvement of early childhood education is to “establish and reflect on practices in teaching and learning” (p.3). It could be assumed from these developments that self-review will become an increasingly important part of the practice of early childhood teachers. As it would seem more likely that self-review of practice will succeed if there is an effective leader at the helm, there is a need to emphasise not only the processes of self-review, but also the leadership needed to facilitate the process. Evidence of effective practice, together with debate and discussion on the role of leadership in early childhood education is also needed, so that leadership can become an integral part of the early childhood education discourse. In so doing, the future of early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand can be enhanced through ensuring that there is always an effective leader at the helm.
References


**About the Author**

Anne Grey has been involved in early years education for many years – as a teacher, a Playcentre parent, as supervisor of a community centre and now as Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Auckland University of Technology. Anne is interested in educational leadership and its significance for reflecting on and improving practice in early childhood education. Anne researched the role of leadership in self-review for her Masters of Education.
Turning the Kaleidoscope on Quality

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Abstract
Caregivers, coordinators and management from a New Zealand family day care network explored notions of quality whilst engaging in a three-month professional development course studying The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000). Exploration took place through focus group interviews and as part of the review process itself. This paper presents some of the results of the study in relation to participant constructions of quality. Participants constructions suggest that ideas of quality merge and shift depending on the values and beliefs and influences of policy. The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000), offered a shared framework for participants to construct collective indicators for quality within the organisation, which resulted in more shared understandings of what mattered most, to whom, and why.

Introduction: From microscopes to kaleidoscopes
Quality in early childhood education has been under the microscope for several decades now. An articulation and identification of quality has been sought within the early childhood sector by seeking out one lens from which all services can be examined. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners have tried to create a template for a set of variables that constitute what is “good” about early childhood services. For example, Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes and Cryer (1997, cited in Podmore & Meade, 2000) highlight child: adult ratios, group size and staff training as the three most significant features in “the iron triangle of quality” (p. 23). Using these and other structural and dynamic variables large-scale centre-based studies have taken place both internationally (e.g., Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1998) and nationally (Smith, 1996). A range of variables are frequently compared and contrasted using quantitative treatments in early childhood research into quality. To this end, measures have been developed from centre-based models, such as, Harms-Clifford Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms-Clifford, 1989) and feature in a number of family day care studies (Modigliani & Dunleavey, 1990). The results of these studies suggest that training is a consistently strong indicator of quality outcomes for children.

Traditionally, family day care research has viewed quality through the same lens as used in larger centre-based assessment using the same or similar quantitative treatments where training levels are significantly lower, and the variables considered are largely the same (Cryer, 1999). The extent to which family day care quality criteria differ from centre-based definitions has been considered more recently (Gormley, 1999; Weaver, 2002). Whilst several researchers (eg Cryer, 1999;
Ebbeck, 2001) support the notion that there are universal core elements of quality that should be evident in any quality home or centre-based early childhood setting, there is an increasing international awareness that family day care has or should have its own unique quality definitions (Burchinal, Howes & Kontos, 2002; Karlsson, 2003; Stonehouse, 2001). Despite the emergence of research that suggests that there may be differences in the way quality is defined in family day care this microscopic view of quality has often been applied to family day care internationally. As a consequence of the dearth of trained caregivers/educators in home-based programmes and the private nature of their work in the home, this lens has not served family day care well, with studies implying that until caregivers are trained, family day care will struggle to realise its potential (e.g., Fischer & Eheart, 1991). This has also been a feature of New Zealand appraisal of family day care. The Education Review Office report (ERO, 2001) suggested that “a more robust set of criteria needs to be developed that recognises that the caregiver has responsibility for providing education to children in home-based care networks”.

The notion of universal criteria derived from centre-based research measures has also driven the development of family day care accreditation systems in several countries such as the United States of America and Australia (Gormley, 1999). Fleer and Kennedy (2000) are critical of such systems because they believe they are based on dominant and culturally bound criteria, in the same way as quantitative research tools. Whilst base-line standards are also reflected through New Zealand legislation [Ministry of Education 1996; 1998 and Education (Home-Based Care) Amendment Order, 1998] a formula/e approach to quality has been rejected, nationally, in favour of a quality system that is sufficiently flexible to allow caregivers and management to determine their own systems of quality review. This system of review, presented in The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000), is based on the development of locally and culturally constructed definitions of quality indicators alongside national baseline standards, underpinned by the notion that quality is not easily quantifiable and is comprised of a complex and interwoven set of variables that differ from one early childhood service to another. Family day care is recognised as one type of service, and included in the framework of The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) as a result of a consultation process in 1999.

