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Uninterrupted play: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings

Susan Widger

Abstract

This qualitative study explores two experienced teachers’ beliefs and practices around the notions of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, with a focus on infant and toddler settings. There are two potentially polarising theoretical perspectives that impact on early childhood education in New Zealand today: developmental theory (constructivism) and sociocultural theory (social constructivism). Because of the potential for polarisation the teacher’s role in relation to interacting with children during play can be uncertain, creating a tension. On the one hand there is a mandate for non-interference in children’s play and the promotion of independence and autonomy, and, on the other hand, there is a mandate for teacher interaction and responsibility for children’s learning. This study challenges the inherent theoretical polarisation and, instead, advocates for viewing the two perspectives as being intrinsically bound together in practice. This view was supported in the findings, generated by a methodology that drew on three methods which formed a process of triangulation: interviews, video recording and observations. This study argues for an alternative view that embraces the connections that lie beyond the polarised perspectives of constructivism and social constructivism, promoting the idea that ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are not exclusive of each other, but integrally linked.
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Introduction

Over the past two decades, early childhood teachers and educators in Aotearoa New Zealand have welcomed new theoretical and pedagogical perspectives such as sociocultural theory, its ‘presence’ within the curriculum document *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and its implementation in practice. In early childhood education settings, sociocultural theory is seen to emphasise the value of relationships and ‘teacher interaction’ with children to extend learning and conceptual understandings. During the past two decades there has also been an introduction of varied philosophical and pedagogical perspectives, such as the RIE philosophy, into early childhood education. The RIE philosophy, which has been adopted in many infant and toddler settings, emphasises the importance of supporting children to play and learn ‘without interruption’ and promotes ‘teacher interaction’ as taking place in ‘care moments’. The notion of young children constructing their own knowledge in play, compared to co-constructing knowledge alongside a more competent other, can be a contentious issue that early childhood teachers find confusing. The early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*, being deliberately broad in nature, can add to this confusion by leading teachers to make their own interpretations in response to a range of theories, their own philosophy and pedagogy, and centres’ varied philosophical and pedagogical practices. Interpretations have proved neither simple nor straightforward, especially when teachers approach interactional decision-making in relation to children’s play with varied views about the purpose and their own role in play.

Whilst the focus of this study is on two infant and toddler settings and so, by implication, on infant and toddler pedagogy, one of the teacher participants works daily with children aged between six months and five years. Therefore, this research implicates a broader reference to perspectives and practices pertaining to all young children, and so supports the necessarily complex nature of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ in early childhood education per se. The overall aim of this research is to promote critical discussion and enhance professional practice in the area of ‘teacher interaction’ during children’s play.
The idea for this study arose from my long-term interest in ‘uninterrupted play’, first realised through learning about Piaget’s and Erikson’s theoretical perspectives during my initial teacher education in 1997. I was then introduced to the works of Emmi Pikler and Magda Gerber and the RIE philosophy, which further enlightened me to the apparent conflict between ‘teacher interaction’ and the notion of ‘uninterrupted play’. Since continuing on to postgraduate study, completing two infant and toddler papers at postgraduate level and through working in the field of academia, I have become committed to the exploration and critical insights that research delivers. Whilst there is an increasing body of literature indicating the need for ‘quality’ experiences for children under three (Dalli et al., 2011), there appears to be limited research focused on the notion of ‘uninterrupted play’ in relation to ‘teacher interaction’. With statistical evidence indicating that infants and toddlers account for consistently increasing enrolments in early childhood services, this research was deemed to be of worth.

The research begins with a review of the literature focused on ‘uninterrupted play’ in relation to ‘teacher interaction’. This literature review sets the parameters of the research and anticipates the analysis of the participants’ responses to the interview questions, the video footage and the observations.
Chapter One

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The overarching aim of this research is to explore ‘uninterrupted play’ in relation to ‘teacher interaction’ with infants and toddlers. This chapter reviews literature related to ‘uninterrupted play’, ‘teacher interaction’, and the theoretical positioning of the philosophical perspectives that influence these selected pedagogies. A contemporary analysis of the literature will be presented in accordance with the current sociocultural emphasis that underpins early childhood education in New Zealand in 2013. Analysis will also consider critical perspectives as an emerging discourse within early childhood education in New Zealand.

Play has been a prominent feature of early childhood education in New Zealand and internationally. For many years play has been a central and ‘taken for granted’ feature of curriculum planning in early childhood settings. A philosophy based on play is influenced by historical perspectives such as Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey and Piaget (Hill, Reid & Stover, 1998). As the Playcentre Federation’s first president, the educationalist Gwen Somerset (1967) was an advocate for ‘free play’, recommending that adults should avoid interrupting children when they are immersed in play experiences. Nationally, Kindergartens also have strong links to a ‘play-based’ programme, underpinned by constructivism and social constructivism. Over the last three decades, the rise of long-day early childhood education and care centres has seen a wide range of philosophical perspectives on play. Through recent decades, there have been multi-layered interpretations of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ within early childhood settings underpinned by diverse theories.

In New Zealand today, early childhood teachers are guided by the early childhood curriculum document Te Whāriki in relation to daily practice. Underpinned by constructivism and sociocultural theory, Te Whāriki leads teachers to understand that children “learn through
collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection” (p. 9). It has been recognised that decision-making regarding interactions has proved challenging for teachers, particularly when grappling with the issue of whether or not to interrupt children during play (Meade, 2000). Section one of this chapter reviews literature describing the nature of interactions in early childhood, thereby establishing that decision-making regarding interactions is problematic.

*Te Whāriki* includes guidelines that encourage teachers to make their own interpretations in response to general theory, own philosophy and pedagogy and centres’ varied philosophical and pedagogical practices (p. 11). Interpretations have proved neither simple nor straightforward, especially when teachers approach interactional decision-making with varied views about its purpose and their role (Cullen, 2003). Section two of this chapter will review literature on interpretations of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, in order to establish that the phenomena under exploration are complex constructs to interpret. Section three will consider issues that impact on teacher interactions, including discourse around ‘human rights’ and ‘risk’.

**Section one: Teacher interaction in early childhood education**

In this section, the nature of teacher interactions in early childhood education is discussed and key features of these interactions are identified.

**The nature of interactions in early childhood education**

A primary purpose of interacting with infants and toddlers during play is to enhance learning, with teachers noticing, recognising and responding to children’s learning as teachers and children interact (Cowie & Bell, 1999). Effective interactions therefore require teachers to be knowledgeable about the significance of their interactions in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’, recognising that gauging when to initiate interactions when children are playing is a complex task (Fleer, 2010). Significantly, interactions are believed to occur mainly between teachers and learners, however, *Te Whāriki* also emphasises the critical role of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with places and things.
Uninterrupted play, on the other hand, involves teachers making deliberate decisions not to interact with children during play and learning experiences. In early childhood education, these decisions may be influenced by specific philosophical approaches. In Widger’s (2010) postgraduate research, six teachers representative of diverse early childhood philosophical perspectives; - Steiner, Montessori, Gerber, Playcentre and Reggio Emilia - were interviewed regarding their beliefs about ‘child centredness’. The teachers’ beliefs regarding ‘child centred’ interactions during play were in direct correlation to their espoused philosophy. The participants practise from diverse philosophies; however, all claim to be ‘child centred’ (Widger & Schofield, 2012). The findings revealed that the tension concerning whether to interact with children during play or not is nullified when educators align their daily practice with clear philosophical guidelines.

The notion of ‘uninterrupted play’ suggests that teachers are deliberately not interacting with children. With the current sociocultural emphasis underpinning early childhood education, the juxtaposition of sociocultural and developmental theories is far from straightforward. For example, the potential for children to learn without teacher interaction is widely debated (Fleer, 2010; Hedges, 2000). Hedges (2013) questions teachers’ abilities to interpret and integrate contemporary sociocultural notions of curriculum in New Zealand. Hedges asserts that the promotion of children’s learning through play is a contentious issue, with arguments evolving over the “extent to which children are, or might be, supported by teachers during play to construct content knowledge appropriate to their interests and current cognitive abilities” (p. 285).

