

Playcentre Journal

ISSUE 139

spring 2010

Working theories in action:
Building and sharing islands of interest and expertise.

Re-licensing – Sustainability – Myths of Playcentre
Grandparents – Marae visit – What the students
taught the teacher.





Port Ahuriri Playcentre (Hawkes Bay Association)



Port Ahuriri Playcentre (Hawkes Bay Association)



Howick Playcentre (Tamaki Association)



Port Ahuriri Playcentre (Hawkes Bay Association)



Howick Playcentre (Tamaki Association)

Let nature do the teaching

Everybody talks about the bad state our earth is in and about sustainability, and we are all aware that something needs to be done. However, we do not want to place these concerns in the children's minds or on their shoulders, as that could provoke feelings of helplessness and fear. But we do want our children to become concerned citizens who will relate to nature in a more harmonious way than the present generations do.

Children are naturally inclined to play. It prepares them for their roles in the family and in the community later in life. Play in natural environments offers children to learn about the natural world and develops a deeper understanding and appreciation of nature. These are the building blocks for the values of an ethic of caring for the environment. Children make sense of their world and develop their place in our world by constructing their own knowledge through experiences they are exposed to, through encounters with the unfamiliar. If we want our children to build a sense of environmental awareness and responsibility for sustainability, we need to let them explore nature. Nature provides a rich learning environment and all we need to do is let nature be the teacher. This is easy for the children, but for us adults who have become so used to the toys that keep the children entertained, it is a bit more difficult. But Playcentre, where adults learn and play together with their children, should be the perfect place to share the children's inborn sense of wonder when together they discover the mysteries of the world. Think about this when you plan to revamp your centre's playground or your sessions. Put on your gumboots, take a raincoat and let the child lead you to discover nature, while all developmental functions are automatically taken care of and practiced. Adults, invest the time and give your child the chance to make a difference to our future.

Susy Mannall (Canterbury Association)

Playcentre Journal Cooperative: Colleen Welch (Western Bay of Plenty Playcentre Association), Susy Mannall (Canterbury Association), Sue Easter (Waikato Association) and Kathryn Gunson (Central Hawkes Bay Association)

EDITORIAL

Contributions of written pieces, illustrations and photographs are welcome either by post to 1 Barrow Place, Te Puke 3119 or by email to pcjournal@gmail.com; please enclose a self-addressed envelope with any material you would like returned. Digital images should be sent in the highest possible resolution: if the image files are too large to email, they can be burnt to a CD and posted to us. It is the photographer's responsibility to ensure people photographed have given permission. The Journal is currently edited by an editorial co-operative. If you are interested in participating in this group, please send an email to pcjournal@gmail.com.

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For Issue 140 we would like to receive stories and photos about:

- Nature and young children
- ICT in Playcentre
- How to encourage te reo Māori in your centre
- Tikanga (harakeke, poi making etc)

Guidelines for writing for the Playcentre Journal can be found at <http://www.playcentre.org.nz/journal.php>
Please email your contributions to pcjournal@gmail.com or post them to 1 Barrow Place, Te Puke 3119.

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Cover photo:

Philip Chignell, Eden-Epsom Playcentre (Auckland Association) playing in a tent at his brother's Playcentre graduation.

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Port Ahuriri Playcentre
(Hawkes Bay Association)



Levin Playcentre
(Central Districts Association)



Howick Playcentre (Tamaki Association)



Profile Book Changes

Changing the way children's profile books are updated is proving a challenge for Houghton Valley Playcentre (HVP), but it is paying off, as the books are becoming learning resources instead of the beautiful scrapbooks many of them used to be.

A few HVP members attended the Wellington Association profile book discussion in term one and realised HVP's profile books were not working.

Unlike other centres, parents at HVP had been responsible for updating their children's profile books. This resulted in books being at home a lot of the time instead of at the centre where they are required to be.

Many books were also out of date or non-existent and were certainly not used as a resource on session.

HVP was also taking more photos than other centres, which was costly as they were

developed off site. These were often stand alone pictures, which did not accompany learning stories.

The centre agreed upon changes in April, which fully came into effect in term three. These included:

- Duty teams updating the books at the end of a session.
- Photos printed off after each session on a newly purchased printer.
- Photos to always to be accompanied by words about the learning depicted.
- Children's large or bulky art work photographed with the photo put in the book.

Overall teams are finding the changes positive, but time consuming.

Sarah McDougall, Houghton Valley Playcentre (Wellington Association)



Our face painted Nescafé supporters.

Tauriko Playcentre's Nescafé Family Day

With its eyes on the prize money of \$10,000, Tauriko Playcentre entered the Nescafé Café Menu competition and held a coffee and cupcake fundraiser at its centre on 31 July 2010. A wonderful day of fun was had by our members and their families and not even a little rain could dampen the occasion. There was face painting, bouncy castles and scrumptious coffee courtesy of Nescafé. The children delighted in operating a cake stall selling cupcakes and food to their families. There was a real sense of belonging and community. We can only hope that luck is on our side when they draw the winner of the big prize but even if we don't win, we can be comforted by the fact that our family day was a real success and a day to remember.

Amy Rogers, Tauriko Playcentre (Western Bay of Plenty Association)



Emma and Mike Rogers get into the spirit of the day.



The Nescafé coffee stand.

Planes, Planes and More Planes

It all started with all the children wanting to play with the same plane Kazuya found that was made up of Mobilo Blocks. Fumiko suggested they could all fly around the centre with their arms held out and be planes themselves. Off they took. Over the following sessions more Mobilo and human planes were being flown through the centre: plastic planes were found and carpentry planes were created. We started a display table and hung planes from the ceiling to empower and encourage their work. Keira and her mum brought in some photos from a recent plane trip for the children to

look at and catalogue into the sequence of events, from packing to boarding and taking off. The photos were numbered so it was interesting to notice some children putting them in numerical sequence while others used their own working theory to decide which event should happen first and last. There was also discussion on what parts were on a plane and what they were for.

At the next centre meeting someone mentioned the local Aero Club. We jumped on this fantastic idea and headed off. They had a small plane available for the children to look in, had pilots available for questions

and some cool headphones to try on. We also had the bonus of seeing an aircraft land and take off several times. We made paper planes to have flying races and loads of photo opportunities pretending to be pilots ourselves. I recommend to anyone to check out their local Aero Club rather than keeping up with the schedule of the airport just to see planes land and take off. This is a much better hands on experience!

Trish Morris, Pamapurua Playcentre
(Far North Playcentre Association)



Throw the ball at the trapeze!

We set up an obstacle course with the trapeze bar in the middle. One of the challenges for the children was how to get the bar — they couldn't reach it by standing on top of the big muscle play cube and stretching their arm out.

Elsie came up with an ingenious idea. Get a ball and throw it at the bar, so that it swung enough to grab.

After doing this a number of times, Elsie went on to play in the sandpit. Then along came Alisa who hadn't seen

Elsie's solution. Alisa also wanted to do the trapeze, but couldn't reach it. I told Alisa that Elsie had been doing the trapeze earlier and had managed to get the bar all by herself. I encouraged Alisa to ask Elsie how she achieved it. So, Alisa asked her. While Elsie continued to focus on her play in the sandpit, she described to Alisa what she had done. Interestingly, Elsie didn't go over and show her. Alisa took this information, tried it out and accomplished it. Ka pai.

I thought this showed great thinking

on Elsie's part and how able Alisa was at following instructions. Alisa was also empowered by her friend Elsie by giving her the information and being able to accomplish the task she'd set herself.

Kath O'Connor,
Johnsonville Playcentre
(Wellington Association)



Elsie Reddish (pink hat) throwing the ball to get the trapeze bar.

Alisa Norman (yellow hat) carrying out the instructions that Elsie had given her.



Jackson Reader, Keira Bayliss, India McKee and Kaylah Johnston watch as the birthday cake is lit.

Sixty Years Young: Tawa-Linden Playcentre

In May, around 200 people from as far away as Auckland gathered in Tawa, Wellington to celebrate the Tawa-Linden Playcentre's 60th anniversary.

Started in 1950, Tawa-Linden was among the first Playcentres in the country, and this significant milestone in the centre's history was celebrated with two events: a coffee and dessert function and a mid-week children's birthday party.

The coffee and dessert evening was the brainchild of the chocolate-deprived mothers who organised the event. And it was a great hit with all who attended.

The coffee and dessert evening started with a tour of Playcentre. Many enhancements in recent years – upgraded flooring and wall coverings, a wet area extension, new outdoor equipment – meant that the centre looks quite different now, so this was a wonderful catalyst for guests to reminisce

about days gone by. Many people also bought along photographs and other items from their days in the centre, which added to the celebrations.

A playdough sculpture competition was another of the evening's highlights. Everyone got back to their Playcentre roots – adults were gathered around toddler-height tables playing with playdough and chatting. It was a fun night.

There was also a fantastic display of photographs and documents from the centre's history.

Through the anniversary we celebrated all that is good about Playcentre – the companionship and family togetherness – all of which was relished by the past and present members who came along.

Jose Reader, Tawa-Linden Playcentre,
(Wellington Association)

Fire-fighters to the rescue

Harrison had been pretending to be Fireman Sam for the past week at home and he decided he was going to take his helmet to Playcentre. When we got there he quickly rustled up some friends to join him. Noah, Jack, Amelie, Kaleb and Neeti were extremely keen and they soon were kitted out in their uniforms and hats. I was given the white hat and was made chief fireman. I asked where the fire engine was and they took me to the wooden car outside. We all climbed in. Jack was the driver. I suggested we fight the first fire and then take it in turns to drive each time we get back to the station. We all made the noise of the siren "Nee nar nee nar" as we made our way to the fire. Jack then announced we were at the fire which was the house outside. We all climbed out and got into the house and pretended to put the fire out. I checked that they all had their hats, visors down and breathing masks on. Then it was Harrison's turn to drive. We were off again, sirens blaring. The next fire was the exercise mats. That was quickly extinguished and we were back to the fire engine heading back to the station. This dramatic play has continued for several weeks for Harrison and Kaleb and has become part of our daily routine at home where they charge around with hats on to fight various fires. They showed great imagination, communication skills and teamwork along with turn taking.

Nic Cobbett, Howick Playcentre
(Tamaki Association)



Putting out the fire.



Driving the fire engine.



Sharing the hose.

Nayan Woods

For the past four years my family and I have been involved in Linwood Playcentre. Jacob, now seven, attended Playcentre since he was two and Nayan since he was six weeks old. Tragically our time at Playcentre ended on 21 May 2010 when Nayan was killed by a car that mounted the footpath and struck the three of us as we walked home. We had been at Playcentre that morning, making potions, eating sushi and playing. Jacob hadn't been to Playcentre much since he started school but he had come along for the last part of that session and I remember watching out the window as the two of them played together in a yard that was so familiar to them.

It was six years ago that I first heard about Playcentre. My friend Tina Longman who attended Playcentre in Leeston, introduced me to it. From looking at her daughter's learning journal I knew that it was the place for our family. I was relatively new to

in New Zealand but few I really connected with. It was two years before I went along to Linwood Playcentre and it was there I found all the people who thought like me. Playcentre became our second home and through those connections I understood what an important word and concept whānau is.

I always valued the learning stories though that wasn't always evident in the amount of time I dedicated to keeping the boys' journals current. Mostly the records of learning and discovery were filed away in the 'I'll do that later drawer'. Since the accident I've spent a lot of time re-reading, organising and gluing all of Nayan's artwork, learning stories and photographs into his new (and very large) journal. The one thought that keeps occurring to me is: "Thank goodness I



Nayan, 3 years old

Canterbury Playcentre Association who sent support to our family and to the families at Linwood Playcentre. We have definitely felt like part of a larger, loving community which, in times like this, is so important.

I know that everyone who is involved in Playcentre already has the knowledge of how important these early years are in a child's life but I would just like to remind people to record those moments and treasure them because they are so wonderful to look back on. Every child has a "magic moment" every day and it is only after an event like this that you truly realise how important each one is.

Emma Philp, Linwood Playcentre
(Canterbury Association)

Playcentre became our second home and through those connections I understood what an important word and concept whānau is.

New Zealand and didn't really have a social network. I had met some really nice people

chose Playcentre!" Having this record of the stages he was at, the activities he enjoyed, and the fun we had is amazing. It has helped me focus on the good that was his life. There is also the realisation that he connected with so many fantastic people, that he felt safe and loved and felt a type of ownership over the centre.

I like looking at the photos and seeing evidence of me being near him. Most of the time I am not central in the photo; I am there in the background or I can see my foot, my shadow or the reflection of me in his eyes as I took the photo. I am reminded of the place I had in his life and all the time we got to spend with each other.

I would like to acknowledge all the individual Playcentre families, the different Playcentres around the country and the

Nayan making potions during his last day at Playcentre.



Nayan's learning journal

As a centre we know the importance children's learning journals have. The loss of Nayan has reminded us that recording children's moments, no matter how small, at home and at Playcentre builds a picture of their journey through their preschool years and a cherished book for the future.