Pathways to the future: Nga huarahi arataki (Ministry of Education, 2002), for early childhood services in New Zealand, builds on this knowledge and recognises that there are tensions between quality and participation, and between quality and training, that must be understood and managed to achieve a shared vision for quality. Such an approach suggests that there is a developing awareness of the relationship between beliefs and values that influence the discourses prevalent in early childhood education (Fleer & Kennedy, 2000). It also suggests that there is a climate of openness to multiple perspectives of quality. Hence, the possibility of different lenses for family day care has begun to emerge.
Recent family day care research has advocated strongly for a collective construction of quality (Kyle, 1999; Mooney & Statham, 2003; Taylor, Dunster & Pollard, 1999). According to Moss (2003), meaning can only be developed when all stakeholders are involved in the process. The stakeholders in family day care include parents, caregivers, management, policymakers and children themselves. In contrast, traditional research-based constructions of quality in family day care that continue to influence research are largely derived from observations by researchers rather than the perspectives of stakeholders themselves. International research has suggested that this continues to be the case for research in family day care (Kyle, 1999). Kyle suggests that this approach to research is a deliberate marginalisation of caregivers who work in the private realm of family day care. In New Zealand, where family day care has acquired “newly attained status as an emerging professional service” (Everiss & Dalli, 2003, p. 75), and increased public accountability (as a result of funding and regulatory accountabilities), I was interested to see how quality might be understood and whose views might comprise the ‘colours of the kaleidoscope’ as quality was constructed in the context of a New Zealand family day care service. A kaleidoscopic lens, therefore, enabled alternative colours and light to enter the quality debate.

**Turning the Kaleidoscope on Quality: Colours of the Kaleidoscope**

In light of the growing body of literature suggesting firstly, that quality for family day care rests somewhere between centre-based definitions and notions of uniqueness and secondly, that the people who work directly with children in family day care (i.e., the caregivers, supported by coordinators) seldom have the opportunity to contribute to the debate within the sphere of ‘research’, I was interested to explore constructions of quality from within the field. To this end, I worked with a network of 13 caregivers, 9 coordinators and 2 management representatives from a family day care network to explore their collective and individual constructions of quality (White, 2003). The caregivers were invited to participate if they met the criteria the coordinators established. These criteria were that caregivers had to be experienced, cooperative, interested, work well in groups and possessed demonstrated planning abilities. The caregivers who eventually participated in the project brought a range of experience between one and twenty years in family day care, and qualifications spanning module one of the family day care certificate, which was a requirement of the network, to a primary teacher certificate, to a polytechnic diploma in other fields. They represented family day care clusters in five different communities (decile ratings between 2 and 10).

The study took place around a three-month professional development course comprising three formal training evenings and several informal (cluster) meetings. During these sessions, participants investigated the document *The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua* (2000) as a tool for self-review. Not only did this require participants to construct indicators for quality, but they were also required to
do so within geographical clusters of caregivers and coordinators (as well as management where possible) with my input as a professional development advisor where required. Sessions that I attended were audio-taped with the permission of the participants.

A central part of the research comprised separate coordinator and caregiver focus groups, where participants candidly discussed their views. My role was one of stage managing rather than directing these groups, as recommended by Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson (2001), which were videoed and audio-taped. I also kept a researcher diary throughout the three-month process, which was a useful tool for gathering my own thoughts and responses. This was done in the knowledge that I, too, was a central part of the research process. In other words, my actions impacted on others and theirs on me. Since I had no idea of what would be offered by the participants in terms of their constructions of quality, I intended to enter the field as an interested ‘probe’. However, as the study progressed, I recognised that I, too, in my professional advisor and researcher roles became an influential colour of the kaleidoscope. The shifting and merging views of participants, therefore, could not be separated from my own role as researcher, or professional advisor. Neither could the influence of The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000), as a discursive tool of the profession, be separated from the views and beliefs of participants, or the results of the study. The focus group discussions, cluster meeting feedback and diary recordings were coded with the assistance of a qualitative computer software analysis tool – NVivo. The themes that arose from the coding process emerged from the data itself. They were not pre-determined. As the themes were revealed, they were then compared and contrasted using a Boolean search tool offered by Nvivo. This process enabled me to determine how the themes were linked to groupings (that is, caregivers or coordinators, or both). Some of these emergent groupings are discussed in this paper in relation to key themes that arose through the focus group discussions and cluster groups meetings. These are presented under the headings of rules, roles, curriculum, support, lifestyle, relationships, employment, lifestyle, support, employment and families (see Table 1 for a summary of these).