Similarly, Hill (2011) argues that too many early childhood teachers have difficulty interpreting a sociocultural curriculum. Hill contends that children benefit when teachers “actively and continually search for new knowledge and confidently weave this into their practice alongside earlier knowledge” (p. 7).

**Sedimented theoretical layers**
Hill (2011) outlines four sedimented layers of theory that can be ‘buried’ in teachers’ daily practice: behaviourism, constructivism, social constructivism and critical perspectives. It is
important to be able to understand what each ‘layer’ represents in discourse, because when the discourse of one theory is confused with a discourse of another, the meaning becomes unclear. For example, Hill argues that too many early childhood teachers have behaviourism sedimented in their thinking and that it is this that blocks ‘seeing’ sociocultural theory in practice. Behaviourism can become a ‘default’ mechanism, being a straightforward and directive theory. The next layer, constructivism, is mainly confined to the ideas of the theorist Piaget, where the learner actively constructs their own knowledge, with a focus on stages of development. Teachers are encouraged to observe more than interact, with no defining role for the teacher within constructivist theory (Fleer, 2010). The third ‘layer’ of theory, social constructivism, is largely attributed to Vygotsky’s theory and since interpreted by others such as Rogoff (2003) and Fleer (2010). Fleer promotes Vygotsky, through the lens of ‘play’ “in direct response to the contemporary challenge facing early childhood educators” (p. 217).

Social constructivism accompanies a sociocultural interpretation of learning in the New Zealand early childhood sector, commonly involving teachers using teaching opportunities to guide children’s learning and development. Vygotsky’s (1978) perspective of sociocultural theory views children’s learning within a ‘zone of proximal development’ and is ambiguous alongside Piagetian constructivist theory where teaching opportunities can be viewed as moments in time when children are predisposed to assimilating new knowledge. Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory espouses the need for a ‘more capable other’ to effectively bridge the gap from what the child can do alone, to what they can achieve with assistance. However, the fact that Te Whāriki was also strongly influenced by constructivist theory can be overlooked (Hill, 2011). Therefore, teachers’ interpretations of theoretical perspectives in relation to interactions with children become intertwined and complex. In a curriculum such as Te Whāriki, which encompasses both sociocultural and developmental perspectives, teachers need to view young children “as powerful active learners (with autonomy and agency) and yet still hold their dependent and vulnerable selves in mind” (Manning-Morton, 2006, p. 50).

Linked to sociocultural theory, Bruner (2006), an American psychologist influenced first by Piaget and later by Vygotsky, has promoted the use of cognitive ‘scaffolding’, as an analogy of the steel scaffolding used in building construction. In education, the scaffolding that the
teacher erects through thinking differently together with the child, allows the child to transfer the altered thinking to their actions and take supported steps in learning; when the child is able to achieve mastery alone, the support (scaffolding) is removed (Smidt, 2011). However, Rogoff (1990) argued that the scaffolding metaphor is open to personal interpretation, where the teacher may apply rigid control and not include the child in the way that Bruner intended, defaulting to behaviourist pedagogy. This relates to Hill’s (2011) argument that teacher interpretation may be influenced by ‘sedimented’ theoretical thinking, a crucial issue to consider when exploring ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’.

Hill’s (2011) fourth theoretical layer, best described as critical perspectives, denotes a “discernible disciplinary shift from the earlier theoretical layers” (p. 10). Critical perspectives have no boundaries, with ideas resonating from ‘post-modern’, ‘post-structural’, ‘post-colonial’ and ‘post-feminist’ discourses. Within a critical perspective teaching becomes an ethical and political responsibility (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) with each teaching decision a moral act with no definable ‘truths’ about how children learn. Viewed through the lens of social justice, the balance of power between adults and children becomes an important pedagogical consideration.

Section two: Interpretation of theory and curriculum

Interpretation of theory and curriculum in terms of pedagogy is an important feature of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Interpretation is made complex by the multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple curriculum models and multiple pedagogies that are available to teachers; these perspectives and pedagogies “come from different eras and disciplines, offer conflicting points of view and vary in the agendas they create for being with very young children” (Hill, 2011, p. 7). Interpretation involves considering one’s own personal pedagogy and underpinning values; it involves the teacher considering the relevance and meaning of learning in relation to each individual child, through each learning opportunity presented. Interpretation may also be influenced by context-specific outcomes and the centre’s programme planning and learning objectives. In addition, while Te Whāriki espouses key principles such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘holistic development’, teachers must recognise that it is their own interpretation of the document that translates the rhetoric into reality.
The New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* asserts the critical role of socially mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the importance of individual exploration (p. 9). For some teachers, this potential paradox may result in confusion. For example, decision-making and interpretation can be problematic for teachers who are influenced by sedimented layers of theoretical perspectives (Hill, 2011). Hill stresses the importance for early childhood teachers to examine where their beliefs have originated from: “not only of the layers [of theoretical perspectives] but also of the way in which and the extent to which each layer impacts on other layers” (p. 8).

Alongside the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, other documents serve to influence teachers’ interpretations. For example, assessment exemplars *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) were distributed to all licensed early childhood services in New Zealand subsequent to the publication of *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 2009). These exemplars include documentation supporting the role of teachers in children’s learning. However, the existence of such policies and exemplars does not guarantee that teachers’ understandings, as they relate to interactions, will be influenced in meaningful and significant ways. This is especially so when these resources presume that teachers already have relevant knowledge about teacher interactions. In order to illuminate such issues, literature relating to a tension between constructivism and social constructivism is discussed next.

**The tension between constructivism and social constructivism**

Constructivist theory encourage teachers to set up the learning environment, and then deliberately stand back in order to allow independent exploration and discovery of the ‘universal’ resources. Within a Piagetian, constructivist model, therefore, the teacher’s role is to observe and facilitate optimum environmental conditions for the promotion of autonomous learning. Constructivism has been critiqued by numerous academics within the early childhood sector, both locally and internationally.

The current situation in terms of ‘teacher interaction’ and the possibilities for ‘uninterrupted play’ in New Zealand revolves around the polarisation of views between; on the one hand,
Piaget’s focus on developmental theory (constructivism), and, on the other, Vygotsky’s emphasis on socially mediated learning (social constructivism). Piaget and Vygotsky both focused on the cognitive theory that children create their own knowledge; one claimed that children do this primarily in relation to universal resources and the latter claimed that children do this primarily in relation to culturally-bound people. Meade (2000) proposes that, in attempting to conform to developmental perceptions of teaching and learning, teachers may encounter conflict between, on the one hand, the mandate of non-interference in order to promote independence and autonomy, and, on the other hand, their role of being responsible for children’s learning. Furthermore, Hedges (2000) argues that while early childhood programmes have often emphasised a child centred environment, generally accepted as beneficial for children, the underlying developmental theory does not make explicit links to teaching and learning processes engaged in by children and teachers. Therefore, teachers may be left unsure of their role concerning whether to interact with children during play and learning experiences.

Dockett and Fleer (2002) argue that teachers have a significant impact on how children will construct and carry out their play scenarios. They discuss a continuum of adult involvement in play, ranging from indirect to direct influence, noting that adults’ direct influence in play depends a lot on their beliefs about play and learning. It will be teachers’ philosophical and pedagogical interpretations that determine decisions around ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Fleer (2010) critiqued the interpretation of sociocultural theory that promotes a mode of teaching and learning wherein early childhood teachers engage with children to directly mediate concept formation. Fleer argues for a reconceptualisation of the role of the early childhood teacher, wherein she urges teachers “to make conscious to themselves and to the children, valued concepts during play and everyday activities within early childhood centres” (p. 50). However, Fleer emphasises that this role is extremely complicated; requiring exceptional skill and insight on the part of the teacher, in turn echoing Cullen’s (1996) warning that the interpretation of Te Whāriki requires highly skilled teachers.

A New Zealand study conducted by Christie (2011) contributes to the discourse around ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Christie’s qualitative case study investigated
one early childhood setting catering for twenty children less than two years of age. Christie’s study was conducted in the infant room, where there were eight infants and three teacher participants. Data collection methods included written observations, video recording, interviews and document analysis. One of the key areas investigated was the practice of respect for children’s confidence and competence. A significant finding revealed that respectful interactions were demonstrated when teachers “invite children to engage, and wait for their agreement prior to engaging” and are “available to the infant … supporting them in their learning, but resisting the urge to intervene unnecessarily in their problem-solving efforts” (p. 21).