Recording the voices of many people, be it coordinators, parents and whānau or the children themselves provides many different perspectives. This may capture memories in the child's life that may not have been otherwise recorded.

We would like to share a couple of stories from Nayan's learning journal.



AUNTIE CHARLOTTE'S VISIT TO PLAYCENTRE. I HAD A LOVELY TIME PUSHING MY GORGEOUS LITTLE NEPHEW ON THE SWING AND MAN HOW HE LOVES TO SWING!! PUSHING HIM AND SPENCER FOR A GOOD HALF HOUR GAVE ME QUITE THE WORKOUT BUT ALSO SO MUCH ENJOYMENT. A NICE TIME WHICH WAS MADE EVEN NICE BY A HELPING OF YUMMY PEANUT CRUMBLE.... ALL THAT PUSHING MADE ME HUNGRY!

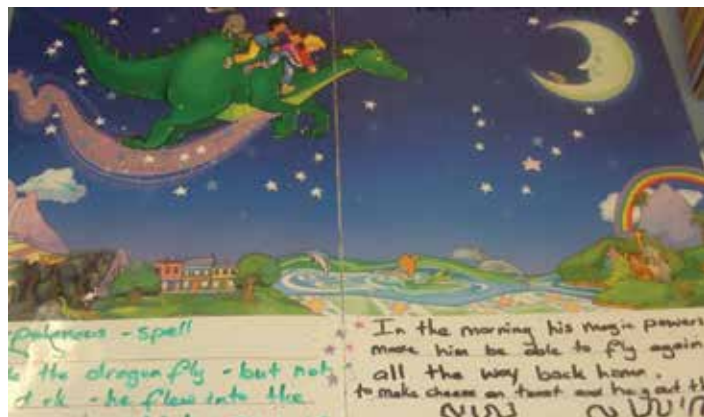


The uniqueness of Playcentre allows the extended family to feel welcome and be included in our children's play.



Centre's and Child's voice working together....

Nayan had a great interest in magic, casting spells like in the Harry Potter stories that his dad Duncan had been reading to his brother Jacob. On this particular morning Nayan had made a wand and cast spells on the centre. Susan had got out a book where children can make their own story. Nayan cast a spell on the book "expelliarmus" he said, as he waved his wand.



Nayan's story ... Made the dragon fly but not in the dark; he flew into the river and turned into a mermaid. In the morning his magic powers made him be able to fly again all the way back home to make cheese on toast and hang out the washing with mum. The dragon went to the mall and did an expelliarmus spell and turned into pretend people.

Nayan did a spell that turned all the animals back into real animals and dragons back to dragons.

When the story was finished Nayan wrote along the bottom, he then asked Susan what the story was he had written.

Potions

Nayan's love for magic continued from spells to potions. He brought from home ingredients so to make them at Playcentre and to share with us what he and Jacob had been experimenting with at home.

This play continued for many days, it was embraced by most of the children at Playcentre at some time, experimenting with what we could mix in the potions, and the effects they would create.

The potions enabled Nayan to take a leadership role, sharing his ideas with others and being very involved.

As a centre we are devastated by the loss of Nayan to our community. We have always formed strong relationships with the families of the centre and Emma, Nayan, Jacob and Duncan were no exception. We thank them for all the wonderful things they brought to the sessions and will treasure the memories Nayan gave us.

Susan Woods and Linda Mason,
Linwood Playcentre (Canterbury Association)



When Rūaumoko stretches his legs

Imagine a world where chocolate is a diet food, Coronation Street (the soap opera of choice) plays continuously, and the wisdom of experience is not measured by the length of the crow's feet. In the early hours of 4 September 2010, I was there! Laying in the soft sand, beside crystal clear blue water in the balmy tropical heat of oblivion.

The rude awakening from my dreamy world of slumber abruptly ended when Rūaumoko the son of Ranginui (the Sky) and Papatūānuku his wife (the Earth), decided to stretch his legs in Canterbury.

Ranginui had been separated from Papatūānuku, and his tears had flooded the land. Their sons turned their mother face downwards, so that she and Ranginui should not constantly see one another's sorrow and grieve more. When Papatūānuku was turned over, Rūaumoko was still at her breast, and was carried to the world below. To keep him warm there he was given fire. He is the god of earthquakes and volcanoes, and the rumblings that disturb the land are made by him as he walks about.

I awoke to find the bed shaking, the lights out and the house groaning as it writhed around. We crouched in the kitchen doorway, listening to the loud and aggressive rumblings, accompanied by vigorous and violent shakes, wondering when it would stop.

We could only guess at the mayhem the 47 second, 7.1 magnitude earthquake had inflicted on the sleeping province. Little did we suspect that our little town of Darfield was the epicentre and about to be catapulted into the focus of worldwide attention!

Once daylight approached, my family regrouped and we spent Saturday together, cleaning up, sorting out sleeping arrangements (no one wanted to go home), and getting ready for some time without electricity. With only a radio to listen to we knew things were bad, but we were unprepared for the totally shocking images that were to follow.

Sunday we drove into town to check out the office of the Canterbury Playcentre Association. Amazingly, there was no damage. Only one block over buildings had come down and streets were cordoned off.

I got home to a call from the Ministry of Education (MoE), who in the following weeks proved invaluable with helpful advice and support that enabled our centres to be



reopened. Offers of help followed quickly from the Playcentre Federation, associations, Southland REAP, and many other places around the country.

During a Monday morning crisis meeting with the board members, the Centre Support Team, and Carmen the property administrator (who are all awesome!) we discovered that our centres' resilience was shining through. We had preliminary reports on most of our buildings, along with sad stories of families who had lost their houses and possessions and who were faced with massive clean up jobs.

The MoE in the following weeks were to become our rock. They were incredibly quick to answer and to follow up our queries. The New Zealand Playcentre Federation (NZPF) President, Maureen Woodhams, continues to have crisis meetings with the MoE in Wellington relaying information both ways and passing on concerns, support and help. This was particularly useful when following on from a council visit that informed us that day-care facilities were to be prioritised

over Playcentres, Maureen contacted the Wellington MoE. They immediately got in touch with the Christchurch MoE, who in turn contacted the City Council to inform them that this was not to be the case and the council reacted by putting us back on the important list!

It has now been three weeks since the event. Our little people show mixed reactions, with some of them still dealing with the trauma they encountered. They are reluctant to be parted from their parents and even the slightest aftershock (of which there are many), loud noises or change to routine brings on a range of reactions. We have trauma counsellors at our disposal and to date their help has been well received and appreciated.

In the office we have personnel who remain smiling and coming to work to support others, even though they themselves are now living in sub-standard conditions and condemned housing.

People here are starting to settle into the reality that life can never be the same for them. The Playcentre community has remained stoic and supportive. We have centres who are sharing their buildings, offering labour and good wishes to those who are worse off than them. We have around six centres yet to open and we are in constant contact with those who can make this happen, to expedite the process.

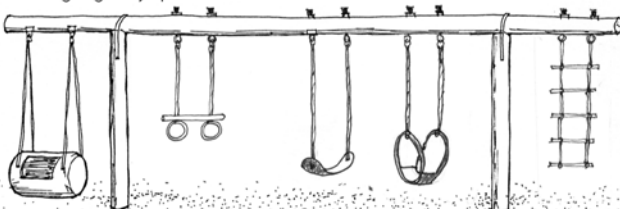
During all of the mayhem, however, Rūaumoko continues to stroll around, causing aftershocks which serve to remind us all of his mighty powers.

Laine Barker, Chairperson
(Canterbury Playcentre Association)

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Our Relicensing Journey – Matamata Playcentre

It is fair to say that at the start of 2007, the future was not looking bright for Matamata Playcentre. The introduction of 20 Free Hours saw our membership fall significantly and we were struggling to stay funded from session to session. Our building was cold, uninventing and needed a major overhaul if we were to survive in a more competitive ECE environment.

We began our journey towards relicensing by tackling the building works. Our first tasks were to install a heat pump and replace our rickety fence and dodgy gates. Thanks to the Midland Region and our builder Paul Lowe, we became a secure facility in October 2008. Then came the hard work of major fundraising to refurbish the building's interior. In February 2009, we became the proud new owners of a separate sleep room, an office and a brand new bathroom complete with shower and disabled toilet.

Once the building had had its facelift, it was time for us to up-skill. Thanks to the professional development contract and Kathleen Moriarty, we embraced Kei Tua o Te Pae, reviewed our strategic plan, threw

ourselves into course work and completely updated our child and adult libraries. Our roll increased and the new mums brought with them a range of exciting skills and useful husbands! Walls were painted, trees were trimmed, toys were purchased, race tracks and a new water play area were constructed. We taught ourselves how to undertake integrated session planning, developed processes for formal budgeting, annual planning and systematic monthly self review. Each of these four areas were crucial cornerstones to our re-licensing process and we were lucky to have the right combination of skills within our centre.

When the Ministry of Education came to undertake the re-licensing check in February this year, they saw the culmination of three years of work. Although we hadn't realised it back in 2007, the renovation of our building led to a renovation of ourselves! We became empowered to learn, to actively participate and to advocate for and embrace change when change was needed. We were able to demonstrate compliance at the most basic level – with a building that met all of the

premises and facilities requirements along with new centre policies and procedures.

Perhaps more importantly, we could demonstrate that we had encompassed some of the more lofty aspirations of the licensing criteria. By this we mean the ability to plan ahead effectively and strategically, to budget for those plans and then to systematically check the outcomes. However the single greatest benefit our centre gained from relicensing was the improvements we made to our sessions as a result of policy changes to account for the curriculum criteria. Simply put, we play more! We have busy, happy sessions, holiday sessions, family nights, regular trips and excursions, and this year we even held a Playcentre camp.

In February this year, we became the first Playcentre in our Association to relicense. Our experience with relicensing was overwhelmingly positive. This is partly because we needed to change and grow, and partly because rather than viewing it as an administrative exercise, we gave every aspect of our centre a spring clean. The irony is that we are now working towards welcoming 20 hours ECE into our centre, rather than fearing its consequences!

Matamata Playcentre,
(East Waikato Association)

RELICENCING: One Word that Creates Panic

My Playcentre was successfully relicensed in March this year. It's all over and like child birth the pain is soon forgotten. This is not to say I wasn't in panic mode prior to the event.

Here are some hot tips from our experience: –

1. Start early. Get those policies written and check that they meet the criteria. This was the single most time-consuming and pressured job for us (don't forget consultation takes time).
2. Get your association licensee and your liaison person down to inspect your Playcentre. This will be a fine tooth comb job. Take their criticism as it is meant: as a tool to help you succeed.
3. Read the 'to do' list carefully. Prioritise to ensure everything is done prior to inspection day.
4. Work through those jobs. If you're lucky you will have lots of time: if not, try and get as many volunteers as possible to share

the load. Don't forget all the signs and references that need to match the new policies: they all take time.

5. Complete the paper war and send copies of all the items requested by the due date.
6. License inspection is like ERO: it's a lot of questions and a bit of measuring. Have your support team organised early; one from the Playcentre management, the licensee, support or Playcentre liaison and one facilitator. Remember you need to be able to explain what you do. Have your evidence to hand. Lots of it!
7. Stay calm. Some of the questions may be unusual! Sometimes the inspectors are learning about Playcentre: try and answer and if you're not sure if that is what they wanted, ask. They appear likely to focus on different things with each Playcentre so don't rely on what happened to your neighbouring centre.

8. Remember you can use relicensing to change your licence. We applied to increase our under twos per session to twenty and it was approved!

If the relicensing inspector is walking away without saying if you have passed, ask! Our licensee had to! The support we got from our association was awesome. Listen to their advice because they have done it all before.

9. For my Playcentre this was just the first hurdle. We had ERO coming ten days later: no chance to breathe before we went through it all over again.

Looking back, I realise I made relicensing into a much bigger hurdle than it really was, but I don't think I could have known that until after it was over. I had to experience it first! I found out we don't have to do it again in five years time which is just wonderful.

Rowena Bullen, Ohau Playcentre
(Central Districts Playcentre Association)

Re-licensing at Burwood Playcentre – June 2010

The list of processes and documentation required for our re-licensing was overwhelming (27 pages long). I didn't know where to begin so I sat down one night and skimmed through the requirements making notes on the things that I wasn't sure about (which was probably around half the list). Our Centre Support Team (CST) person emailed me documents that other centres had used so that I had templates to work off and to edit specific to our centre. I delegated jobs but it was also a job to remember to follow people up as to whether they had completed the stuff I had requested. Our CST person met with me on a couple occasions to go through the requirements and see where we were at with things. She was very helpful and supportive but it was frustrating as the meetings took-up full Playcentre sessions and I had a two and a half year old and a five month old at the time. There was a lot of time spent running around to locate documents, up-date information and put new practices into place.

The day the MOE inspectors came we had a great session and they were very pleased with how our centre was operating. They had some minor things that we had to follow-up on. The larger and most unpopular of the tasks was to earthquake proof our resource room. Earthquake proofing the small, cluttered resource room was a mission and we ended up fitting nets over our shelves that could be unhooked when we needed access.