Results and discussion: Looking into the kaleidoscope

The results of this study highlight the differences and similarities in coordinator and caregiver constructions of quality. Caregiver constructions of quality were primarily based on their private world, including provision for their own family, whilst coordinator constructions were focussed more strongly around their professional accountabilities. Their views were strongly aligned to aspects of quality that positioned coordinators as ‘expert professionals’, whilst caregivers focussed heavily on the reciprocal benefits of their work. Areas of consensus, however, support the central role of the caregiver as a key feature of quality, with an emphasis on the interactive nature of their work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of quality</th>
<th>Areas of agreement</th>
<th>Areas of disagreement - caregivers</th>
<th>Areas of disagreement - co-ordinators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality is situated around aspects of...</strong></td>
<td>Quality exists where.....</td>
<td>Quality exists where......</td>
<td>Quality exists where....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Roles</td>
<td>Relationships are fundamental to quality.</td>
<td>Caregivers are supported to achieve a balance between care of other people’s children and their own lifestyle.</td>
<td>Coordinators are advocates for the child, their family and the caregiver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Rules</td>
<td>Basic rules are met. The service is valued by wider society.</td>
<td>When the organisation keeps caregivers safe and caregivers are given training and knowledge (eg DOPs).</td>
<td>Co-ordinators need to interpret DOPs for caregivers who have inadequate training to do so themselves (and coordinators can’t expect it anyway, since caregivers are volunteers not professionals).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Curriculum facilitation</td>
<td>Te Whāriki is understood and utilised. Training is accessible.</td>
<td>High expectations in terms of standards of care and ample training opportunities that suit the “caregiver culture”.</td>
<td>The co-ordinators role is to teach caregivers how to recognise teaching and learning opportunities, if caregivers are ready, willing and able.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Support</td>
<td>Paperwork is a way of being accountable and receiving positive feedback, which is essential for caregivers. Caregivers are central to quality – attitudes not levels of training are what matters most.</td>
<td>Caregivers generating our own care through our reputation in our communities. The coordinator supporting caregivers by dealing with difficult issues.</td>
<td>Co-ordinators are accountable and responsible for training, support, matching and recruitment therefore co-ordinators control quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Lifestyle</td>
<td>Flexibility in terms of family and home is possible</td>
<td>Caregiver’s own family and lifestyle can be upheld as a top priority.</td>
<td>The child and family seeking education and care are placed as a top priority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Employment</td>
<td>There is flexibility in reimbursement, support and working conditions. Interpersonal skills are valued.</td>
<td>Caregivers are of a high standard, are well resourced but are not forced to become employees(as this affects taxes)</td>
<td>Caregivers are prepared to put their reimbursement into resources. Some caregivers are better paid than co-ordinators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii) Families/whānau</td>
<td>Communication is vital.</td>
<td>Quality is determined by the gratitude conveyed by the family to the caregiver and the match between that family and the values of the caregiver.</td>
<td>Quality is determined by a matching process that supports parent choice rather than the caregiver’s financial need.</td>
</tr>
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Rosenthal (2001) argued that oppositional views are evident in early childhood education when different groups are invited to contribute their ideas and this was certainly the case for the caregiver and coordinator groups within this study. Rosenthal further suggested that the investigation of extreme views within early childhood education communities is helpful in clarifying our understandings of the sector and this is seen as particularly significant for family day care (Modigliani, 2003). For the women in this family day care network, the importance of having their views heard was a significant incentive for their involvement in the study. Caregivers, in particular, felt that they had a vital contribution to make and were very aware of the fact that their views were not shared by everyone in the network. Nevertheless, they were prepared to share their ideas within a framework of quality review because they perceived that the organisation would be more likely to listen to their ‘voice’ within the more formalised structures offered by the professional development process. This was manifested in a feeling of being valued, as described by one of the caregivers who said, “Those of us who have been doing it for a long time and, that, are probably feeling that this is the first time that we’ve actually, we might have something to say, that we’re actually being listened to”. Another caregiver emphasised the importance of being “inside” research rather than “just looking in”.