The interconnection of polarised theories requires teachers to have the ability to effectively articulate and demonstrate the critical pedagogical thinking that underpins their decision-making around interactions. This is typified by Nuttall (2013), who reiterates her previous observation that “teachers can only negotiate their actions within the constraints and possibilities of their existing definitions of curriculum” (p. 191).

Another research study, conducted in the USA by Sutterby (2005), investigated interactions during play between teachers and children in an early childhood setting. Sutterby’s year-long micro-ethnographic study involved his immersion into the early childhood environment where he worked as a participant observer. Data collection involved taking field notes, conducting formal and informal interviews with teachers and parents, collecting samples of children’s work and the audio taping of indoor play sessions. The focus of Sutterby’s study was to determine how teachers’ attempts to scaffold children’s learning during play experiences, defining ‘scaffolding’ as “attempts by the teacher to structure the play in order to gain a specific result” (p. 350). Data analysis revealed that teachers’ attempts at scaffolding fell under three main categories: interruptions, overscripting, and limitations, with interruptions leading to disjointed play and shallow engagement. Further findings revealed that when teachers’ interactions occurred for academic goals, complex play scenarios were ignored. While Sutterby’s findings illuminate the potential disadvantages in relation to interacting with children during play, he maintains that his findings are not meant to discourage all intervention in play; rather to encourage early childhood teachers and early childhood teacher
educators to examine their beliefs around play interventions. An emphasis on ‘teaching’ inherent within sedimented behaviourist thinking may have been responsible for the teacher attempts at understanding ‘scaffolding’.

A New Zealand study highlights issues around early childhood teachers’ decisions not to interact with young children. In her 2006 study involving toddlers’ participation in art education, Visser discovered a tension between developmental and sociocultural perspectives. Visser found that the teachers in her study held an enduring adherence to a developmental perspective with its focus on interaction with resources rather than people, and chose to take on a passive role in relation to children, culminating in limited interactions and interruptions.

These two studies from New Zealand and American early childhood settings epitomise the complexity of teacher understanding of their own interactions in children’s play. The notions of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are without doubt a contributing factor to this complexity, requiring judicious critical reflection. A critical perspective challenges teachers to think carefully about why they make daily pedagogical decisions.

A critical perspective challenges early childhood teachers to look beyond the daily rhetoric and to reflect on alternative viewpoints and ways of looking at the world (Hill, 2011). Critical perspectives present a case for teachers to broaden their theoretical perspectives and explore complex ideologies which are seen to be presented as a catalyst for change. Vossler, Waitere-Ang and Adams (2005) state that becoming an educator involves “constant becoming, of being and seeing the world, that is integrally linked to a person’s desire for a socially-just, democratic society … it is reliant on the educator having a strong vision of society and their place within it” (p. 26).

Vossler, Waitere-Ang and Adams (2005) emphasise how teachers can be influenced strongly by their personal beliefs, these being a by-product of deep-seated value systems. Yet it can be difficult to alter complex constructs such as beliefs, even when it becomes logical or necessary to do so (Pajares, 1992; Raths, 2001). Personal beliefs around the notion of ‘uninterrupted play’ may dictate how early childhood teachers make decisions around interactions; whether
they view interacting with young children as essential to learning or an interruption of personal learning processes. Sedimented ideas may require “deeper reflection and action if it is to be reconciled with more sociocultural ideas of responding to children as unique individuals” (Hill, 2011, p. 8).

A critical perspective

When considering the discourse around ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ it is pertinent to consider a critical perspective, wherein teaching is viewed as an ethical and political process (Hill, 2011). ‘Uninterrupted play’, as a pedagogical notion, has been challenged by a number of people as being a disadvantage to children. For example, Kilderry (2004) claims that in a study carried out by Kessler and Hauser (2000) it was revealed that ‘uninterrupted play’ can reinforce unequal power and authority. Their study raised issues such as how free play can offer few opportunities for children to challenge their “received social identities … stereotypical roles can be reinforced if play is left uninterrupted” (p. 35). Similarly, Canella (2004) challenges the discourse of ‘free play’, arguing that “no discourse is entirely good or bad, but all discourses are dangerous and require continual critique” (p. 202). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) contend that ‘quality’ within the early childhood sector is subjective in nature, based on values and beliefs rather than a universal reality. In other words, ‘quality’ early childhood education, to a large extent, is in the eye of the beholder and must be subjected to the process of continual meaning-making with others.

These views substantiate the need for early childhood teachers to carefully reflect when making decisions in relation to interacting with young children, so that teaching is viewed as an ethical and political process, when the teacher is constituted as a critically reflective practitioner (Hill, 2011). Slattery (2006) reiterates this perspective, urging teachers to understand that “while the present is conditioned by the past, every moment is also full of future possibilities for change and new direction” (p. 282). Slattery emphasises that curriculum must include forms of inquiry open to the changing perspectives among stakeholders and the competing voices. When Chung and Walsh (2000) explored literature around the term ‘child centredness’ which has strong links to ‘uninterrupted play’, they found that the term “balances on many layers of complex and sometimes contradictory meanings that
have been forged over the years by competing interest groups” (p. 215). This complexity is inherent within the sedimented multi-layered theoretical perspectives that require critique if early childhood education in New Zealand is to clearly project specific perspectives in practice. One way by which to define and understand broad ‘taken for granted’ terms is to examine different philosophies practised in New Zealand early childhood infant and toddler settings.

**Prevalent philosophical perspectives in early childhood settings**

With the need to question what ‘taken for granted’ terms may mean in relation to daily interactions, the RIE approach to early childhood education (Resources for Infant Educarers) provides specific guidelines that include the principle of ‘uninterrupted play’. Gerber’s philosophy, inspired by her work with Emmi Pikler, is often referred to as the RIE approach, with the RIE organisation founded in 1978 by Magda Gerber and paediatric neurologist Tom Forrest, MD (Greenwald & Weaver, 2013). The RIE approach promotes ‘uninterrupted play’ as being vital, so that children are afforded the time and space to form conceptual understandings without unnecessary adult interactions (Gerber, 2005). In contrast, interactions with children during care routines are viewed as prime opportunities for the teaching-learning process to take place.

Child psychologist Anna Tardos, daughter of Emmi Pikler and president of the Hungarian Pikler Institute, is a supporter of ‘uninterrupted play’, having spent years analysing over 700 observations based on six children aged between three and twelve months, playing without interruption. Tardos (2012) stresses that if “we manage to observe the activities of our children without disturbing them, we can witness a really spectacular learning process” (p. 5). She urges adults working with young children to recognise that ‘uninterrupted play’ contributes to the “origin of human curiosity and the initiation of questioning behaviour” (p. 5). Tardos (2013) emphasises that ‘uninterrupted play’ may not only help to let young children move and play independently, but also assist to create a relationship in which the child is not “considered as a helpless being, but is thought of instead as another person, a partner” (p. 176).
Hammond (2009) states that it is “RIE’s bias, culturally-speaking, to view infants as individuals with a right to age-appropriate autonomy, especially with regard to play” (p. 93). Hammond argues for the promotion of non-interruption, reiterating her position by describing that when someone else’s agenda is introduced into a child’s play, it ceases to “be pure play, and has become something else” (p. 92). Those early childhood teachers, who view their role as teaching children through play experiences with consistent collaboration and shared learning, could have difficulty accepting the RIE philosophy. This is because, within a RIE approach, teachers resist intervention and active stimulation during play experiences (Bussey, 2012). Rather than intervening, uninvited, into children’s play experiences, the RIE philosophy promotes care routines such as nappy-changing, mealtimes and sleep transitions as being the prime opportunity to engage in interactions. This emphasis on interactions during care routines is shared by several writers in New Zealand early childhood contexts (Bussey, 2012; Deans & Bary, 2008; Freeman, 2007; Rockel & Peal, 2008). Hammond (2009) describes Gerber’s tenet of ‘selective intervention’ as having three criteria. ‘Green light’ is when the child is in a situation that they can manage autonomously with no adult interaction required. ‘Red light’ signifies a situation where the child is at immediate risk of physical danger or not adhering to a social discourse; ‘yellow light' represents those situations where there is uncertainty regarding whether a child can deal with a situation alone. This yellow light status can be challenging; critical consideration is required in order to determine whether interaction will be advantageous or disadvantageous for the child. Proponents of both non-interruption and interruption of children’s play beyond the Gerber/Pikler approaches share the commonality that a highly specialised domain of knowledge is required in order to determine the parameters around interactions (See Cullen, 2003; Fleer, 2010; Greenwald & Weaver, 2013; Hammond, 2009; Stover, White, Rockel & Tosso, 2010).