During the re-licensing process I learnt a lot about our centre and where things were kept which was a positive. Although it was a bit of a gruelling ordeal, the support I got from our CST person and centre parents made a big difference.

Fleur Earl, Burwood Playcentre
(Canterbury Association)



Two's a charm

Frankton Playcentre has been in a unique position over the last two years as we have tackled licensing TWICE!

The first time we relicensed was in April 2009, when we moved from our old building to a temporary building (which was to be demolished to make way for a new facility adjacent to the Remarkables Primary School). Then we relicensed again in April, 2010 for the opening of our new facility.

Here are a few tips that made our process work best for us:

1. *Have one point of contact for all licensing and regulation requirements.* It allows for simple email contact with your association and Ministry of Education team.
2. *Allow time for the updated policies to flow through.* Encourage your parents to read, sign and adopt as many as possible before each monthly Parent Council meeting.
3. *Make the 2008 Licensing Criteria for ECE (the green book) your friend!* If you have the man power, break each section out and have sub-teams tackle each point.
4. *Utilise your local Public Health office.* They can check the building prior to MOE check and highlight any areas that may need attention. A signed letter from your local Public Health office forms part of your complete sign off.
5. *Fire Evacuation Plans are all processed at the Central Processing Unit.* If there are any issues they will return your application or if all is well they will approve. The time taken for both events is not specific due

to the number of applications received and the time taken to review and get them right. Allow at least six weeks for this to be approved.

6. *Start now!* Even if you are not scheduled for license check by the MOE just now, there is a raft of points that can be checked, actioned and put to bed!

We did not have the luxury of time in both cases, however our success was due to a great and small team of parents who worked to their strengths and were persistent in achieving a timely outcome.

And finally, ASK QUESTIONS! You are welcome to call Andi or Nicky at Frankton Playcentre on 03 442 3354, who may have the answer you need!

Andi Smillie, Frankton Playcentre
(Otago Association)



Nicky Thompson and Andi Smillie on opening day at the new facility.



Nicky Thompson enjoying reading the first story in the new centre.

What the children taught the teacher:

Reflections on my Playcentre journey

Hang on. Shouldn't that read 'What the teacher taught the children?' Isn't that the teacher's job? To teach the children? Well maybe, but upon reflection it has become clear to me that learning is a reciprocal process and what is most important to me now is not what I taught the children but what the children taught me. Facilitating the learning of prospective Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers over the last little while has required me to think deeply about my own underlying values and assumptions about how best to help children learn, what it is important for them to learn and who makes these decisions. In doing so I have become very aware of how much my thinking has changed and indeed how much the children have taught me.

Influenced by my primary teaching background and training, when I first began supervising Playcentre sessions for the older children in preparation for school I focused on a needs based model which used goal based assessment. The parents and I would meet to choose goals for their child and these became the focus of our assessment. The goals were based on what we thought the child needed to learn – usually a physical (hold the pencil correctly), social (take turns) or cognitive (count to ten) skill. We were focused on filling the gaps (Peters, 2003, p.9) in the child's experience or skills. Planning was done well in advance (often weeks) following themes which the parents at the centre thought would be interesting to children. Sometimes this would be an interest we had noticed a child or group of children exploring but more often it was a topic the parents thought the children would like.

Why did I think it important to teach this way? When teaching new entrants I had noticed how children who were unfamiliar with any structure found it difficult to adjust to school life. Consequently I ran a very structured Playcentre session which followed very predictable routines. The session would start with mat time where a story was read, we sang some songs and did some alphabet work (all related to the theme). We would all

move to an activity which was related to our mat time. Once the children had completed the activity they were allowed to go off and choose an activity. At this time our goals for the children were the teaching focus. We all stopped for morning tea together and then the children were encouraged to complete another activity linked to the theme. A short opportunity for free play and we were back on the mat for another story

children were learning from each other and realised how important the interactions between children were. I began to see how the dispositions that the stories were highlighting might be able to be transferred into the school world and enable a child to cope with the changing roles, environment and routines. The children showed me they were capable of learning within a context which was important to them and how

I learned that by following the child's interests the door opened to so many learning opportunities, that often a few comments or well chosen questions could facilitate more learning than a carefully planned adult directed activity.

much more they could learn within this context rather than the contexts adults chose for their learning. I learned that by following the child's interests the door opened to so many learning opportunities, that often a few

and some number work before heading off home. The children seemed to enjoy these sessions and soon got used to the routine.

Then along came my colleague Carole Dean with Kei Tua o Te Pae (Ministry of Education, 2004) and introduced us to learning stories as a method of assessing children's learning. Learning stories focus on developing children's dispositions for learning by describing and highlighting children's learning through narratives. This is a model of assessment which focuses on the strengths of children and assists adults in considering where they may be able to support further learning. I began to use the learning stories alongside the goal based assessment. This involved focusing much more closely on what was happening during the children's play and at first I noticed the skills I thought were necessary to starting school – the skills I was watching for. However as I watched and listened I began to see a much broader picture of learning build up. I started to notice how much the

comments or well chosen questions could facilitate more learning than a carefully planned adult directed activity. This did not happen overnight of course and as I learned I began to make changes in my practice.

I still continued with mat times at the beginning and end of each session as I was aware that this was giving the children an experience that would be familiar when they began school. The types of activities changed and became more child-focused, however, with children choosing songs and books. Activities were still planned to follow mat time but children could choose whether or not to participate. Often most of them did want to join in as they could see the others having fun and it was a nice shared experience. Other activities were set up as a response to children's prior learning and the sessions were a lot more flexible.

Parents had become used to the way things were done and sometimes found it difficult to understand why things were changing. They had really liked the literacy and numeracy based activities that they had seen happening as they felt their children were getting a head start. When evaluating our changed sessions they began to suggest more literacy and numeracy focussed activities. I needed to point out to them that literacy and numeracy was still happening but in a more meaningful and authentic context for the children. It was embedded within the programme. For example every time an adult wrote down what a child said

Most of all I have learned that everyone in a learning centre is a learner – including the teacher.

I needed to point out to them that literacy and numeracy was still happening but in a more meaningful and authentic context for the children.

about a painting they were modelling writing to the child and if the child was interested the adult could talk about the sounds of some of the letters. Stories were often shared in the library corner and were a great opportunity to point out aspects of books and text to children. Children's interest in the letters of their name provided opportunities to explore the alphabet and the sounds of the letters, and every time we counted our spadefuls as we built 'the biggest castle ever' we were practising numeracy.

I found that as the sessions changed I had to ensure I had a theoretical base for the changes I was making so that I could explain to parents the value of and reasons for the changes. (Pressley, 2006) has written that emergent literacy should be part of natural fun and the ability of children to learn literacy in the context of natural fun was

certainly confirmed for me. The suitability of developing the learning dispositions in children has been seen by Peters (2003) as beneficial for children transitioning to school. Awareness of the socio-cultural nature of development supports the benefits of literacy and numeracy learning taking place in a child oriented, social environment which involves play (Dockett & Fler, 2003).

My time at Playcentre has been a reflective journey which has led to significant changes in my practise and thinking. The children have showed me that learning does not have to be teacher directed and that children are capable of contributing their own ideas about learning. Most of all I have learned that everyone in a learning centre is a learner – including the teacher.

Joanne Hayes, Hamurana Playcentre
(Rotorua Association)

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Once upon a time – myths of Playcentre

Notes from an education team meeting

In a collaborative effort the 2009/2010 federation education team uncovered the answers to myths that have been circulating for a long time and that keep making appearances at different levels of Playcentre.

MYTH 1. We are failing if we don't extend the children every session.

Children who observe others or are not actively engaged, are still learning. Children need time for quiet reflection and they have the right to choose the time to do so. Often, these periods lead to creativity. Remember, it used to be that doing well as a child was what parents aimed at, now it is "optimal development" that is wanted.

MYTH 2. Playcentre education exists so that centres can receive funding.

When Playcentre began in 1941, those with suitable training, such as kindergarten teachers, were appointed. But our founders always envisioned that adult education would be part of the programme and when mothers themselves showed interest in learning about their children, it was easy to respond. Combined with the growing difficulty of getting trained people, our own programmes started. In 1944 Mrs. Beeby ran "A Study Group for Parents" (Densem & Chapman, p. 35) and a year later the Wellington Association started a supervisor course.

Most importantly, we train to be better parents, but also to get over 'baby brain' and to keep our brain healthy. Training provides good opportunities to meet other parents and it creates possibilities for dialogue with adults. Playcentre education gives us a position to reflect on how our own values fit with those of our centre and how we can provide for high quality sessions for the children. It is also a milestone in our lifelong learning process.

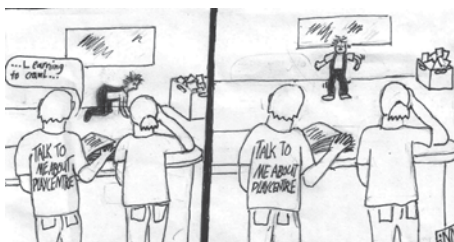
Note: The education programme became linked to licensing 1991. Once a centre is licensed it is eligible for bulk funding.

MYTH 3. Learning moments must be documented, along with a photo.

Congratulations on noticing the moment and recognising that learning is occurring. Enjoy being in the moment. The photo opportunity is for someone

else. The photo is the icing on the cake and the learning is more important than the photo. We coped without photos ten years ago, we can continue to make learning visible with written pictures.

MYTH 4. The only record of learning is



Sometimes we are so busy looking at the documentation that we forget to look at the child!
Drawn by Finn van Leuven, age 11, ex-Belmont Playcentre, Hutt Association.

the portfolio.

The CHILD is the living record of learning and achievement.

MYTH 5. Playcentre is not a coffee group.

Playcentre had its origins in supporting and empowering women to take some time out to socialise. One of the aims of the New Zealand Play Centres Association (1941) was "to provide leisure time for mothers, and opportunities for the social development of the pre-school child through co-operative effort" (Densem & Chapman, p. 35). And thus by role modelling socialising, we teach children to be social and provide opportunities to practice their social skills. But there is a tension between adult socialisation and the aim of making Playcentre a place for children. Good to get a balance on the continuum.

MYTH 6. All centres, all associations are like mine.

Is your management structure a BOG, a COM, a BOM or an executive? Do you complete Course 2, Te Puna or Harakeke? Do you find it difficult to drive 15 minutes up the road to attend a workshop? Spare a thought for Playcentre members from Kaikoura who must travel 3 hours to attend a workshop.

MYTH 7. Everyone must do as much as I do.

There are 'seasons' for giving – when you have younger children, are pregnant etc. your contributions to Playcentre might be limited, but when your youngest is four you might take a bigger role. Policies can give guidance in this respect, but can also make things inflexible. Make compassion the guideline for measuring contributions.

MYTH 8. everything we do should be 'creditable' towards a certificate.

Would we prefer someone to take on an office only to meet a certificate requirement or in order to contribute voluntarily towards the centre? If it is 'for credit', then minimums and maximums need to be defined e.g. length of time to hold office, which particular office. This in turn encourages minimal contributions from members aiming to do the least possible to get credit.

MYTH 9. A Playcentre session must have 16 areas of play set up.

Well, who decided that there are 16 areas of play and who picked them? Why are there 16? Where is the NZPF approved list? Why are these considered more important than others? Where is the remit that approved these?

MYTH 10. The federation education team gives you the answers and tells you what to do.

We facilitate your ideas and/or issues as well as externally driven items. We respect that you are the drivers of Playcentre's direction and are the policy makers. We work to give you a safe place to ponder, think, discuss and express your view.

PS The answer to the unstated eleventh myth is: Gillian is not scary at all.

Victoria Spagnolo, Suzanne Manning, Glenda Caradus, Gillian Croad, Corina Landon-Lane, Susy Mannall.

Reference:

Densem, A., & Chapman, B. (2000). Learning together: The Playcentre Way. Auckland: New Zealand Playcentre Federation.

A Natural Phenomenon

Have you connected with the joy, the wonder, and the magic of our natural environment?

Henry David Thoreau wrote, “... *the earth is more to be admired and enjoyed than be used*”. In this precarious age we would do well to follow this advice. There is no denying the fact that our planet has been used to such excess that it is now in a state of crisis. Clearly, if human life is to continue, there is an urgent need to change our behaviours and attitudes towards Mother Earth. In doing so it is vital we involve our children, and develop in them a healthy respect and awareness for the earth, and a sense of awe and wonder for the subtle qualities of nature. To do this requires an awareness of how we ourselves connect with the earth, for it is in the way that we approach nature that our children will learn to cherish or rubbish her. As Senegalese ecologist Baba Dioum says:

“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.”