The main areas of difference between the caregivers and coordinators are highlighted in terms of roles, relationships, curriculum, awhanau. Each of these are discussed in the following section, and summarised in Table 1.

**Roles**

The main areas of disagreement in participant interpretations of quality were evident in the different way caregivers and coordinators perceived their roles within the organisation and their roles as educators or caregivers of children. The expectations management and coordinators had of caregivers contrasted with the perceptions caregivers held of their own roles. On one hand, there was an acknowledgement by coordinators that quality relies on knowledgeable and engaged caregivers, yet on the other hand, coordinators were constrained in their ability to expect “too much” from caregivers as a result of their ‘volunteer’ status. Similarly, caregivers were caught between their perceptions of the coordinator as an enforcer/employer, with a great deal of control over their livelihood, and the notion of the coordinator as a partner, support and advocate. They also felt that their role, as caregivers, was a combination of the teaching and parenting roles “You see – we’re not just mothers and we’re not just teachers – we’re a blend of both”.

**Rules**

On several occasions caregivers commented about the different ways they believed that coordinators interpreted the ‘rules’. They believed that these were dependent on the preferences of the coordinator. The notion of these ‘rules’ was revealed by
caregivers who had experienced frequent turnover of coordinators in their geographical cluster area. The differing interpretations that coordinators applied to the *Education Home-Based Care Amendment Order* (1998), according to the caregivers, contributed to their perception that rules were at the discretion of the coordinator rather than externally imposed. The coordinators, on the other hand, placed an emphasis on the trusting nature of their relationship with caregivers, based on individual and collective caregiver selection processes, and monthly visits to caregiver homes. Professional discourse is founded on trust, according to Vossler (2002), hence the extent to which a professional discourse could contribute to quality was reliant on a shared view of caregivers as professionals. In the absence of these shared views, trust was likely to be misguided, misinterpreted or manipulated (as was evident in some of the stories caregivers told about their colleagues).

**Curriculum facilitation**

Despite the number of oppositional views in relation to participant constructions of quality, there were also occasions where they were able to “co-habitate”. This meant that potentially conflicting beliefs could be tolerated or accommodated by either coordinators, caregivers, or both. Examples of this were found in practices such as caregivers writing records (as an accountability requirement) as opposed to more informal ways of communicating their awareness of children’s progress (such as orally) or in a fluid application of the ratio requirements. Kyle (1999) suggested that flexible approaches to family day care provision contribute, to a greater sense of caregiver “personal agency”, defined as “an embedded process of social engagement” (Emmbayer & Mische, 1998, cited in Kyle, 1999, p. 216). In other words, if caregivers are given the flexibility to interpret external requirements through acknowledgement of their experience and knowledge, they are able to embrace and own their work. However, the results of my study showed that when such flexible approaches were not offered in a consistent manner, that is, by all coordinators to all caregivers, caregivers experienced resentment or a feeling that there were double-standards. Examples of these inconsistencies were described by caregivers in focus groups. They ranged from incidents of caregivers’ peers (that is, other caregivers) swearing at playgroup with no apparent consequence to occasions where it was felt that the coordinator re-interpreted the rules to suit herself. If responsibility for maintaining the standards was not shared by caregivers, then resistance was not only likely, but highly probable.

**Support**

The professional views identified by coordinators within this network are reflective of the growing influences within New Zealand of legislative and regulatory requirements for family day care and, as such, are situated at the public end of the private-public continuum (White, 2003). These views contributed to the emphasis placed on articulating children’s progress, which situated informal training as a
central task of the coordinator (despite the fact that this was not valued by the caregivers). Further, this professional view served to support a deficit perception of caregivers by coordinators as incapable of engaging with professional documentation (Ministry of Education 1998) – that underpinned their work whilst recognising external expectations that planning and evaluation would take place, supported by the early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Concurrently, the positioning of caregivers as emerging professionals was seen as desirable by some of the caregivers, who used professional language as a way of advocating their work and access to esteem from the coordinators and families. For these women, the frustration was evident in their perceptions of the gap between their access to knowledge and their aspirations as what I have called “emerging professionals”. Caregivers saw the support offered by the organisation (in the form of knowledge and resource) as an opportunity to access the professional world of early childhood education. When this was not readily available, these caregivers felt that their opportunities were limited. They also felt that the expectations of them in terms of record-keeping and curriculum facilitation represented another double-standard, as described by one caregiver “Here they go again – expecting us to act like kindy teachers without giving us the training”.