While the RIE approach has a growing number of supporters both in New Zealand and internationally, the issue of not interacting with children during play remains contentious, as this approach particularly challenges those who define their role as being a teacher who actively ‘educates’. In a 2010 British study exploring influences on teachers’ perspectives of pedagogy within the early childhood sector, Stephen (2010) argued that those beliefs that were based on a Piagetian perspective of ‘free play’ were indeed problematic, as they could be
indicative of a “laissez-faire approach” to human interactions (p. 20). Stephen argued for teachers to think critically about particular theoretical perspectives and how these might influence daily pedagogical decisions, making a specific link to the RIE philosophy guiding the teachers in her study. However, Stephen found evidence that it was through autonomous play that engendered the most enthusiasm from children and they did not relate a sense of ownership with the time spent interacting with teachers.

Another philosophy gaining prominence in the New Zealand early childhood sector is the Reggio Emilia-inspired approach to pedagogy, named after the town in which it originated, and an increasing part of the fabric of early childhood education, both locally and internationally. Children are seen as individual and group learners in an approach that views learning as “a cooperative and communicative activity, in which children construct knowledge [and] make meaning of the world, together with adults” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. 50). The Reggio Emilia-inspired approach draws on social constructivist and critical pedagogy principles.

In response to the legacy of Piagetian theory in New Zealand early childhood settings, Hedges and Cullen (2005) have argued for greater emphasis to be placed on teaching and learning opportunities between teachers and children. In her qualitative master’s thesis study (2002), Hedges explored teachers’ and children’s subject knowledge and the role these might play in curriculum and pedagogy to extend young children’s learning. Hedges and Cullen (2005) convincingly argued that intersubjectivity in the shape of shared understandings, between teacher and child, is central to maximising learning. With interactions between teachers and children as the emphasis of Hedges’ (2002) study, sociocultural perspectives of knowledge building underpinned the study. This argument can be pursued in more detail by examining Fleer’s (2010) ideas regarding intersubjectivity and the teacher’s role in mediating concept formation.

**Intersubjectivity and concept formation**

In her doctoral study researching infant and toddler pedagogy in several contexts internationally, Elliot (2007) concluded that the teaching of under-two-year-olds involves
highly specialised and skilled pedagogical decision-making. Fleer (2010) agrees, advocating for early childhood teachers to relate conceptual ideas into the daily curriculum. Fleer devised a pedagogical model encompassing a ‘double move’ whereas the field of the child and the field of the teacher interconnect. This act of intersecting everyday concept formation and scientific concept formation is possible when the teacher successfully connects the scientific concept to the lived everyday experience of the child. Fleer stresses that supporting concept formation in ways that are transformative for children is complicated for teachers, requiring “great skill and a high level of knowledge about how to dialectically relate everyday concepts and scientific concepts in play-based programs” (p. 49). Fleer also points out that this highly skilled work requires teachers who understand how to preserve traditional teaching concepts whilst simultaneously and consciously engaging themselves and children in subject knowledge and concepts in play based programmes. In other words, Fleer warns teachers to display sensitivity to children’s learning in direct relation to their own understanding of what that means theoretically.

Some authors (Cullen, 2003; Hedges & Cullen, 2005) regard sensitive teacher interaction in play as paramount for optimum learning to occur; others (Petrie & Owen, 2005) argue for independent concept formation in play, with limited adult interpretation. Neumann (1971) asserts that in play children draw on ‘internal reality, internal motivation and internal control’, which are valid reasons for children to play in an uninterrupted manner. In discussing their international project relating to play experiences, Stover, White, Rockel & Toso (2010) recognised that play is a complex phenomenon requiring specialised consideration. Stover et al. emphasised the importance of implementing a pedagogy of play for infants and toddlers that involves “knowing when to become involved, when to step back, when to see other perspectives, when to give children the opportunity to claim full autonomy, and when to intervene” (p. 11). Yet, it is evident that decision making is not straight forward; hence the relevance of exploring ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’.

**Section three: Issues to consider**

The tension inherent in the notions of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ seems to lie within teachers’ integration of traditional models of teaching/learning processes with
sociocultural and critical notions of pedagogy. When an integrated theoretical approach is taken, teachers are able to deliberately engage in reciprocal and responsive interactions in order to share subject knowledge and conceptual understandings with children during play experiences. When considering subject knowledge and conceptual understandings, an important question to consider is: Whose knowledge is it that is deemed worthwhile? Moreover, whose agency is prioritised in the daily interactions that occur in early childhood settings? These questions lead to the examination of political issues such as children’s rights in early childhood settings.

The politicisation of early childhood is examined by Jones, Holmes, MacRae & MacLure (2010), questioning how children’s gestures, transmitted through different expressions of their playfulness, are understood by teachers. Jones et al. raise a pertinent concern regarding the tension between surface appearances and underlying pedagogy; early childhood centres may appear to represent contemporary places where young children play, yet these sites are steeped in “philosophical and political reverberations” (p. 292). This raises questions such as: How do teachers perceive young children? Through which theoretical and philosophical lens is children’s play being viewed? The corollary of this underpinning tension is that teachers will be guided by their philosophical leanings when choosing whether to interact with children who are playing. A teacher who views infants and toddlers as being vulnerable and needy may choose to interrupt play that appears to involve risk. However, given that Te Whāriki states that children are to be viewed as “competent and confident learners” (p. 9), why are children’s attempts to face challenges often thwarted? To complicate the issue of multiple theoretical perspectives, the Ministry of Education Early Childhood Regulations (2008) continue to instruct teachers to maintain ‘safe’ practice while simultaneously offering challenging learning opportunities. This creates an inexorable paradox between autonomy and dependence. Hill (2006), based on Parker Rees (1999), promoted play as the interface between individual freedom and social constraints.

When reviewing the current literature in New Zealand, it is pertinent to note that in a recent report to the Ministry of Education, Dalli et al. (2011) reviewed extensive literature defining what quality early childhood education for under-two-year-olds should look like. The report
identified arguments both for and against interacting with children during play. For example, Wood (2007) warns that play is often marginalised in pedagogical discussions, with adult-directed activity taking precedence. In contrast, White (2009) argues that very young children require teacher interaction during play because they need help to learn specific genres of play in a group setting. In a similar vein, Sand & Lichtwark (2007) emphasise the need for infant and toddler environments to be places of intrigue, where there is a willingness to get involved in deep investigation and where children and teachers drive the learning together. The report by Dalli et al. highlights that there have been only limited investigations into the pedagogical role of the early childhood teacher in the area of under-two-year-olds’ intersubjective experiences and interactions. This study will argue that further research may provide valuable insights into the complexity inherent within ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ in the twenty-first century.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, released in 1989 and ratified in New Zealand in 1987, prompted questions as to what the term ‘children’s rights’ might mean for daily pedagogical decision-making in New Zealand early childhood settings. Freeman (2007) argues that the most fundamental right for humans is the right to possess rights. The discourse of children’s rights views children as being capable and confident, competent to make their own decisions (Smith, 2007). In relation to the issue of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, Article 31 of the Convention has been interpreted as children having the right to play (Freeman, 2007). This article has direct relevance to children’s experiences in early childhood settings, with Dalli et al. (2011) suggesting that this (and other articles) “embed notions of what quality early childhood provision looks like” (p. 36). Yet, again the discourse of quality is complex, relying on insightful interpretations based on a critically, reflective perspective recognising the multidimensional, multi-layered theoretical perspectives that influence teacher pedagogy.