So what do we need to *teach* this understanding and love? If we think back to our own childhoods there are, for most of us, certain to be memories of favourite trees climbed, huts in the bushes or backyard, mud pies, jumping in puddles, etc. This is a good starting point. Identify the feelings that are associated with these memories, and consider if these are present for your own children. Look around you and admire the natural wonder of the ever-changing seasons; the silvery trail of a snail, the knothole in a tree trunk, perfect for a wee elf or fairy to sleep in. As we engage children in the wonder of such things we connect them with the world beyond our own selves. We give them the opportunity to realise that we humans are a part of a much bigger ecosystem, and that it is a system precious and beautiful, full of wonder and discovery. Whether we are talking about planting, observing and eating from a garden, jumping in puddles, climbing trees, making huts or fairy houses, cooking over an open fire or finding beautiful stones, shells, or seeds to create patterns and pictures, a connection is being created, a love fostered. This connection may provide a space for peace, reflection, feeling ... a balance to the constant buzz of our technologically

abundant lives. Equally it may stimulate and excite, as a sense of wonder takes hold. Each of these activities engages different areas of learning and development, and holds vital ingredients for the emotional, physical, intellectual and even spiritual development of a child.

Clearly such activities can cover numerous aspects of Te Whāriki, often whilst requiring minimal effort to activate (and producing no waste or excessive investment). Most importantly they connect the child with our natural world, through direct physical experience. Consider just how many of our Playcentre ‘areas of play’ can be covered purely through nature experiences and the use of natural materials – music, science, physically active, manipulative, clay, collage, and storytelling. Now contemplate how many non-renewable resources that will wear out and have to be thrown away, and replaced, are used in these areas currently. Is there room to bring in more nature? Can you afford not to?

As I finish writing this my three and a half year old has pulled me away to come and look at the big puddle, NOW. As we go out to it she exclaims “Oh, the moon!” in pure joy, as she discovers it waxing above her.

We could do well to follow the old adage ‘less is more’. Simply working with nature’s rhythms and elements can slow us all down, giving us time to *smell the roses* along the highway that childhood has all too often become. Not only this, but it will improve our children’s health, and that of the planet. If our children have the opportunity to truly get to know and befriend nature, they will hold a love for it, and as inheritors of this earth, it is essential that this love be fostered. *It is in our hands.*

If you are interested in learning more about how we can connect our children with nature and bring these experiences to our Playcentre there are an increasing number of books and specialists providing training and support in this area. For further information and ideas join The Natural Phenomena Conference 2010, being held in November. The conference is bringing together both international and national speakers on a huge range of topics centered on this theme. To find out more go to www.thenaturalphenomena.co.nz.

Ria Woollams, Tutukaka Coast Playcentre
(Northland Association)



Ross at Tutukaka Coast Playcentre

Beyond Gardening: Sustainability at Playcentre

As concern for human impact on the earth grows, there can't be many large organisations in New Zealand that have not incorporated sustainability into their policies and practices in some way. What is Playcentre's approach going to be and how far are we prepared to go?

This is the question the recently formed Canterbury Playcentre Kaitiakitanga Group has been attempting to address in its initial meetings. After brainstorming ideas the group has come up with the following working vision.

Our vision is to create a community where everyone respects, understands and cares for their environment (social, cultural and natural) by taking action through education in, for and about the environment.

How far are we prepared to commit to sustainability within our centres, the associations and the federation?

At a centre level many of us are already growing our own vegetables, composting and recycling. Locally, some centres, for example Halswell, have done an internal self review and have changed to environmentally friendly cleaning products. Tai Tapu Playcentre is participating in the *Paper 4 Trees* programme. Shirley has looked at how sustainability fits in with Te Whāriki. This is a great start. But what would a centre working towards sustainability on all fronts be like?

Are we prepared to commit to things like recycling water, using environmental friendly products (cleaning products, food, toys etc), limiting our use of resources such as play dough and water and to have education for sustainability as an integral part of our learning?

For centres to start making this shift towards a sustainable future, information and communication within the centres will be critically important. All the mechanisms for this are already in place, for example; meetings, notice board, emails, verbal and written discussion, the self review process etc. As this is an important and, in some cases, a big change for centres we need to give everyone the opportunity to be involved.

For this to occur what commitment and support is required at association level? We have discussed many ideas in

the Canterbury Playcentre Kaitiakitanga Group. An obvious place to start is with the education of members through workshops and course programmes which are available to everyone. The association could also offer a sustainability self review process where centres undertake an audit and then work through a process to run the centre in a more sustainable way. To oversee the association's commitment a 'sustainability position' could be created thus giving the centres a contact point and some support within the association.

Supporting the associations and centres in their quest for sustainability, the federation would need to look at and change its policies and even the philosophy. We are in fact looking at presenting a remit along these lines at the national conference which could start the process.

As parents it is our responsibility to educate and prepare our children to understand, respect and care for their environment. If the centres, the association and the federation are all prepared to work together, surely this is achievable.

Jenny Duncan and Kate Armour
(Canterbury Association)



Using natural cleaners at Halswell Playcentre.

Imagine!

Imagine a perfect Playcentre: welcoming, green, with climbable trees full of singing birds, unusual sand and water features, intriguing, effective planting and full of those potential learning and teaching opportunities. Picture a Playcentre that invites exploration and oozes excitement and fun. Envisage a Playcentre that fosters environmental awareness. Is it possible?

There is an amazing bunch of people out there in the form of a group called *Enviroschools* helping schools and early childhood centres on their journey to this sustainable utopia. Over 700 schools including 50 early childhood centres in New Zealand are already enrolled. They have started their journey. Many more are on waiting lists, keen, enthusiastic and wanting to be part of the process.

Ohau Playcentre was on one of those waiting lists. They already had a worm farm, compost bins, had built macrocarpa vegetable beds, and the kids even had their own vegetable gardens in half barrels. They also had a large recycling bin in their Playcentre. But they did not know what to do next. I heard about *Enviroschools* and I investigated the programme by reading their web site (www.enviroschools.org.nz). I was amazed by the incredible things they were inspiring children and communities to do. I was so keen!

I found out about the *Enviroschools* facilitator training and all I needed was some funding. This is where imagination became reality. The farsighted executive and education teams of the Central Districts Playcentre Association (CDPA) agreed to fund my training. That was last month, since then I have attended three days of life altering training in Raglan and an inspiring three day National Meeting in Waikanae.

This program could have been designed for Playcentres. It looks for ways to empower the students, it encourages community support and involvement, and it allows schools or early childhood centres to set their own goals and time frames. It provides amazing resources for the trained facilitators that encourage the Māori perspective to be not just included but honoured along the journey. It lives inclusion. It has a strong philosophy that fits alongside Playcentre's own philosophy and Te Whāriki too. This programme is ideal.

An *action cycle* is used to help to evaluate

Planting our garden

During term two we focused on planting a garden. We set up the science area with gardening equipment including spades, gloves, pots, seeds, watering cans and compost. The children had the opportunity to grow a broad bean in a yoghurt pot and to observe its growth on a regular basis. Donna also planted some in clear jars with cotton wool, for the children to watch how the roots develop and to find out whether they would grow without soil. We also planted carrots, radishes, beetroot, lettuces and nasturtium in seed trays and talked about planting vegetables at different times of the year, the variation in size of seeds, how to plant them and how to look after them.

The children showed great interest in this activity and were fascinated by the different sized seeds. Kaleb's interest was more in emptying the compost from the trays as opposed to planting seeds! Harrison used the wooden ride on truck to transport watering cans and the big heavy bag of compost.

We tracked the growth of the beans using a chart for the children to follow the progress. Soon Kaleb's plant had taken an early lead and was shooting up along with Elise's and Megan's. Harrison was a little upset as his was yet to grow but we reassured him with some more water it would soon start to grow.

A week later, all the broad beans had sprouted and Harrison was most pleased. Some beans already needed to be staked for support and the roots of the bean in the clear jar had grown without soil all together.

We extended our bean study by doing a puppet show of Jack and the Beanstalk and each child took home a "magic bean". We also made a giant beanstalk that reached up to the ceiling. Later, Donna explained that the plants needed more sunlight and more space to grow and the children helped transfer them out to the garden. It is nice for the children to see the continuity of growing vegetables.

Nic Cobbett, Howick Playcentre
(Tamaki Association)



Many hands make light work.



Planning for the future.

the progress in the participating centre, to assess the current situation by exploring what has been put in place already and to find out what works and what doesn't. What are the alternatives? Do we need to take action? And most importantly is the regular reflection on change. If you have made progress you may qualify for a medal too!

And how does the imagined Playcentre fit in? *Enviroschools* is helping to raise awareness and to encourage planned action for a sustainable environment. They are helping our children and us to help save our planet, as we know it. One step at a time from early childhood through primary, intermediate, college and now into university, all can be

involved. Soon there will be generations aware of the importance of recycling, of reducing waste, of making lunch boxes rubbish free, of the journey of water, of climate change and its consequences, and the benefits of planting native trees – all together taking care of our own world. The best age to start this journey is the preschool age because the children have open minds, an eagerness to learn and they take their learning home.

The CDPA has just embarked on this journey. They would love to share their experiences with whoever is interested.

In the words of the *Enviroschools* song "Let the Children lead the way".

Rowena Bullen, Ohau Playcentre
(Central District Association)



SUSTAINABILITY

Why are sustainability issues important for Playcentre?

Starting a vegetable garden or planting fruit trees and bushes are often the first steps a centre will take towards teaching sustainability. The lessons learned from taking care of plants encompass so many different areas of learning and are so valuable. However, the idea of sustainability can be broadened so that we are offering our children an environment where responsible stewardship of the earth is promoted in all aspects of the daily running of Playcentre.

Looking at energy use, cleaning products, purchasing and use of resources, and the products we promote through fundraising can be evaluated. Even traditional areas of play like playdough and collage can be considered: is it okay to produce dough from a food source when the final product cannot be re-used or composted? Would clay or daily baking be a more sustainable approach? Sometimes it is hard to think about changing traditional areas or ways of play because they are so familiar to us.

If we focus on what we want our children to view as valuable and let their futures be our guide then some changes may become obvious. Becoming more sustainable may lead to other benefits as well, in terms of cost and manageability of resources within the centre.

Playcentre families are great at practical changes and most have a strong environmental focus already. We are sure Playcentre can lead the way as a sustainable and environmentally focused early childhood option.



What to look out

INSIDE

Toys/resources:

- Sustainable craft materials—being aware of where the product has come from, who has produced the material and what will happen to the final product.
- Buy toys/furniture that are wooden, fabric, cardboard or metal over plastic and, when possible, locally made. Consider what is likely to break and how easy it will be to repair. Make quality and durability more important than cost when it comes to purchases.
- Try to fix or replace broken or missing parts of toys or puzzles rather than replacing them. There are companies that will make new puzzle pieces.
- Purchase books and music that reflect respect for the environment.
- Provide heuristic play opportunities for babies by collecting treasure baskets full of natural materials. There are two great articles on www.littleacornstomightyoaks.co.uk that provide more information on items that can be included.

Administration/ Management:

- Promotion of waste free lunch boxes by encouraging reusable containers, providing containers to collect compostable materials, and creating a culture where recycling becomes a habit.
- Recycle ink cartridges or refill them, reduce paper use, promote paper free correspondence.
- Use recycling bins in centres and offices.
- Purchase food that has been locally produced, has little packaging, is organic or has been bought in bulk; consider embedded water and transportation.
- Share ideas with families – through the children and through newsletters.
- Look at switching to eco-friendly cleaning products and those you can buy in bulk. Remember to follow the recommended ratio for ones that require dilution.
- Consider installing insulation, efficient heating, and energy efficient light bulbs.
- When needing to make repairs to the building, consider environmentally friendly building materials. Utilise sustainable design principles, e.g. sky lights, light-coloured paints, passive heating/cooling.

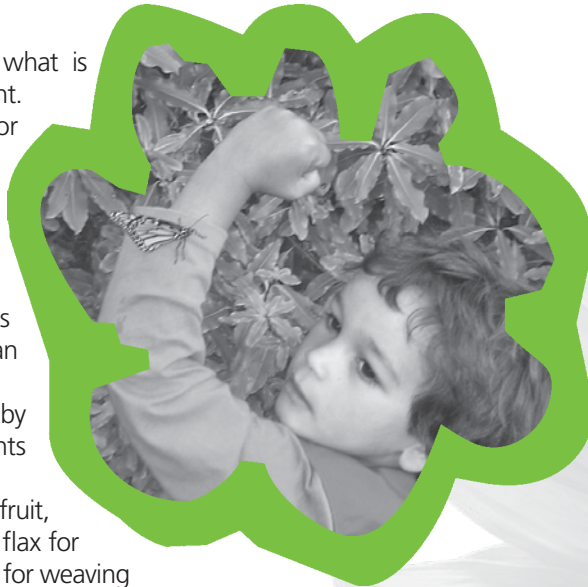


AT PLAYCENTRE

for at your centre

OUTSIDE

- Natural play areas that reflect what is important in the local environment.
- Outside areas that promote care for local birds, animals, and insects by providing them with food, shelter and water.
- Landscaping with plants that are suitable for the environment.
- Encourage children to dress appropriately so outside play is an option in all weather conditions.
- Model care for outside areas by collecting rubbish, caring for plants and fixing equipment.
- Growing plants that are of use (fruit, herbs and vegetables for eating, flax for weaving and making dye, willow for weaving etc).
- Provide areas with natural materials for play; pine cones, sawdust, shells, stones, clay etc.
- Collect rainwater in tanks and encourage conservation of use.
- Use of solar, wind and water to demonstrate energy (windmill, solar oven, solar shower, water wheel).