**Lifestyle**

The caregivers expressed a strong wish for a public acknowledgement for their work. This sat alongside an underlying family-centred emphasis that positioned their work within their own family, lifestyle and community. Seen in this light, caregivers wanted the coordinator to fulfil the role as key support person in their lives by assisting them in upholding their lifestyle through provision of care arrangements. Where this was not evident, either by a perceived lack of financial or verbal feedback on the part of the organisation, caregivers felt under-valued. Coordinators were aware of this tension, seeing their role as advocates for caregivers as well as children and their families. These dual advocacy roles frequently resulted in tensions between the rights of caregivers and the rights of children. An example of this was raised in relation to placing children in care – coordinators spoke of feeling pressured to place children with caregivers who had made hire purchase commitments based on their belief that their financial needs would be met by the provision of family day care arrangements. Despite these pressures, coordinators maintained their resolve to place the child in a home-based arrangement that met the requirements of the family and/or child (as opposed to the caregiver).

**Employment**

The influence of economic factors on perceptions of quality has already been considered by Weaver (1999) as a significant contributor to quality in family day care. The results of my study suggest that, in the absence of other incentives, economics played an important role in contributing to caregiver self esteem and
associated personal agency. Further, economic considerations either supported or precluded caregivers from being involved in quality review itself. Caregivers keenly felt the inequities of coordinators being paid to be involved in the professional development, where they were not. Not only did this influence their perception of their worth within the organisation, but it also contributed to a feeling of marginalisation, captured in the statement by one of the caregivers, who said “We’re only a bunch of caregivers – why bother?”.

**Families/whanau**

The emphasis the women placed on the family-centred values and beliefs of the participants strongly distinguished family day care from other early childhood services (White, 2003). Stonehouse (2001) suggested that this central tenet reflected a key element of uniqueness for family day care. Repetitive comparisons were made between family day care and centre-based provision by both caregivers and coordinators, who viewed the family atmosphere of the home base (and associated ratios influencing levels of intimacy) as a major strength of the service. A strong belief in the family as an institution meant caregivers viewed their own families as an integral aspect of family day care quality. This finding is echoed in Kyle’s 1999 study of Canadian caregivers, who saw their role in family day care as a family and/or community undertaking rather than an individual career choice (see also Chandra, in Ayers, 1989).

In my study, this view appeared to have the potential to either enrich the family day care experience, or to limit it. Where the experience was enriched, reciprocal relationships were developed based on mutual support, intimacy and friendship. Where the experience was limited, the caregiver exercised her right to exclude the child from her home if the family was considered incompatible with the caregiver’s lifestyle needs. These extreme family-centred views were strongly aligned to the private world of the caregiver and placed emphasis on experience, lifestyle and relationships. Waayer (2001) suggested that the matching process, where selection of care is made on behalf of children and their families, may be critical to an understanding of family day care. In my study, the matching process appeared to encapsulate the influence of family-centred values on constructions of quality. An example of this view was shared by caregivers at the final focus group at the end of the study, when they discussed their role in selecting families, based on their first impressions of the child’s mother:

- Briar, “A personality clash is a personality clash.”
- Lisag, “If you don’t click with the parent then it’s not going to work cause they’re never going to feel comfortable with you looking after their child.”
- Pansy, “And you get a feeling.”
Lisag, “You do.”

Pansy, “I’ve had three that I’ve …. Two that I’ve turned down from the interview, I thought no (laughs) there’s just something about you and then there was one that was in the throes of care and I actually said to them that this is not going to work.”

The existence of personal agency amongst the caregivers, coupled with the fact that their homes were the site for education and care, meant that the caregivers’ private views strongly influenced their practices. The intimate knowledge caregivers held in relation to their work with children and families placed them in a powerful position to contribute to constructions of quality. Several of the caregivers in this study were able to command a reasonable income for their work. This was accessible as a result of their local (community) knowledge and reputation, as well as their economic strategies. Income incentives, coupled with lifestyle choice, emerged as a powerful influence on the way caregivers approached their work in family day care. This finding contrasts starkly with the work of feminists such as Coney (1981), who suggested that during the previous century, New Zealand caregivers, were disempowered by their unpaid status. For the caregivers in this study, the issue focussed more strongly around employment status and what could be perceived as professional gate-keeping than income. In other words caregivers felt disempowered by their untrained volunteer status because they could not readily access professional knowledge themselves. One caregiver stated “We haven’t got DOPs”.