**Overall themes and gaps in the literature**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has highlighted that ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are complex notions, influenced by many factors. From a critical perspective, the literature supports the notion that all interactions are necessarily problematic constructs, open
to interpretation. There is a subtle difference between constructivism and social constructivism (Hill, 2011). This difference can be placed on a continuum which is representative of the duality of the notions that are not exclusive of each other, but integrally linked. The literature emphasises the impact of philosophical perspectives and sedimented layers that influence teachers’ daily pedagogy. The complexity of the notions ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ is a feature in the literature, with interpretations encompassing multi-layered beliefs and theoretical perspectives.

A database search revealed the existence of multiple national and international studies in relation to ‘teacher interaction’ in early childhood settings. However, a review of the literature has exposed a gap in current research: there is evidence of the importance of teachers having knowledge, but limited evidence of the intricate subtleties required to impart that knowledge.

The following chapter will describe the research process and methods utilised in order to explore ‘uninterrupted play’ in relation to ‘teacher interaction’ in early childhood settings.
Chapter Two

METHODOLOGY

Introduction
The purpose of this study was to explore the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interactions’ with infants and toddlers in early childhood settings. In order to explore this complex phenomenon, qualitative inquiry provided effective tools for the research design, methods of data collection and analysis. A research design involves particular options and choices regarding how to conduct a study from the outset. The design, therefore, is “the creative process of translating a research idea into a set of decisions about how the research will proceed in practice” (Hayes, 2010, p. 104).

This chapter begins with an overview of the research paradigm deemed most appropriate to the design, in relation to the phenomenon being studied. The next section describes the research context, including the research sites and teacher participant profiles. Positioning myself in the study, I address the axiological role of values in research by acknowledging the potential effect of researcher bias. Following this, ethical considerations in relation to informed consent, voluntary participation and minimising harm are outlined. Validation strategies are also considered. Next, the chosen strategy of triangulation of data is discussed and the data-gathering techniques used in the study are described. Lastly, the processes utilised to guide data analysis are presented.

A Question of Paradigm
A research paradigm embodies a set of assumptions regarding the social world in which we live, overlaid with varying perspectives on ways to enquire into that world. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe a research paradigm as encompassing the researcher’s underpinning beliefs, assumptions and thoughts about the world. White (2011) proposes that the term ‘paradigm’ has taken on multiple meanings, yet offers some general definitions; that they have
a core of coherent assumptions and are characteristically complex constructs. While assumptions may not be explicit within the research narrative, personal beliefs may affect how the research is undertaken, ultimately influencing the research in its entirety. For example, personal beliefs and interests can influence participant selection and interviews are shaped by the researcher’s style of questioning.

Four paradigms are discussed in the literature: positivist, interpretive, critical, and post-structural (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretation forms an intrinsic component in a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, an interpretive paradigm presents the most valid construct for a small-scale investigation, hence it was deemed most appropriate for this study. This investigation is viewed through a paradigm imbued with the qualitative orientation of social justice, through which teaching is seen as an ethical and political process requiring critical reflection and inquiry. This study involved a juxtaposition of contrasting theoretical perspectives; ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’; therefore, the utilisation of an interpretive design, underpinned by a critical perspective, was pertinent and appropriate. White (2011) points out that since the 1990s, it has become unnecessary to include lengthy sections explaining the nature and purpose of qualitative research. However, White emphasises that “explanations of the specific steps and procedure adopted in particular approaches to qualitative research are required” (p. 259).

In qualitative research, the practice of using interpretive frameworks includes the researcher’s recognition of the subjectivity inherent in this approach, as the research is viewed through the researcher’s own lens. Such recognition acknowledges the powerful position of the researcher in the research, allowing for an understanding that the true ownership of information collected is the participant’s (Creswell, 2013).

**Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative researchers study a phenomenon in its natural setting, attempting to make sense of it in terms of the meanings that people bring to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This investigation studied two early childhood settings, in order to explore the phenomenon of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ with infants and toddlers. I chose to utilise a range of data
collection methods, including video recording, interviews, and written observations. In order to achieve in-depth analysis and discussion around ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, triangulation of the three sets of data was deemed most suitable for this study. The findings of the data were organised in relation to the three methods of data collection; interviews, videos, and written observations. The data was analysed in relation to similarities, differences and complexities, identifying specific issues to interpret across both research settings.

The Research Context

Two early childhood settings were selected as the research sites. This section describes the research context and the processes followed in order to gain access to the two research sites. The two teacher participants and the researcher are profiled, including a summary of each site’s demographic data.

The selection of research sites was made through purposive sampling; i.e. the two sites were purposively selected as places that would provide authentic and rich description regarding ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Creswell (2013) defines ‘purposeful maximal sampling’ as the selection of cases that have different perspectives about the phenomenon. As part of the ethics process, it was decided that meeting with an infant and toddler ‘expert’ to discuss the study would aid in the selection of research sites. The sites, therefore, were selected in consultation with an academic at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland.

I then telephoned the two selected centre managers to discuss my research topic and to ask if they would be agreeable to one of their teachers participating. I opted to meet with the two centre managers and teacher participants prior to beginning data collection. I felt that a face-to-face meeting would be an effective opportunity to introduce myself and explain the purpose of my study, which is indicative of socially situated qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I travelled to each centre to meet with the managers, discuss my project, answer questions and to deliver the participant information sheets (PIS). At the first site I visited, it
was decided at the time who would participate in the study. At the second site, participant confirmation was received a few days later via email communication.

The following week I returned to both sites to meet with the participants and to deliver the consent forms (CFs). At the first site, the manager of the centre opted to participate in the research. At the second site, the assistant manager of the infants and toddlers room was happy to participate. This second visit to the research sites provided the opportunity to talk more about the research, providing a forum for further clarification after perusal of the participant information sheets (PIS). During these meetings I took the opportunity to arrange suitable dates and times for the video-recording.

The following is a synopsis of each site, along with the participating teachers’ profiles:

**Site One Centre Information**
The first research site is a privately owned early childhood centre that operates Monday to Friday, 7.30 am to 6.00 pm, in a high socioeconomic area of Auckland. The Infant/Toddler area is the research site and caters for children aged three months to around two years.

**Site One Teacher Participant Details**
The Teacher Participant is referred to as Amanda for the purposes of this study. Amanda is a qualified and registered early childhood teacher. Her qualifications include: Bachelor of Consumer and Applied Sciences, Otago University, 1989; Diploma of Education, Auckland College of Education, 1998; Bachelor of Education, The University of Auckland, 1999. Amanda’s job title is Assistant Supervisor, Infant/Toddler area. She presently works three days a week, and is in the process of starting a small business designing, making and selling cotton canvas toys, bags and storage for children. Amanda has been the assistant supervisor at the research site for ten years.
Site One Teacher Participant’s Profile Statement

“My main aim as a teacher is to interact with children respectfully, in a way which enables them to be themselves, so that they can learn and develop in their own unique way. My personality is calm and relaxed. I am gentle, observant and very open to new ideas. I am fascinated by children’s toys and resources, especially handmade items; I have been for as long as I can remember. I love to observe the way in which children incorporate resources into their play, and I love to contemplate the possibilities for creating new resources. I have always loved sewing and creativity. I am very impressed with, and inspired by, the Pikler and RIE philosophies. They form the base of my own philosophy. I believe respectfulness is everything, and simplicity in life is something to be treasured. One of the most important things I have found is to be aware of, and open to your own unique personality and interests. This is why I think it is so important for children to be enabled and encouraged to do the same. There are no interests as strong as those that come from within.”

Site Two Centre Information

The second research site is a not-for-profit childcare centre providing education and care for children of parents who work at the adjoining organisation. The entire centre represents the research site and is attended by thirty children aged between six months and five years. The centre is situated in the grounds of the organisation, and enjoys close links with the parents. It is managed by a governance committee of parents and staff.

Site Two Teacher Participant Details

The Teacher Participant is referred to as Mary for the purposes of this study. Mary’s job title is Head Teacher of an Early Childhood setting. Mary is also a visiting lecturer for the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. Her qualifications include: Master of Social Work (First Class Honours), Massey University, 1999; Diploma in Teaching ECE, Auckland College of Education, 1992.

Site Two Teacher Participant’s Profile Statement

“I have been involved in my present teaching position for the last ten years. My current teaching passion is in children learning about science through assisting in everyday
experiences including cooking and caring routines. Thirty children between the ages of six months and five years attend the centre; many have developed close relationships with the other children and the older children enjoy talking together. My experience runs to forty years working with children in teaching and in social work. I have worked with children in schools, Playcentre, kindergarten and education and care centres. I have also worked in adult education in a variety of settings.”