Centre Activities:

- Go on excursions that provide children opportunities to learn more about the local environment or places that care for the environment.
- Fundraising with sustainable practices in mind (selling worm castings, seedlings, etc).
- Promotion of libraries (toys and books) to centre families.
- Encourage swapping of toys, clothing and books.
- Create an awareness of surrounding geography; names of specific local mountains, rivers or lakes. Provide opportunities where environmental vocabulary is used and children can see their place in the land.
- Encourage an awareness of topical environmental issues through discussion or sharing of books.
- Promotion of local environmental events like tree plantings, or rubbish clean-up days.



Websites to check out:

- www.4myearth.co.nz
- www.nzbirds.com
- www.naturplaynz.co.nz
- www.sustainableliving.org.nz
- www.earthcharter.org
- www.nzaee.org.nz
- www.planetark.com



Ideas for trips out:

- Local conservation centres
- Refuse stations
- Local rivers, lakes or beaches
- Wildlife parks or animal rescue centres
- Second hand shops or resource recovery centres.

Challenge to Playcentres:

We'd like to post a challenge to all Playcentres, to review one area of play and feedback how their thinking or practices have changed.

Compiled by Emma Philp and Belinda Nicholls,
(Canterbury Association)

Working theories in action

Building and sharing islands of interest and expertise

In the Winter (2010) edition of the Playcentre Journal, we shared part of a case study from the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funded project involving the Canterbury Playcentre Association, CORE Education and University of Waikato called Moments of wonder, everyday events: how are young children theorising and making sense of their world?

In that article we described some of the ways four-year old Sarah-Kate's working theories had been noticed, understood and intentionally responded to at Southbridge Playcentre. We shared how some of Sarah-Kate's ways and means for expressing her working theories about

the animal world had strengthened over time, using Margaret Carr's (2009) four-track (ABCD) framework for strengthening key competences. We have found this framework for key competencies useful for considering the ways working theories can 'progress.'

In this article we explain some of the other frameworks that have shaped our thinking and actions in this research project. In particular we will explain in greater detail the connection between Guy Claxton's (1990) 'minitheories' and the 'working theories' of *Te Whāriki* we introduced in the first of this series of articles (see the Autumn 2010 edition of the Playcentre Journal), and the ways we have come to understand working theories as *islands of interest and expertise*.

We also share the ways one of the practitioner researchers in our project team sought out parent's

perspectives and stories of their children's islands of interest, or expertise, as she attempted to not only find out about these funds of knowledge from home, but to encourage parents to begin to speak the language of working theories.

Frameworks for understanding working theories

Children's working theories, as described in *Te Whāriki*, are derived from Claxton's (1990) ways of thinking about knowledge, an idea

he called 'minitheories.' Claxton describes one's knowledge as consisting of:

... a large number of purpose-built, situation-specific packages called 'minitheories,' and that our basic method of learning – our natural learning ability, as I call it – involves a gradual process of editing these minitheories so that they become (1) to contain better-quality knowledge and skill, and (2) to be better 'located' with

When we experience something new we are either 'on firm ground,' because we relate it easily to what we know – our island of knowledge – or we are 'at sea' and are uncertain and unsure how to interpret this experience or how to behave.

respect to the area of experience for which they are suitable. (p.66)

According to *Te Whāriki*, working theories are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes and contribute to children developing learning dispositions (Ministry of Education, 1996). In our project we have come to think of working theories and learning dispositions as two sides to the same coin. While this project foregrounds the working theories side of the coin, we recognise the connected nature of learning dispositions.

Like Claxton's mini-theories, *Te Whāriki* describes working theories as shifting and changing over time. Working theories

It was suggested that a possible theory the baby might have was that she saw herself as capable, as a 'big kid.'

develop and morph as a child's knowledge of the world, skills and strategies, attitudes and expectations change through experience.

As children gain greater experience, knowledge, skills, the theories they develop become more widely applicable and have more connecting links between them. Working theories become increasingly useful for making sense of the world, for giving the child control over what happens, for problem solving, and for many communities, theories about the world

are infused with a spiritual dimension. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 44)

Claxton (1990) uses three simple analogies to describe minitheories – islands, amoebae and computer files. It's Claxton's island analogy that first resonated with us as we searched for ways to frame our thinking about what was being noticed and documented about children's behaviours and ideas, as examples of children's working theories in action. In

his island analogy, Claxton refers to what we know as being like islands in a sea of what we don't know. When we experience something new we are either 'on firm ground,' because we relate it easily to what we know – our island of knowledge – or we are 'at sea' and are

uncertain and unsure how to interpret this experience or how to behave. Islands may eventually connect as we come to realise they are not dissimilar. Likewise, what was once thought of as one island could, with greater experience, become two.

Claxton's minitheories provided us with a useful way of thinking about the sort of learning we were interested in, in its most general sense, while at the same time it kept our view of this learning as connected to action and context.

Islands of interest and expertise

Working theories are about thinking and acting in ways that work to express, communicate, develop and strengthen ideas and understandings about the world. Our ideas and understandings of working theories are not

limited in any sense to particular domains such as scientific thought: rather we have been interested in children's creativity, imaginings, problem seeking and solving, theorising, acting and interactions as they engage in everyday inquiries and conversations with others.

In exploring working theories we recognise the strong influence of children's interests on their learning. Some of these interests are fleeting, while others are more connected or revisited more frequently by children. Over

the course of our research, we have come to think of these interests as 'islands', adapting Claxton's island analogy to create a metaphor for working theories. We were keen to see how we can grow some of these *islands of interest*: making them more complex, more connected, and more compelling to children.

Crowley and Jacobs (2002) describe the ways in which knowledge deepens and becomes more complex over time as children find and develop areas of interest that become islands of expertise. This resonates with Claxton's (1990) islands analogy where learning is 'reclaiming dry land from the sea' (p.67). Crowley and Jacob demonstrated how islands can grow. When a child shows an interest in, for example, dinosaurs, adults may follow and foster this interest through their responses to the interest and interactions with the child. Perhaps after responding to the child's interest by talking many times about what dinosaurs do, adults may introduce resources and activities that extend the 'island' (in this case watching YouTube footage of 'dinosaur' movies, and recreating scenes from these movies with Lego and so on). The adults and child all develop increased knowledge and vocabulary. The child's family or whānau is tuned into the connections to dinosaurs the child makes in their day-to-day interactions, and they recognise these moments as worthy of attention (e.g. when jumping off the playground equipment and the child makes a connection to the thud of a dinosaur's walk), over other fleeting interests (e.g. the child's question about what worms eat), thus contributing over time to the child's eventual island of expertise around all things dinosaur. Development of these islands allows children and families to develop positive learning habits. While some of the details may fade when/if the interest in dinosaurs wanes, some important general structures and approaches to learning remain.

Sarah-Kate, who we featured in the article we wrote for the previous edition of this journal, was an example of a child who had developed an island of expertise around aspects of the animal world, and with the right level of scaffolding and co-construction, also developed an island of expertise in storytelling.

When children are engaged with others in complex thinking, they are forming and strengthening their working theories. It is through interactions and activities that children begin to own the ideas and beliefs of their culture and begin to make sense of their

worlds (Rogoff, 2003). This requires skilled and flexible adults who can adapt the way they respond to learners (Jordan, 2004), and there is much to learn about how that skill and flexibility can be achieved and how adults in early childhood environments might 'stretch' children's thinking (Meade, 2008).

Tapping into learning at home and creating a shared language

The example given above reminds us that children build and inhabit their islands of expertise and interest with their parents, families and whānau through the things they do together every day. Parents are therefore often able to provide meaningful contexts to their children's working theories, filling the gaps in understandings and meaning for others involved in the education of their children. When other adults are aware of children's learning at home they are able to provide programmes that are more culturally responsive and meaningful for learners and their families. Because whānau, parents and family attend Playcentre alongside their children, we might assume the child's islands of interest or expertise that are fostered at home are well known and understood at Playcentre. However, we found that it was worth exploring how these are shared and how well are they understood.

Aletta Duff, a practitioner researcher and co-ordinator at Cust West Eyreton Playcentre, was keen to explore this issue. She provided parents with a notebook to take home and invited parents to note down what

they noticed or knew about their children's working theories or islands of interests or expertise at home.

For the purposes of this article we have chosen to share two examples that emerged from the notebook data. The first is an example of a child's island of interest well known and understood at home, but unknown at Playcentre. The second is of a parent's shifting view of her child as she begins to recognise her baby as a thinker, who is developing theories about his world, himself and the others around him.

Untapped islands of interest

When the notebooks were first introduced, we were interested in what information parents could add to what happened at Playcentre. We expected the notes parents made would provide a window into the parents' ideas about their children's islands of interest and expertise. We hadn't expected to find that for some children there was a significant gulf between what were well-recognised islands of interest at home, and what is recognised and known about that child's interests at Playcentre. This surprising finding was illustrated by Hannah's notebook where Hannah's mum recorded many examples about Hannah's interest in song and performance. Of the 11 entries made in the notebook, all but one related to this interest.

When Keryn (academic researcher and project co-director) spoke to Hannah's mum about this, she was quick to point out that this



Hannah making sense of her world through music.

interest was well understood and responded to at home. She identified that Hannah was developing all sorts of working theories about song, music, dance and performance from her many experiences with her immediate and extended family. From the notebook it can be seen how Hannah's play had become more complex. At first she enjoyed familiar Playcentre songs, recreating them at home, later making them more elaborate by creating a new role for her mum. Then Hannah decided to perform for an audience.

"Hannah had decided that she likes to perform songs for an audience. She stood up on her seat/stool (is ok only 20cm high!) and sang to Mum and Dad and Thomas. When she had finished she asked us to clap for her! The grin on her face was priceless, self achievement."

A day later members of her extended family came to stay:

"Aunty Rachael, cousin Kate and Samantha came to stay for [the] weekend. Hannah sang lots of songs for them."

Hannah's mum shared that Hannah's grandmother plays the piano for her while Hannah sings and dances, and this has been a loved ritual for a long time between them. Hannah's mum also intentionally encourages Hannah's interest by using song during play and Hannah and her mum often sing the conversations they have with one another.

One of the ways Hannah's mum had attempted to create a bridge between Hannah's island of interest at home and Playcentre was recorded by Aletta prior to the use of notebooks, but this went unrecognised by Aletta for its significance to Hannah. The story captured one of the ways Hannah and her



Connor trying to pull free the sellotape.

mum made-up songs and interacted through using these songs. In this case, part of the song included singing 'hello' to Aletta when they arrived at Playcentre. At Aletta's request Hannah's mum wrote down the words of the song, with Aletta adding a further verse. The story was not discussed further by the adults, despite it being documented at the time.

Aletta knew nothing of this strong interest at home until the conversation between Keryn and Hannah's mum was shared with her. It was as if Hannah's island of interest did not cross the border to Playcentre. Interestingly, although Hannah's mum valued and recognised her daughter's growing expertise, and wanted her to be a confident person, she was hesitant to 'push her child forward' during adult conversations at Playcentre about children's learning.

Seeing with new eyes

A second finding from the notebooks was Carolyn's shifting view of her baby, Connor, as she began to consider the ways that Connor was developing working theories about his world.

In the beginning of Connor's notebook, when Carolyn was first introduced to the idea of working theories, her notes were typically descriptive of his actions and means of communicating his feelings in responses to the things, events and people in his life.

On one of Keryn's visits to the centre an incident with a baby provided the catalyst to shift Carolyn's thinking. The centre is open-plan and it was not long before a crawling

baby moved beyond the baby area carpet despite her mother's wish for her to remain in the area. Keryn suggested they reflect on this using working theories as the lens for looking at the baby's actions. How might this child be viewed when we stop to think about working theories she may be developing? It was suggested that a possible theory the baby might have was that she saw herself as capable, as a 'big kid.' Perhaps she had a theory about what lies beyond the baby area. A parent made the comment:

"It differs according to what we bring to the table. If we see her as a baby, who needs to be protected, we do one thing, but if we see her as she herself might see herself [as a big girl], how we respond to what she's doing would be very different."

Later, Keryn shared this story with Carolyn. Later, Carolyn reflected:

[This story] definitely influenced me, and some of our thinking and conversations at our centre meetings, during interactions with babies and also in relation to purchasing equipment for our infants and toddlers.

Around this time, the centre undertook a review of the provision for infants and toddlers at the centre. Carolyn recorded in Connor's notebook that she noticed parents at Playcentre tended to keep babies and toddlers close to them and these children spent lots of time on mum's knee being held, fed and kept occupied while the adults did things with the older children. She wondered if they should be doing more for the babies at the centre (especially given Connor was given



Connor exploring different textures.

much more freedom at home) or whether they were getting enough out of just being present and nurtured by their parents.