I believe this difference reflects the substantial shift in the way family day care is viewed in New Zealand this century. The changing nature of the service and its associated views supports Foucault’s claim (cited in McHoul and Grace, 2000) that discourse, that is, values and beliefs that underpin practice, can be viewed through a historical lens, and that it is culturally defined. Hence, quality is not only interpreted differently by early childhood services, but by the different cultures within each service. Further, these cultures are influenced by local and national changes over time.

**Conclusion: Merging and shifting images**

The review process facilitated a merging view of quality by highlighting the relationships between practices, roles and policy that had not been evident to the caregivers. Further, the engagement of caregivers in the process highlighted to coordinators that there were alternative ways of viewing quality. In addition, the review process provided opportunities for caregivers to contribute their ideas whilst learning about other viewpoints. Therefore, *The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua* (2000) process offered a shared space for the collective construction of quality indicators. The quality review process worked exclusionary or oppositional views. For example, an awareness of caregiver desire to engage with early childhood
mandatory and regulatory requirements emerged as an empowering aspect of their work since they were more aware of the requirements and how to meet them. Moreover, they were very keen not to see the review process as an academic exercise, describing themselves as having “a passion to see change”. This finding is consistent with the work of Foote and Davey (2003), who found that shared professional language was empowering for home-based educators and led to relationships based on partnership.

The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) offered a step-by-step way of engaging in review, starting with groundwork issues and process to construct a view of quality. The positioning of The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) as a key component of mandatory criteria that impact on family day care, (Ministry of Education, 1998) and within the wider early childhood environment, supported the participants in situating their practical knowledge within a contemporary and relevant context. Coordinators on the other hand were required to share their professional knowledge and consider perspectives that were not their own. As one participant described “it’s a partnership thing rather than imposed on them [caregivers]…you can actually look at it in two ways…”. In this way, practices were open to scrutiny when held up against the light shed by knowledge. This approach to quality is endorsed by Kyle (1999) as a way of increasing collective agency for family day care services, that is, a view of quality outcomes as a social ‘good’ rather than an individual gain. As a result, caregivers are able to move beyond their immediate and personal needs, to view family day care as a public responsibility.

The focus groups supported entry and exit to the review process by enabling some of the key quality issues to be brought out into the open, confronted and considered in a safe forum. In this way, they became part of the constructing process. The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) supported the complex and interwoven nature of family day care evident within this network by creating a space for participants to share perspectives whilst upholding outcomes for the child as a central tenet of quality. The combination of within (separate coordinator and caregiver cultures) and between (where caregivers and coordinators worked together in clusters) approaches to review enabled caregivers to ‘sound out’ their ideas with peers as well as embrace alternative views in a shared forum. The invitation offered within The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) for participants to review structures, processes or outcomes, dependent on their “need to know” (Ministry of Education, 2000b, p. 14) highlights the emphasis on partnership emphasis of the document (encapsulated in the guiding principles of DOPs as part of the groundwork criteria to quality review). Hence, The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) process recognised that quality must embrace economic and social as well as educational aspirations for early childhood education.

The recognition of multiple lenses for constructing quality highlights the complex and unique nature of family day care provision and supports the notion that quality
is not a “lock-step following of certain rules and routines”, as described by Kyle (1999, p. 266), but an interactive process. The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000) methodology supported this view of quality and facilitated a process of broadening, whilst embracing perspectives. The results of this study, therefore, support the view that quality is constructed in ways that reflect the political, social, educational and economic systems within an ecological context, as highlighted by Rosenthal (2003). The process of “meaning-making” with different cultural groups within as well as between different early childhood services is an aspect of quality that offers a fresh perspective to the field of research for early childhood education and potential for progressing our understanding of early childhood education. This kaleidoscopic approach to quality allows new colours and dimensions to contribute to the construction of indicators for quality, and to ways of achieving these. For the caregivers and coordinators in this study, this meant listening to one another and sharing professional (and private) spaces, supported by The Quality Journey/He Haerenga whai hua (2000).

References


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Jayne is a Senior Lecturer at Wellington College of Education where she teaches across a range of courses related to early childhood education. Of particular interest to Jayne are issues surrounding equity, quality and professionalism. Jayne has recently taken a year’s leave to work as a Project Facilitator: Self Review, at the Ministry of Education, where she is one of a team involved in developing quality review guidelines in consultation with the sector.