**Positioning Myself in the Study**

The role of values in research, or ‘axiology’, involves the researcher actively addressing one’s own values and biases by positioning oneself within the research (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to position myself within a particular perspective. Inductive understandings of the research data will emerge, shaped by my personal experiences of collecting and analysing the data.

**Researcher Profile Statement**

I have been involved in early childhood education for sixteen years, beginning my studies in 1997, following the release of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. I attended Newmarket Playcentre as a team member with my daughter from 2002 until 2005. Alongside Playcentre, I worked as a Parent Educator delivering the Parents as First Teachers Programme (PAFT) from 2002 until 2006. Further study followed, first with an upgrade from my Diploma of Teaching to a Bachelor of Education degree, then carrying on to complete an Honours degree. During this time I held a contract with Uniservices, as a facilitator delivering professional development based on the *Kei tua o te pae* assessment exemplars. Upon completing my Honours degree in 2010 I secured my first lecturing position, teaching level five certificate and diploma students. In 2012 I secured an eight month contract at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa, teaching across diploma and degree courses. This contract ended in December 2012. I am currently working with a three-year-old child who has cerebral palsy, whilst seeking a permanent lecturing position.

Over the years I have developed a special interest in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. During my PAFT years, I was introduced to the work of Emmi Pikler
and Magda Gerber, which emphasises the importance of uninterrupted play. The research project I completed at honours level has helped me to understand the need to maintain a critical perspective when considering a complex phenomenon such as play and interactions. This current research experience has reinforced the importance of acknowledging ethical issues such as researcher bias. I understand that my personal interpretations of the teachers’ perspectives represent only one of many possibilities.

**Ethical Considerations**

All social research has an ethical dimension because social research examines human phenomena; the rights and privacy of the people involved must be protected. Punch (2009) argued that ethical issues are relevant throughout all stages of the research process, beginning when the researcher chooses a topic, raising the questions of why the research is worthwhile and who will benefit from it. The ethical consent process for this study was vigorous, particularly around the video recording of children and adults. This vigour was necessary to ensure that the teacher participant was only recorded with the children whose parents had given permission for their child to be videoed. It was necessary to clarify that the video recordings were for the purpose of data analysis only, and that the video footage would be deleted immediately following data analysis.

Three factors that must be considered when conducting research are: informed consent, minimising harm and voluntary participation (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). In this study, ethical issues were recognised by the provision of a participant information sheet, offering full and in-depth summary of the study’s purpose (Appendices A, C and E), and by having the participants’ rights clarified within the consent forms, signed prior to data collection (Appendices B, D and F).

**Informed Consent**

The requirements of informed consent includes the participants being told the nature of the research, what will be expected of them, any possible risks and that they can withdraw themselves and any unprocessed data at any stage (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The participants were given assurance that their decision to participate, or not
participate, would not affect their relationship with the manager, relationship with the centre, or employment. These factors were addressed within the participation information forms (Appendices A, C and E), and consent forms (Appendices B, D and F). Issues in relation to ‘informed consent’ were recognised and addressed, parental consent being a priority.

**Voluntary Participation**
Voluntary participation was recognised through the provision of participant information sheets (Appendices A, C and E) and consent forms (Appendices B, D and F). Adequate time was provided for the teacher participants and parents to consider the validity of the intended research and whether they wished to be part of the study. Issues in relation to participation were recognised as a priority, including a clear directive that any indication of dissent would be responded to immediately.

**Minimising Harm**
Every effort was made to ensure that the participants and the early childhood centres could not be identified; pseudonyms were used for the participants and for the early childhood centres. Confidentiality was a priority throughout the research study; however, there is a possibility that through the descriptions, the early childhood centres and the participants may be recognised. Another priority was ensuring that the research process was as unobtrusive as possible; particularly during the episodes of recording the video footage and documenting the written observations. This was achieved through sensitive placement of the video camera and maintaining a discreet presence in the centre. The participants could request that I turn off the audio recorder or video recorder at any time during the data gathering process.

I placed myself as an ethical participant in this study, recognising that my participation within the early childhood settings, interviewing and making observations of human participants could influence the data gathered.
Validation Strategies

Validation strategies utilised included the triangulation of data, clarifying researcher bias, member checking and the application of rich, thick description to allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Creswell, 2013). Creswell notes that validation standards in qualitative research emphasise “researcher reflexivity and on researcher challenges that include raising questions about the ideas developed during a research study” (p. 249).

Triangulation

Validation is inherent within triangulation “when a qualitative researcher locates evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Researcher bias

Two main concepts were investigated in this study: ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. As noted by Creswell (2003), an important aspect of validation is that the researcher must clarify any bias that they may bring to a study. Hatch (2007) concurs, stressing the importance of unpacking any assumptions such as beliefs regarding the nature of reality (ontological assumptions) and what can be known (epistemological assumptions). Hatch argues that the unpacking of these assumptions is “an essential first step that points qualitative researchers in a direction that can be taken with confidence” (p. 224). In this study, both participant and researcher profiles are presented to create transparency of potential biases and assumptions.

Participant Checking and Feedback

Following the interviews, transcription was undertaken and the completed transcripts were forwarded to the participants for checking, as per the ethics application guidelines, in order to verify that it was an accurate account of their beliefs regarding ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. One participating teacher took time to not only clarify her beliefs; she further elucidated small components that emphasised the essence of her meanings. The other teacher participant responded by clarifying several areas that were inaudible during the transcribing process. These explanations further increased the rich, thick description,
providing sufficient descriptive data to promote insight into the phenomena being studied (Punch, 2009).

**Rick, thick description**

Rick, thick description is when the researcher provides sufficient descriptive information in the findings to promote insight into the phenomena being studied (Punch, 2009). Creswell (2003) contends that using rich, thick description is a way to ensure the trustworthiness of the research because readers are transported to the setting, providing an element of shared experience. The interview responses were illuminated through numerous quotations in the findings. Additional to the quotations, the other two data sources involved a detailed and triangulated source of description that further illuminated the research findings.

**Triangulation of Data**

Viewed through the lens of uninterrupted play, any exploration of teacher interactions is likely to be symbolic of the complexity inherent within the early childhood sector in New Zealand. In order to ensure the validity and credibility of my interpretations, multiple data collection methods were deemed essential as this would allow me to compare and contrast across the data sources. Discussion around the use of triangulation formed part of the initial supervision meeting in relation to collecting and analysing data. In qualitative research, to triangulate your data means to “confirm their validity by obtaining data from a second or third methodological source” (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 283). However, Richards and Morse (2007) dispute this in their claim that many researchers misuse the term ‘triangulation’, as it does not mean “multiple data sources used in a single study to build a single picture” (p. 92). According to Richard and Morse (2007), triangulation refers rather to the “gaining of multiple perspectives through completed studies that have been conducted on the same topic and that directly address each other’s findings” (p. 91). Having acknowledged the existence of conflicting definitions of ‘triangulation,’ MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) note that while different types of triangulation do indeed exist, the choosing of one type, for instance the employment of three data collection strategies, is both applicable and appropriate. In this study, three such methods were deemed appropriate for comparing and analysing a robust collection of data in order to explore more thoroughly this complex topic. This section
discusses the three data collection methods, including the process of collecting each set of data and the process of analysing the data, once brought together.

**Data Collection Methods (Video, Interviews, Observations)**

Creswell (2013) prefers to select cases that show different perspectives on the issue he seeks to portray, using multiple methods to collect the data. With credibility and authenticity in mind, I employed three data collection methods; video recording, written observations, and interviews. During the data-gathering phase, I was present at each early childhood centre for approximately ninety minutes, in order to video-record the participants as they went about their daily practice, and also to record written observations in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. To limit my intrusion in the early childhood settings and to maximise time, I opted to record the written observations both during and following the period of video-recording. The fifty minute interviews, representing the third data collection strategy, were conducted the following week at a time and location convenient to the participants.