Soon after a professional development facilitator visited the centre and shared ideas about infants and toddlers as active learners and the powerful influence of respectful interactions on learning, which resonated with the ideas we are exploring in this research project. Infants and toddlers actively developing working theories about themselves, others, things and place through their interactions and experiences was becoming clearer to Carolyn. Carolyn's notebook revealed the way her view of Connor began to shift:

Since then I have talked to Connor more and waited for him to show me he is ready before I pick him up etc. I have been amazed at how quickly he has responded to this. He obviously understands what I mean when I go to pick him up because he often reaches up. If I ask him to lift up his legs to change his nappy he responds. I can't believe it! Even though he is my third child I still have so much to learn!

On another occasion Connor spent a considerable amount of time at the table manipulating the cellotape. The tape was in its dispenser and his goal appeared to be to tear off a piece of the tape using the serrated edge of the dispenser—a tricky task especially when supporting his own weight as he stood at the table. Carolyn reported that he was focused and determined. Just as he was about to pull a piece of tape free, another adult walked by, and uplifted the cellotape without noticing Connor, and carried it away to use it. This event hit home for Carolyn, that although she was now recognising the significance of everyday moments like this as an opportunity for Connor to stretch his thinking and possibly test or modify his working theories about the objects in his world and about his own ability, others may not be.

Over a year later, Carolyn shared with the research team how the focus on working theories has changed the way she sees Connor as a learner.

Exploring Connor's working theories has allowed me to gain an insight into the world through his eyes. I now try to be fully tuned in to what he is telling me with his actions. I feel like I was missing so much before! Connor is very clear in his communication with me if I just slow down and listen properly. This seems so simple but I think amidst the business of family life and Playcentre sessions it is the

most challenging to implement.

I now value Connor's play more and recognise his choices as being directly related to what he needs next in his learning and development. For example I am much more patient when he insists on climbing into the car on his own as I have observed his desire to climb whenever possible. While it takes a little more time I now recognise his need to develop these skills in everyday activities.

I am also more confident about letting him 'have a go' at things and I let him use things which I didn't let my older children near at the same age. For example he likes to sit in a chair and use a knife and fork and an ordinary glass and plate at the dinner table. So the high chair, baby spoons, sipper cups and plastic plates were shelved much earlier. As a result he was competently drinking from a cup and giving a knife and fork a go from 18 months. He also likes to use tools such as scissors, screwdrivers, hammers and saws and I have accepted his desire to learn to use them and have shown him how to use them safely with close supervision where in the past I would have thought he was too little and steered him towards something I thought was more 'appropriate' for a baby. I now realise I would have been inhibiting his development by doing this.

Taking the time to document Connor's working theories in a notebook, and discussing her observations with others, was influential in Carolyn's changing views about Connor. She acknowledged the importance of skilled and flexible adults (Jordan, 2004), as noted earlier in this article, in recognising and stretching children's thinking.

What might these stories tell us about adults' roles in supporting children's working theories in Playcentre?

In both Connor's and Hannah's examples, the sharing of focused documentation with others at Playcentre could potentially have provided more insights into the working theories of these children. Documentation has an important role to play in supporting continuity for children, but documentation must have clear purposes if it is to contribute to children's working theories. In this project, we have been frequently reminded of the power of documentation in supporting us to make meaning of children's learning. This, together with reflective discussion, is fundamental to any educational setting where adults strive to understand children's

learning and put this understanding to good use (Drummond, 1993).

Developing a shared language and understanding of working theories, has the potential to create many opportunities for meaningful dialogue about the learning of all children in Playcentre. Furthermore, the adoption of this 'lens' has the potential to shift the ways the youngest members of their communities are seen and understood as learners.

Hannah's story, and other similar stories from our data, raises questions about the ways in which families are able to share their child's working theories and islands of interest and expertise at Playcentre. There appears to be potential for much richer learning when deliberate connections are made. These connections, however, require intentional strategies. Stronger connections create greater continuity in experience and learning between home and Playcentre, allowing opportunity for learning to be encouraged and supported in diverse and new ways. Although there may be existing mechanisms in many Playcentres for sharing information about children, we cannot assume these mechanisms are focused on encouraging children's islands of interest or expertise, or that these are working for all children or all parents.

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More information

Over the coming editions of the Playcentre Journal we will be sharing examples from other case studies. In the meantime if you have any questions about the project please feel free to contact Keryn Davis at keryn.davis@core-ed.org

Mothers in Japanese Playcentres

A study of mothers in Japanese Playcentres and the impact of their participation in Playcentre.

Japanese child-rearing context

The deep-rooted structure of the Japanese family is changing along with the working conditions of Japanese society (Macfarlane, 2007). Traditionally, extended families lived and worked close together and were able to provide support for mothers bringing up children. After World War II Japan rebuilt its economy which involved many more women working outside the home, men working long hours away from home and extended families living further apart. Without the traditional sources of support, many Japanese mothers became isolated and stressed. Contemporary couples in Japan often choose to have just one child, due to the stresses (both financially and socially) of having children. This has contributed to the declining birth rate over the last few decades, with a low of 1.3 children per couple in 2006 (OECD, 2009). The government has been developing policies to support families and reverse the birth rate decline since the early 1990s (NIPSSR, 2003). These have been successful in producing more child care facilities, but not in increasing the birth rate.

Many programmes have been set up by local governments to provide mothering information and local networks for full-time mothers. These are usually staffed by professional teachers and provide play equipment and activities, so all mothers need to do, is turn up. A different approach is to focus on connecting mothers with other mothers and building social networks to support mothering. This was the idea behind the introduction of Playcentres.

Playcentres in Japan

The first Japanese Playcentres were opened in Tokyo in 2002 (Picasso Playcentre) and in the Shizuoka Prefecture south of Tokyo (Mishima Playcentre) by Japanese academics Dr Mika Ikemoto and Professor Chikara Kuboto (Pilkington, Manning & Parr-Whalley, 2010). They were attracted to the Playcentre model of a mother cooperative as a means of providing empowerment and support for mothers. Currently there are nine Playcentres in Japan: seven in the Tokyo region, one in Mishima and one in Eniwa city. Eniwa Playcentre

opened in 2008, and was the first Playcentre to be initiated by the local government.

For the research, mothers from two contrasting Playcentres, Picasso and Eniwa, were chosen and then appraised through semi-structured interviews. In 2009 Picasso Playcentre had approximately 40 families enrolled. It was started by a volunteer group, some of whom then formed the Japan Playcentre Association (JPA). Voluntary supervisors who had done the JPA six month training course ran the three morning sessions a week. Mothers stayed on sessions with their children, coming regularly to as many sessions as they wished. Management was generally taken care of by the supervisors, but there were monthly meetings where the mothers discussed what was happening at the Playcentre and included a general mother education session based on Playcentre material produced by the JPA. The mothers covered expenses through fees and donations. Some mothers completed the JPA supervisor training and these trained mothers would run the session if the usual supervisors were unavailable, and three left to open their own Playcentre in Kodaira City.

Eniwa Playcentre is the newest Playcentre

and was an initiative of the Eniwa City Council, (see Pilkington et al., 2010) who provided the venue and employed supervisors who had trained through the JPA system. Like Picasso Playcentre, management was not a fully cooperative enterprise as it is in Aotearoa/ New Zealand Playcentres, but there was still a large amount of mother and voluntary community involvement—an example was the working bee using donated materials to build an outdoor sandpit. Some mothers undertook the JPA training and therefore contributed more to the running of sessions. In 2009, approximately thirty families were participating in the Eniwa Playcentre, attending in two groups which each had two morning sessions a week. Every fortnight a mother education morning was held, open to both groups.

The researcher attended a total of seven sessions during which she interviewed twenty-one mothers. All were married, of Japanese-origin, between 20 and 40 years of age and had been attending Playcentre between three months and five years. Only two mothers were living with extended families. The average number of children per family was two, and the median age of the children was two years old.



Suzanne Manning and Junko Satoh.

Some thoughts about what the study tells us the impact of attending Playcentre is on mothers and their social environment.

1. Individual motivation

The opportunity to be actively involved with the children and child-rearing was valued by the mothers. Attending a Playcentre allowed mothers to spend enjoyable time with their children and to be affirmed as the primary educators and carers of their own children. The positive atmosphere of the Playcentre had an impact on the enjoyment and the mothers referred to being cheered up, enjoying the mood of Playcentre sessions and being able to relax, and relieving loneliness, such as in this quote:

The effect of the Playcentre is not something you can see, but something inside the heart. So, it's kind of hard to put into words but, when there are Playcentre sessions and learning sessions, it puts you in a good mood. That's the biggest part I think. (Eniwa)

2. Educational impacts on adults

There was a strong theme of increased understanding of children and their role as a mother because of participation in Playcentre. This was attributed to being actively involved in sessions, to being able to talk about issues with other mothers (especially the more experienced ones), and to the formal education opportunities offered. There was talk of 'growing' as a mother, making new discoveries and having a deeper understanding of child development and how to treat children.

Japanese mothers also valued the idea of collective nurturing of the children, and gaining a wider focus of caring than their previous focus on just their child/ren. Some mothers in the study said that they had previously not been involved with other children because they did not want to cause trouble between themselves and other mothers. After participating in the Playcentre and the education programme, they felt more comfortable with caring for the other children as well. The mothers made comments that they now felt other children were as wonderful as their own!

3. Impact on Social Networks

This study confirmed that adult participation in Playcentres in Japan, like those in Aotearoa/New Zealand, builds strong social networks. Mothers talked of

making new friends in the community and building social networks:

The good thing about the Playcentre – I guess it has to be the relationships with other people. In this day in age, you definitely need a way to be able to make a lot of connections. I feel like I've made connections. I feel that sincerely. (Eniwa). The child-rearing strengths of the large families and local communities of the past are back in a different form in the Playcentre. (Picasso)

The relationships formed at the Playcentres appeared to be satisfying, but it was acknowledged that these were not as deep as the relationships amongst family. This was seen, however, as a good thing and called "loose relationships". One mother said:

At the Playcentre, I like the fact that no one pries into anyone else's business. If you don't want to say everything about your own family, nobody minds. But when you want to get your troubles off your chest, you can say everything directly. All the members are kind enough to listen, and sometimes they even cry. Maybe what I like is that there's just the right amount of distance. (Picasso)

Mothers also said that the Playcentre itself formed a community to which they enjoyed belonging to, and this was formed because of the collaborative activities. This was a major difference between the Playcentres and other playgroups that some mothers had previously attended. This is illustrated by this quote:

You get more of a 'let's actively participate and cooperate' attitude compared with when playing at a prepared place. The feeling of 'we each do what we can and build up our own place' ties into affection for that community. (Picasso)

The difference between a service where the mother was a passive consumer, and the Playcentre where the mother was an active participant was often commented on. Mothers are expected to do 'duties' at Playcentre, to help out running the sessions. Initially mothers often felt that this was a burden, but in hindsight they realised that they learnt a lot from the experience, and felt it to be worthwhile.

The social networks formed within the Playcentre also extended out into the local community. There were many comments

about the community building aspects of Playcentre, firmly based in the commonality of parenting:

It's like the Playcentre is the local community – that's what it feels like there...which is appealing you know. It's true, especially when you're rearing a child, that it's more comforting to have lots of children and mothers you know in the local community than to be an isolated family. (Eniwa)

An example of the connection of the Playcentre in the local community was the building of an outside play area at Eniwa Playcentre. This was achieved through working bees which involved the fathers (who usually do not attend the Playcentre) coming in to help, and many of the materials were donated by community businesses and individuals.

To sum it up

Mothers in Japanese Playcentres gain a greater understanding of children's learning and development, growing confidence as mothers, emotional and practical support through social networks. This is very similar to the findings of the similar (larger scale) study in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Powell et al., 2005), showing that the Playcentre model can cross the boundaries of countries. Perhaps it is because Playcentre empowers parents, and sees them as the competent people they are!

Junko Satoh (Japan Playcentre Association)
Suzanne Manning (NZ Playcentre Federation)

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More information

Junko Satoh, the Japanese Playcentre Association (JPA) co-president, undertook this study as part of her PhD project. This research was presented both at the NZ Research in Early Childhood symposium in May 2010, and again at the Playcentre Conference later that month. This article gives a summary of those presentations. A more in-depth discussion has been submitted to the New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education Journal.

Preparing Our Butterflies to Fly

New Plymouth Playcentre is a vibrant bustling centre with 50 children. As with all centres, we always look to evolve. For too long our five year olds have passed out of the centre with the traditional morning tea, the gift, and the speeches and then off to school they go. It was time to change, and afford our beautiful butterflies, who had grown from their chrysalises into wriggling feisty caterpillars, with some mana and recognition of what they had become. Each of our five years olds leaves our centre with passion, personality, a creative spark that sets them apart, and we wanted to show them how much we have loved watching them blossom.