**Video Recording**

The first mode of data collection was the video recording of the teacher participants as they went about their daily practice. In order to be unobtrusive, the digital recording device was placed in an inconspicuous position, yet with clear visibility. The resultant video footage provided a holistic embedded depiction of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ with infants and toddlers. Video recording captured both verbal and non-verbal interactions in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, thus yielding data to triangulate against the interview transcripts and written observations.

The two research sites presented alternative perspectives in terms of how and what images to capture. In the first early childhood setting, there was a group of ten to fifteen children in the immediate environment, aged one to four years. In the second setting there were four toddlers situated within a smaller physical environment. The two settings provided different contexts in which to explore the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, adding to the richness and complexity of the data.
**Semi-structured Interviews**

The second method of data collection consisted of interviewing the two teacher participants. Interviews are a valuable tool in qualitative research because they allow for the collection of in-depth data (Denscombe, 2003). The interviews were approximately fifty minutes in duration and were semi-structured in nature. The main objective was to obtain data relating to the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Open dialogue was a valued goal, as this would help elicit authentic interpretations capturing open-minded and critical perspectives, thereby not limiting the participants’ contribution to the study. Flexible, open-ended dialogue provided a forum wherein the practitioner participants could inquire into their own practice, moreover, their own selves (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007).

The interviews were held at times that were convenient to the participants. Amanda, working three days at the early childhood centre, opted to be interviewed in her home. The quiet and ‘uninterrupted’ home environment created a context where the interviewee could reflect on each question, providing carefully considered feedback to each question or provocation. Mary, on the other hand, was interviewed in the early childhood setting, where opportunities arose to respond and interpret experiences occurring at the time in response to the questions raised.

**Written Observations**

The third data collection method was written observations. To limit any additional disruption to the children and adults in the early childhood setting, I recorded written observations during and following the video-recording period. With the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ in mind, I recorded written observations of what was occurring in the early childhood setting. While I remained aware of the research questions, I was open to alternative insights in relation to the phenomenon being studied. Objectivity a priority, I understood that an interpretive lens was to some degree inevitable when recording particular observations of the teacher and children.

**Analysis of Data**

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of the text and image data (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data for
analysis, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in a discussion. The first step to make sense out of the data involved an initial reading of the interview transcripts to obtain a general sense of the information, in order to begin the process of interpreting its overall meaning. The video footage was viewed and transcribed in relation to what I interpreted to be the most pertinent examples of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction.’ In turn, the data from the written observations were representative of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’.

Data relevant to this study included two transcribed video recordings, two sets of transcribed interview data, and two sets of written observations. The next phase of data analysis involved coding the six transcriptions as representative of six separate pieces of data. It was important to also code the six sets of data as originating from the two different research sites. The two sets of interview data were printed on different coloured paper. The video data and written observations were recorded on white paper with codes assigned to represent whether it was video footage or written observation data, and which participant the data belonged to.

After critical reflection regarding a logical and coherent depiction of the key findings, followed by consultation with my supervisors, I decided to assign the most pertinent data to ‘the value of uninterrupted play’ and ‘the value of teacher interaction’. Ongoing, cyclic analysis involved the allocation of nine focus areas that were representative of the most significant findings. The nine areas were: uninterrupted play, concentration, risk-taking, observation, the environment and resources, interactions, ideas about learning, questioning, and responsive positioning.

The findings of this study cannot be generalised due to the interpretive nature of the research. Therefore, any findings will be open to individual interpretation in relation to each particular context or situation and the transferability of the findings will be dependent on the correlation with the descriptions provided.
Summary

In this chapter I have explained and justified the interpretivist qualitative approach utilised in this research to generate data with which to explore ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. The qualitative research strategies, including data gathering and analysis techniques, have been outlined. The research sites have been described, along with the participant and the researcher profiles. Ethical considerations including informed consent, minimising harm and voluntary participation have been discussed. Validation strategies have also been considered. Finally, data gathering and analysis techniques have been outlined. In the following chapter the findings will be presented.
Chapter Three

FINDINGS

This research project was centred around exploring the notion that research into teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ is worthwhile and valuable: firstly, because the literature indicated a tension between the two pedagogical practices, and secondly, because the literature indicated that an exploration of teachers’ beliefs and theories and pedagogical interpretations is crucial in order to understand and influence teachers’ thinking and practice.

The literature review indicated that within New Zealand early childhood education, approaches to teaching and learning are embedded within layers of theoretical interpretation (Hill, 2011). Hill contends that teachers are influenced by the sedimented layers of theoretical perspectives that permeate their daily practice and must address these perspectives if they are to make sound pedagogical decisions.

This chapter presents the findings as they are interpreted through the methodology outlined in chapter two. The findings emerged through the analysis of the interviews, the video recordings and the written observations. The data was refined and defined through the iterative process of discovery and analysis (White, 2011). The data is presented in alignment with the strategy of triangulation described in the methodology chapter, through the three data sets: interviews, video recordings and written observations.

Each of the three data sets provided insights into the value of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. In section one I describe the findings that relate to the value of ‘uninterrupted play’. In section two I describe the findings that relate to the value of ‘teacher interaction’.

Throughout this chapter, abbreviations are used to acknowledge the source of data. Each excerpt is labelled: (I) interview data, (V) video data or (W) written observation, to signify its
data set. The responses to the interviews are mostly intact, in order to present as much of the raw data as possible.

Section one: The value of uninterrupted play

This section represents the teachers’ views about the value of ‘uninterrupted play’, along with corroborating evidence from the video footage and written observations. The central ideas relate to the areas of uninterrupted play, concentration, risk-taking, observation, the environment and resources.

Uninterrupted play

Both participants expressed that they valued ‘uninterrupted play’, with Amanda articulating this concept particularly clearly.

If you have uninterrupted time to do something, you can fully focus on what you are doing, you can take your time, you can follow your ideas through and you can become absorbed in what you are doing. To interact would be to spoil the whole atmosphere, because they are so, so busy doing what they are doing.

[Amanda, (I)]

While Mary valued uninterrupted play, she communicated clearly that there were times when interruption was necessary.

I believe that children should have periods of time where they engage in uninterrupted play to allow them to see processes through. Obviously sometimes it’s necessary for adults to interrupt them, but I think as far as possible they should be left uninterrupted.

[Mary (I)]

Mary and Amanda both believed that a reason not to interrupt play was because of the inability to …
... see inside their minds to see what ideas they are getting from what they are doing. [Amanda (I)]

And the fact that…

... we don’t know exactly what they’re learning, so we should respect their learning and not keep interrupting them. And that’s even to the extent of not keeping on having pointless conversations with babies. If they are engaged in play as these are, we just respect that and have no obligation to keep making eye contact and giving a running commentary about what they’re doing. They know what they’re doing. [Mary (I)]

**Concentration**

The concept of concentration featured as a prominent contributing factor to uninterrupted play, particularly for Amanda, who identified concentration as a factor in problem-solving and following things through. She also talked about the issue of losing concentration if you are interrupted.

*I think that concentration is so important for children and for adults; it should be encouraged so that they develop their own concentration and problem-solving skills. I think that the value of learning for yourself is huge and it’s to be encouraged. Therefore, allowing children to concentrate and follow things through is hugely important.* [Amanda (I)]

*If someone interrupts a child, possibly with the intention of extending their play, they will presumably be assuming that they know what the child is, or isn’t doing. They might be problem-solving or working something out, or just trying things out on their own. If someone interrupts you, passes you something, talks to you, then your mind has to switch away from what you are doing, to what they are saying or giving to you, therefore you lose your concentration.* [Amanda (I)]
Furthermore, she linked concentration to a course she had attended, which focused on the importance of ‘processing-time’, allowing children the time to process new information and ideas.

What I like is that there is also a cloud up in the sky next to the triangle, and that is processing-time. So that is when a child is sitting, maybe staring into space. They are processing; their mind is maybe thinking over what they have been doing, what they might like to do next, or any one of numerous other thoughts; it’s just time for thinking things over. [Amanda (I)]

Video observations included several instances where children demonstrated intense concentration while playing.

A group of between four and seven toddlers play with a train set uninterrupted for approximately twenty minutes before departing of their own volition. [Mary (V)]

A toddler stands by a wall, repeatedly pushing an object into and out of a hole in the wall. This play continues for an extended period, uninterrupted. [Amanda (V)]

**Risk-taking**

Mary and Amanda both talked about risk-taking in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’. For example, Mary referred to teachers not interrupting children to tell them to be careful or to stop running.