So, what was the big idea?

We are lucky to have Sarah, who is an incredibly talented artist and photographer. She offered to make a korowai, a special Māori cloak that would be worn by our five year olds as part of their rite of passage into the brave bold world beyond Playcentre. The korowai are finely woven cloaks covered with muka tassels (hukahuka). They are worn as part of special and significant rituals.

For months Sarah beavered away creating the korowai, and completed it earlier this year. It was hand woven, depicting both Mount Taranaki and the sea.

The creation of the korowai sparked a complete re-energising of our five year old graduations. Instead of the certificate children used to get, all members (particularly the children) were asked to record their art and their memories of the leaving child in the leaving book. We also now plan a morning that consists of a party, games and the activities that the leaving child wants to see happen.

Ruby's graduation.

Ruby joined Playcentre at about one year of age, and now at five and a half she is off for a new challenge at school. Monday 26 July 2010 was Ruby's last day.

She was very excited to be having her leaving party, and she talked about the cloak that Katie got to wear, and was very keen that she could wear it too.

We set up outside for the celebration. Throughout the morning, finishing touches



The korowai is placed around Ruby's shoulders.

were added to Ruby's leaving book and Sarah and Rachel made a crown and a throne for Ruby. Ruby particularly enjoyed watching them create all of this just for her; she beamed all morning.

Sarah opened the ceremony by asking why the day was so special and needed celebrating. The korowai was placed around Ruby's shoulder, the crown upon her head and on the throne she sat. Helen gave a beautiful speech about Ruby and how she and her family had seen her grow up and blossom. Her friends Sophia and Carli gave Ruby her personalised book bag and leaving book, and then all of the children gathered around to look at the book, enjoying their creations, old photos of Ruby, and the messages others had written. Ruby then tied a special shell to the muka tassels (hukahuka). Each child who departs leaves a part of them in Playcentre by tying something special of theirs onto the cloak. We sang the Happy Leaving Day song for Ruby, and then it was time for kai!

Afterwards, Charlotte initiated the pass the parcel game, and towards the end of the session I gathered the children inside for the customary very large, very gooey chocolate cake. I spoke about what my time with Ruby at Playcentre had meant, and she cut the cake. A photograph of Ruby in the korowai now sits at the top of the Pohutukawa tree in the centre, which is where she will stay until the next child graduates.

This symbolised the end of her magical Playcentre journey. Well, sort of.

We find it hard to say goodbye, so we run after school sessions twice a term, so the games, the fun and friendships can continue. Ruby's first day at school was a breeze, made easier by the Playcentre friends already there to greet her with a wave and a smile, and also because of the confidence, the skills, the knowledge and the love we give to all our children in centre.

*Louise Tester, New Plymouth Playcentre
(Taranaki Association)*

Don't let yourselves feel that once your child has made the [transition to school] you will have lost her, or can leave her to it ... You won't have lost her; you will have launched her on the next stage of the journey toward the grown-up world you'll share – *Penelope Leach*

What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.

George Bernard Shaw

Lily's last day

Lily started going to Playcentre when she was about six weeks old, and loved it. She is our middle child and fitted into the Playcentre family easily. On her last day at Playcentre, which was also the last day of term two, everything was ready for Lily's farewell.

Lily had a great day doing all her favourite things. She had her face painted as a very pretty butterfly with all the other children joining in and getting their faces painted. Lily made a great birthday hat with lots of bling-bling on it and also played her favourite game of memory with one of her best friends.

Near the end of session we had a birthday party with Lily sitting on the birthday chair and having Happy Birthday sang to her in English and te reo Māori. The children shared the birthday cake, popcorn and chips. Lily was presented with her portfolio books, a certificate, pencil, eraser and a ruler to remember her time at Playcentre.

Lily had a great last day and loves school. Several of the younger girls still at Playcentre ask where Lily is and are told that she is at school. To this they reply: "Lily can come to Playcentre after she's finished at school".

Lily's Playcentre journey has been great to watch as her personality grew, her perseverance and caring nature developed. As parents we may have missed all that had it not been for Playcentre. She has developed a great range of skills that will help her through life.

Kate Williams, Hinds Playcentre (Mid Canterbury Association)



Lily's last day at Playcentre.



Eliot's graduation.

Eden-Epsom Graduations

For as long as we can remember Eden-Epsom Playcentre has always held really big graduation parties. The graduate gets to choose the activities for the day as well as a special theme. My son Eliot's theme was Police go camping and you can imagine his delight when he walked into the centre and everything was decorated in blue, white and yellow with pictures of policemen and police cars. Tents were pitched outside and the adults were wearing paper police hats! Attached to his special chair at the head of the table stood a life-sized cardboard cut-out of Eliot dressed as a policeman.

We shared a meal and Eliot got to blow out the candles on a police car birthday cake. A parent gave a wonderful speech about Eliot and all the exciting things he had done at Playcentre. The next child in line to graduate opened the present Eliot gave to the centre. I was presented with a bouquet of flowers; everyone wrote messages in a beautiful photo book that had been made and we all loved the day.

We appreciate all the aroha that was put into the celebration by our friends at Playcentre. Nearly a year later, Eliot still has some of the decorations on his wall at home and he can't wait to attend the graduation of his younger brother, Philip. I wonder what his theme will be?

Eliot says: "I was turning five. I chose Policeman on camp. I had a funny policeman. Everybody laughed at it. My baby brother was one year old. My big brother and sister go to school but they came to my graduation as well."

Albertien Chignell, Eden-Epsom Playcentre (Auckland Association)

Farewell ceremonies for five year olds going off to School

At Belmont Playcentre our fourth session celebrates the five year old's learning journey through Playcentre in a number of ways.

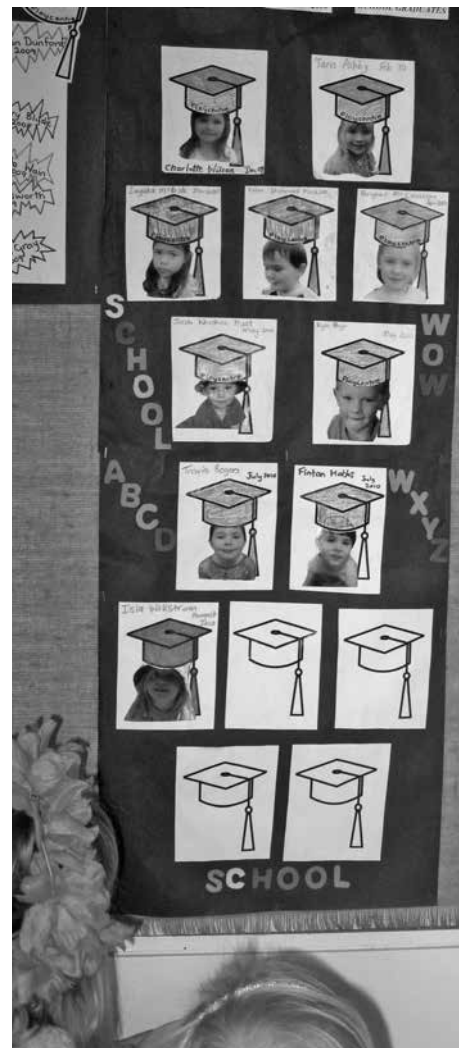
Earlier this year, in an effort to make the achievements of our big kids more visible, we established a Hall of Fame, and so far we have had ten Belmont Playcentre graduates. Our most recent graduate, Isla, turned five in August and proudly had her face and name added to the Hall of Fame.

On the child's last day we have a special session – doing what they would like to do. A recent graduate loved to put on shows, so we focused on creating costumes, props and writing a story to perform for the returning adults at the end of session.

The main part of our ceremony begins at sharing time at the end of session, when the graduating child gets to sit on a special golden throne. We all sit down together and revisit the child's Playcentre journey by looking at and discussing the pages of their profile book, from their first day at Playcentre until the last entry. The children and adults seem to really love this part as it triggers such warm memories for us all. Next we sing Happy School Days to the tune of the Happy Birthday song to the child, and finally we present them with a leaving certificate and a special friendship cushion from their session friends. Every adult gets a chance to write a farewell message to the child in the back of the profile book.

At centre meetings the 4th session team deliver a regular report about what is happening on session and also share the celebrations/farewells we have had.

Sarah Shute, 4th session, Belmont Playcentre (Hutt Association)



Isla looking at the Hall of Fame – our 2010 Graduates.



Rachel presenting Isla with her certificate and friendship cushion.



Rachael McCaw, Nigel Case, Lucy Corry, Rory Mainwaring

Brooklyn Playcentre's Leaving Books

At Brooklyn Playcentre we cherish a proud tradition of preparing special leaving books for our tamariki graduating to school. One of our members says that when families visit our centre to weigh up their early childhood education options, we should simply show them a few leaving books, as they illustrate much of the magic of Playcentre. When ERO reviewed our centre recently, we showed them some leaving books as examples of the reciprocal relationships, belonging and community at Brooklyn. The reviewers were impressed.

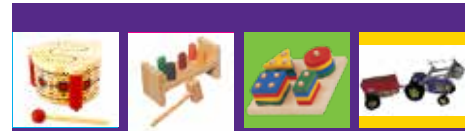
The appearance of the books has become more polished over the years with digital photo technology. But the content remains the same: contributions by adults and children sharing special memories, stories or art work with the departing child. Adults and children alike speak of how they value these leaving books. Children pore over them, asking their parents to read the words over and over again. As school children learn to read, they begin to read the leaving books independently.

The system is simple: when a child is due to graduate, our family support officer selects someone to prepare that child's book, usually an adult who knows the child particularly well. All members who wish to contribute do so. Then the pages are arranged in an A5 sized clearfile book, and any extra photos or decorative touches are added. On the child's last day, she or he is presented with a certificate, a gift (a book), and their leaving book. It says it all

when our tamariki are usually more excited to receive their leaving books than the wrapped present! The books radiate aroha, and some children even take their leaving books to bed with them every night, for months.

Rachel McLean
Brooklyn Playcentre
(Wellington Association)

Pages from Josh Corry's
leaving book



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WHY SHOP ANYWHERE ELSE!



Haka.



Kai time.



Kurahaupo group.

Aotearoa Pā Okaiawa Marae Visit

Puriri Whakamaru o Taranaki hosted a marae visit for Taranaki Playcentre whānau members at Aotearoa Pā, Okaiawa, South Taranaki in conjunction with Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori on Monday 26 July 2010.

All marae tikanga were adhered to: black skirts worn by the women and long trousers worn by the men.

The day began with customary powhiri, where a karanga to welcome the manuhiri consisting of a Puriri Whakamaru o Taranaki member and the rest of the Te Roopu o Te Whare Kohungahunga o Taranaki/Taranaki Playcentre whānau group was performed by the Tangata Whenua and some Puriri Whakamaru o Taranaki members. They were supported by Hawera Playcentre and whānaunga of the Parata Whānau.

The manuhiri also responded with a karanga.

Normally there would be three karanga from both sides, but during this celebration there were only two from either side.

The process clears the path for the manuhiri to proceed onto the marae with ease and comfort, and they in turn acknowledge the surroundings and are there for the purpose of the planned event of the day/kaupapa o te raa, and then both sides to become one after the formalities as well.

The formalities are: hariru, hongī, kihi me whaikorero, waiata tautoko/shake hands, rub noses, kissing, speeches and support song.

After the welcoming formalities, we shared morning tea. It was also important that everyone helped to tidy up after our morning tea. This is usually where everyone gets to know one another over a cuppa, hands in the sink or holding a tea towel. Great team work.

At approximately 11am, I asked that everyone assemble outside the whareniui.

There, we made up three groups. Each group was named after a waka;

- Aotea
 - Tainui
 - Kurahaupo
- We had three areas of learning;
- Taiaha and haka (whareniui)
 - Waiata, waiata- a- ringa and poi,
 - Harakeke

Each group had 20 to 25 minutes in each area, enabling all to partake with the children in the fun kaupapa Māori activities provided by the Parata Whānau and their whānau kaiāwhina tautoko.

The activities planned for the day were well received by all the whānau members of Taranaki Playcentre.

Group and team photos were taken after all the activities were completed, and before lunch was ready.

Everyone brought lunch to be shared by all.

A big thank you to Hawera Playcentre who worked in the kitchen and dining

room: they set up the BYO lunch on the table, buffet style, which was very welcomed by our hungry children and their parents/ caregivers.

After lunch some centres had to leave, but those left behind helped to tidy up.

A brief talk on the whareniui was scheduled followed by poroporoaki/farewell before the remaining centre whānau travelled home.

The members who were unable to attend made poi and taiaha at their centres, sung waiata and spoke the words of Te Reo Māori that they knew at the time to celebrate Te Reo Māori week. Good on them for trying as well.

Char Martin, Inglewood Playcentre (Taranaki Association) and a member of Puriri Whakamaru o Taranaki



Learning the cutting of the flax protocol.



Tainui group.



Taiaha.

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A dad's journey from SPACE to Playcentre

Playcentre is not just for preschoolers, it's for dads, mums and whānau too. Chris Parkin has been attending Belmont Playcentre with his daughter Keryn, four, for more than three years.

"Keryn and I joined Playcentre in early 2007 when we started SPACE sessions (Supporting Parents Alongside their Children's Education: a Playcentre-run course for first time parents and their babies). "My wife and I did a job swap when Keryn was seven-months-old, and one of our antenatal class members suggested I joined SPACE."

While attending SPACE, Chris heard about Playcentre. "It was important to my wife and I that Keryn was able to socialise with other children. We were very lucky to have her, and will probably not be able to have any more children. So the idea of Keryn having other children to play with, and me being able to keep learning about child development, and meet other parents was very attractive." Belmont Playcentre has about eight dads who attend consistently.

"As she is an only child it's been interesting watching Keryn learn to cooperate with other children. This was one of the reasons we chose Playcentre; it's not just about them being able to relate to their peers, but also children older than them and younger. Keryn and I will be staying at Playcentre until she starts school as the high adult to child ratios mean she is being extended at Playcentre in a way that other early childhood services would struggle to achieve."

Playcentre's free parent education courses have helped Chris, a science teacher; learn to multi-task, gain self-esteem and better understand the needs of his daughter. "One of the things I struggled with was when Keryn was about one-and-a-half she liked emptying packets of nappies from one drawer and sticking them in another drawer or anywhere else. It was through the education programme that I learnt she has a transportation schema, that is, she processes the world around her by moving things around. It was great at Playcentre because she could play and move sand, or water, or the blocks and this was accepted.

It was not just her being naughty, she was learning."

"It's been great to see Playcentre recognised as a quality service by now being eligible for the 20 hours ECE. It always has been a great place for children to play, learn and grow supported by family and whānau, but I think people miss out on how much they can gain as adults and parents. Parents need help. We used to live in close-knit communities where families were only a short distance away and now families are more spread out. Even though my parents are not that far away Playcentre has still provided friendships and support that make life easier."

Chris is Hutt Playcentre Association co-president and the New Zealand Playcentre Federation's web administrator.

Jude Pointon (Wellington Association)



Playcentre is a wonderful place

Playcentre has played a big part in our lives for almost three years now. It has also been a safe place for our family as I deal with, and recover from post-natal depression.

The support from our Playcentre whānau through all the bad days is something I am truly grateful for. A chance to talk, ask for advice and have someone else help deal with my spirited older child was, and still is, a welcome respite. Although I was able to put on a brave face most of the time, it was really hard on some days to leave the house, let alone have to face people! I looked forward to Playcentre days.

Our Playcentre members were exceptional in the care and support they gave me. It has been a huge adjustment for me in having a second child. People would play with my older child, offer strategies for coping, bring meals, make cups of coffee in just the right way and, most of all: they were accepting that my children needed me just at the crucial clean up time. Often it was my child that had covered herself and our Playcentre in paint.

Support networks are crucial in the path to recovery from depression and these people feel like part of my tribe. Playcentre is a wonderful place to share that raising children is not easy. Playcentre is based on positive parenting and no matter what your situation, there always seems to be someone who has been, or is, going through the very same thing. The elders of the tribe then offer their wisdom, and all of a sudden my problem shared feels like half a problem.

Thank you Playcentre, for just being you. I promise I will get re-acquainted with the mop!

Janet Wilson, Karaka Playcentre (Counties Association)

My Personal Thoughts on Playcentre

I think it can be difficult to find a balance between getting everyone to do their share at Playcentre and showing compassion and understanding for those who can't.

We as Playcentre parents are responsible for keeping Playcentre up and running; however we must keep in mind that sometimes, people among us may be struggling. There are genuine reasons why some people may not be able to do any more than make it through the Playcentre doors in the morning.

It should be the goal of all Playcentre members to contribute as much as we can, when we can, but it is my belief that we can also be a major source of companionship, support, warmth and caring for all our members.

We are a group of people brought together though the love of our children and an understanding of the important role we can play as early educators. I believe our centre can be encouraging, nurturing and a place of enjoyment for the adults as much as the children.

If you are having any difficulties, at Playcentre or otherwise, please do reach out to someone in your centre. When you are finding life or parenting hard to cope with, it can be terribly isolating and easy to feel that you are the only one. As hard as it is to open up and talk to someone, in my experience it can be extremely helpful.

PS: Try not to compare your insides to other peoples outside.

Fleur Earl, Burwood Playcentre (Canterbury Association)

The Lament of a Playcentre Husband

My wife has joined Playcentre
For our dear son William, you see
I don't really mind at all
It's so cheap—almost free!

I come home late from work at night
The breakfast dishes are in the sink
"What have you been doing all day?" I ask
"At session, what do you think!"

The neighbours think the house is abandoned
The weeds are a metre high
My wife says, "I haven't time to stop"
"Centre Meeting – I must fly!"

This weekend I decide to go fishing
Some special time just for me
My wife says I have a mission
"You're on the Playcentre Working Bee!"

In February she is Duty Team Leader
In May she has taken on Rolls
By June she is the Education Officer
It's Emergent Leadership I'm told

My wife is on the phone
And the kids are running riot
I employ a nanny three days a week
To have some peace and quiet

The kids are playing outside
I can see William climbing the tree
I ask him "Where's the nanny?"
"Oh she's out training for Course 3!"

Now our youngest child is off to school
I look forward to a return to sanity
I flick through the Playcentre Journal
My wife's on the Federation Committee!

Albertien Chignell

Eden-Epsom Playcentre (Auckland Association)

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Ann-Marie Evans, with her grandson Liam from Leeston Playcentre (Canterbury Association).

Supportive Grandparents at Awatuna!

As grandparents we have been co-opted or persuaded into housekeeping and babysitting our only grandchild during the calving season here in Taranaki. We are from Nelson.

Part of the arrangement is to accompany Cahill, the two year old delight of our lives, twice a week to Awatuna Playcentre. Since she is an only child with no neighbouring children of a similar age, Playcentre is quite important for Cahill's development, and she is certainly getting this with the twice a week visits.

This is our second year of experience and education with the Playcentre and we are very impressed with the friendliness towards us and Cahill by the committee, other parents and the children.

The facilities, equipment and the range of activities provided are amazing to us, having not experienced these for our own children here in New Zealand. Surely the children who are exposed to such an experience will have a great start in their lives.

As an example, over the last couple of

weeks, parents brought in new lambs and chickens which were a big hit with the children and with the parents also showing a lot of interest.

Our own education has been broadened by looking at the children's inter-play between one another and other adults.

Altogether we are very impressed with everything we have seen and experienced and hope that the lively committee and group can continue the excellent work.

Bill and June Earland, Awatuna & Districts Playcentre (Taranaki Association)



Bill and June Earland with granddaughter Cahill.



Max, grandfather of Jeremy and Matthew Beauchamp at Brooklyn Playcentre (Wellington Association).



Poppa Kevin

Meet the van Heerden family. There's Melissa (the Mum), Ivan (the Dad), Corey (their son), Kevin (Melissa's Dad and Corey's Poppa) and Melissa's Mum (Oma). In a rather interesting way this family has combined their outlook on family values and the need for Corey to be in an environment that is conducive to having freedom to learn through play, as well as meeting their own lifestyle needs. This is where Poppa Kevin comes in. Every second Sunday evening Corey stays with Poppa and Oma so that Melissa can work at the hospital overnight. Then on Monday mornings our centre welcomes Kevin with open arms. The first thing he usually does is to get his fireman's helmet on because that's what Corey always does and away he goes. From day one he has been a tremendous asset to our centre (it's a bonus that he always chooses the shed to clean up at the end of term – you know what they say about blokes needing a shed).

But more importantly Kevin's comments reflect what is truly meaningful. When I asked him what he liked about Playcentre he replied, "I feel really lucky that I am in a position to come here and make a difference. Just being able to spend the time with all these kids when there are not many men at Playcentre. I notice the boys and the girls gravitate to me and I just love all kids." I asked if there were any memorable moments he had experienced and he said there were two that came to mind. "The first time Corey went down the slide by himself because he's so shy and to see him do that by himself and interact with the other children was really moving for me. Another special moment was one time Mikaela came running up to the gate and greeted me in such a welcoming way with, "Kevin where have you been?" She must have missed me the previous week when Melissa was there with Corey and I realised just how much I mean to the children."

Other centre members describe Kevin as a magnet. The children trust him and can always rely on him to help support their play. He is so hands-on when it comes to tasks and we are very lucky to have him give so much of his time Melissa shares that when she was growing up, Kevin was a fabulous Dad. At our centre we celebrate the fact that great Dad's can also be amazing Grandfathers; especially to our extended whānau at Playcentre.

Anita Richardson, Omokoroa Playcentre
(Western Bay of Plenty Association)

Guggar and the Lighthouse Keepers Lunch

While stepping outside at Playcentre, I immediately see there's a rope and pulley system hitched from the fort all the way over to the upright of the swings. The rope spans across our entire playground. There are children flapping their arms, running and laughing. Neil is amongst it all, trying to throw his voice over the children's noise, reading from a book. I find out later the children were seagulls swooping in to steal Mr Grinling's lunch.

Neil, our Grandfather on session, has set up the rope and pulleys for us all to re-enact the book, *The Lighthouse Keepers Lunch* by Ronda and David Armitage. Neil brought this lovely book to share with us.

Neil brings his three grandsons to Playcentre. Nathan and Oliver are brothers and Daniel is their first cousin. The boys call Neil 'Guggar' and the other parents on duty have been known to call him Guggar too.

Neil creates a rich environment in which the children play, grow and learn. The storytelling incorporating the pulley play has been happening two weeks running now. Before that, pulleys were used to paint pictures. Even before that, pulleys were used to hoist a chime line up and down. Neil approaches learning from a project angle and exposes the children to the same technology or play again and again, so the children learn to be very competent at that skill or can explore the concepts in depth.

I find Neil is fabulous at helping the children to problem solve. For example, "Which way do you have to pull on the rope to make the bucket / basket travel towards the Lighthouse?" Neil is inclusive of the children, making sure even the on-looking children get the opportunity to have a go or not.

He also makes the best date scones and we really appreciate Neil and what he offers the children and us. He's a terrific asset and we're so glad Daniel is soon to have a little sister, so Neil will be with us for at least another five years!

Kath O'Connor, Johnsonville Playcentre (Wellington Association)



Neil reading to the boys so they can re-enact the *Lighthouse Keepers Lunch* Story.

Friday session at Port Ahuriri

At Friday session we are very lucky and blessed to have Grandads on session with their Grandchildren. We have Opa Bart, but we all call him Opa. He comes with his daughter Monique and granddaughters Keira and Keely. 'Yeye,' aka John comes along with granddaughter Leala.

Yeye is Chinese for Granddad, while Opa is from Swedish descent.

Neil McLaren had also begun attending the Friday session with grandson Kiah. He had been attending for two terms when he tragically died suddenly. He will be sadly missed at Port Ahuriri Playcentre as he was also a very involved grandfather who was looking forward to spending his retirement years playing with the children and his grandson at our centre.

Questions posed to Opa (Bart Hjelmstrøm):

How long have you been attending Playcentre?

Four years – the eldest granddaughter is now at school.

What are your favourite things about Playcentre?

Whatever the children seem interested in. I don't have a favourite area of play. I love just being a kid with them, playing. Lots of the other children come up to me and talk to me, telling me what they are doing. I really like that. I really enjoy being outside with the children and also enjoy the heuristic play.



Opa (Bart Hjelmstrøm) with Keely and Keira



Neil with Archie (digging), Haruka and Krishan in the sand pit.

I tend to be quite protective when it comes to the children jumping and climbing up the slide with the physical play. I worry a bit that they might injure themselves.

To me it seems the older boys like the male interaction, involving me in their play.

What do you value most about attending?

The whole day really. I like the way it's organised with the shared morning tea, I love seeing the children healthy and happy. I also enjoy all the interactions that I have with the parents and children. It's all so welcoming and you are all very good to me.

What are the benefits for children attending Playcentre?

More adult interaction, mixing with

other children and parents. Makes them (children) adjust to human beings. The little ones are so aware of the surroundings and take it all in.

What can we do to support you more in Playcentre?

I already feel so welcome. Both the adults and children make us feel like extended family. Everyone is so natural, relaxed and helpful.

Views on how grandparents' roles have changed over the years:

I didn't have much to do with my grandparents. They really were just a picture on the mantel piece. These days children see their grandparents more often.

Views and beliefs:

Do unto others. What you give out, you get back.

Other comments:

The whole thing is really neat. The Playcentre we attend is in a villa and the house has a really good feel about it.

Helen Jackson, Port Ahuriri Playcentre (Hawkes Bay Association)



Yeye (John Holland) with Leala



“Thought flows in terms of stories
- stories about events, stories
about people, and stories about
intentions and achievements.
The best teachers are the best
story tellers. We learn in the
form of stories.”

By Frank Smith