I think we’re a bit of a risk-averse society, particularly with relation to children at play. Here we don’t ever tell children to be careful because it’s a waste of breath; it doesn’t ever make the children careful. So we see children as being careful enough; they make calculations, they make judgments. Because when they are infants, we don’t treat every fall as being a disaster. We let children fall and we celebrate their falls, and they are able to fall and roll and take care of themselves because we trust them to do that. And I think they learn much more than if we stop them falling. [Mary (I)]
We never tell children that running inside is forbidden. If they want to run inside then they run inside ... It’s very liberating for teachers not to have to keep referring to running inside. So we just celebrate the fact that they do want to run inside or outside. [Mary (1)]

Written observations illustrated Mary’s beliefs regarding ‘uninterrupted play’ and risk-taking.

Two toddlers run inside from the outside area, running around a table as they head towards the bathroom. [Mary (W)]

Amanda suggested that toddlers manage risks particularly well when left uninterrupted. They are then given the opportunity to develop understanding of their bodies, learning how to control their physical selves and become more competent at controlling their movements.

They need to be shown a lot of respect and their competence needs to be valued. They learn how to fall in a way which doesn’t harm their body as much as if you fell and you weren’t used to falling. So as they learn, they become so familiar with their bodies that they become extremely competent with those physical skills. [Amanda (I)]

Video excerpts were indicative of these beliefs. For example, Amanda observed a toddler negotiating balancing and falling without interacting.

Amanda observes as a toddler balances on the side of the ball trough, before falling backwards on to his back. The boy continues this balancing and falling backwards repeatedly uninterrupted. [Amanda (V)]

Mary commented on student teachers’ perceptions of their role regarding risk. She raised the concern that children’s learning is adversely affected through the prioritisation of safety.
When you talk to students and ask them “what’s the most important role?” particularly with infants and toddlers, they’ll say “to keep them safe”. I think the obsession with making sure children don’t get hurt limits children’s learning. [Mary (I)]

Amanda discussed ‘risk’ in relation to the RIE philosophy. She related ‘uninterrupted play’ and risk to the idea that children, from birth, are supported to develop physical competence independently.

I do like the RIE approach, where from the time children are born they are not put into positions that they cannot get into by themselves. So that means as they learn to roll over, to sit up, to climb, they understand their bodies so well and are so aware of their capabilities that they appear to not fall as much as you would if you were helped along every step by an adult. [Amanda (I)]

Video footage demonstrated that Amanda put this philosophy into practice, positioning herself so that the children could move freely around the environment.

Amanda observes without interacting as four toddlers move around, negotiating their way around one another and around the environment. [Amanda (V)]

However, Amanda pointed out that there are limits to the degree of non-intervention, for instance in conflict situations. Her stated attitude towards interactions in these situations was affirmed in the video excerpts.

If it’s with other children, say a conflict situation, then I would wait for a little while to see if they were managing okay, that they were feeling okay about it and still under control. If I could see that someone was going to get hurt, then I would definitely interact. [Amanda (I)]
Two toddlers begin to get frustrated about a ball – Amanda, from her position on the ground moves towards them slowly, waits and observes before interacting with them to offer another ball to play with. [Amanda (V)]

**Observation**

Amanda and Mary both linked the notion of uninterrupted play to that of observation. Amanda warned that if teachers fail to observe what children are doing, then they may not fully appreciate children’s actions, while Mary stated that observation should come first.

*I think you really need to start observing, because once you do, there are so many, many things that they do which are fascinating, you know, and the ways in which they do things make that much sense. If you don’t observe what children are actually doing, you may not appreciate what you are seeing. You may then take it upon yourself to find a child something to keep them busy.* [Amanda (I)]

*One of the most important things you can do is observe, to observe means to sit quietly and watch and listen, and if necessary you record. And we have to do that first before we do anything else.* [Mary (I)]

Amanda linked observation with the RIE philosophy; she stressed the danger of depriving children of the chance to discover things for themselves. Mary referred to Magda Gerber, the co-founder of RIE, who advocated observation as being a crucial part of the teacher’s role.

*One thing that I love about the RIE philosophy is that they suggest you wait and observe, before showing a child how to do something, making reference to the concept - when you teach a child something; you take away forever his chance of discovering it himself.* [Amanda (I)]

*We see the role of the teacher as what Magda Gerber says, and one of the most important things you can do is observe and to observe means to sit quietly and watch*
and listen. In that peace and quiet and observation there is teaching going on, because we can’t plan if we’re not observing. [Mary (I)]

Observational data supported these interview excerpts for both teachers. They tended to observe from a distance, allowing the children to play uninterrupted.

*Amanda sits on the ground observing the children playing. The environment is calm and quiet.* [Amanda (V)]

*Mary moves around the environment, observing children. The majority of interactions are child initiated. A group of between four and seven toddlers play with a train set uninterrupted for twenty minutes before departing on their own volition.* [Mary (V)]

**The environment and resources**

Both teachers emphasised the importance of environmental factors. Uninterrupted play was seen as being crucial to children’s experience of their surroundings. Mary pointed out that an engaging environment takes the focus away from the teacher.

*All of their learning needs are being met by this environment and by the set up. We’ve got to give children the time to engage with the environment, so it’s not always the teacher the focus of attention; we set up environments and then leave the children to learn through that environment.* [Mary (I)]

Mary related the environment to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, referring to the environment as being the third teacher.

*And Reggio Emilia, we’ve studied it; we’ve got the books, we’ve looked at the videos, we go to the conferences. We believe that the environment has a big impact on the children’s learning. It should be the third teacher, and it is.* [Mary (I)]
Resources were essential to children’s exploration of these environments. Amanda saw the RIE philosophy as unlocking children’s imaginations.

> Where there are a lot of things there that they can make use of, they can make use of in any way that they choose. They can use their imaginations, they can explore freely. The RIE philosophy, it’s opened up endless possibilities as far as making resources for the children and finding resources for them. [Amanda (I)]

Amanda’s strong personal interest in resources was obvious as she spoke about her efforts to make and find lots of different things for children that are “hugely inspiring”.

> What I’ve been making lately, I’ve been sewing storage bags and we’ve put them on the shelves. They are just made out of cotton canvas; some of them have smaller cylinders inside so they are divided in two. I want to keep more things at our finger tips. You can’t see what is in the bags, there’s not a whole lot of visual clutter, it’s just like plain packaging, but in them we keep an array of all the things the children have been most interested in lately. You keep looking for new possibilities, and then you can have a lot of things to hand, to make available for the children. I search around second hand shops, op shops, car boot sales, fairs, and find all sorts of things that you could offer to the children and put in your room that they could use. There are so many possibilities, they are hugely inspiring and very exciting, especially when you like to get things together and make things like I do. [Amanda (I)]

Amanda emphasised her commitment to uninterrupted play by explaining that she never passes children resources with instructions on what to do with them.

> When I take new things for the children to play with and investigate, I never pass them to them and say, ” look, you can do this, this and this”. I always just put it on a shelf or in a corner of the room and leave it for them to stumble across, and then they can start using it in any way they want to. You are not telling them what to use or when
they have to use it; they can find it for themselves and they can discover it for themselves. [Amanda (I)]

**Section two: The value of teacher interactions**

This section represents the teachers’ views about the value of ‘teacher interaction’, along with corroborating evidence from the video footage and written observations. The central ideas relate to the areas of interactions, ideas about learning, questioning, and responsive positioning.

**Interactions**

While both teachers were clear in their beliefs around the importance of ‘uninterrupted play’, their beliefs around interactions were inherent within the interview and observation data. Mary pointed out that interaction is…

…subjective and open to interpretation. I think wherever possible they should not be interrupted for no good reason. But who says what a good reason is? So I think it’s subjective. [Mary (I)]

Video data illustrates Mary’s practice of stopping certain behaviours that she deems unacceptable.

*Two toddlers play with a plastic tea set with one child verbalising loudly. Mary calls his name and when he looks at her, Mary puts her finger to her mouth, asking him to quieten down.* [Mary (V)]

Mary acknowledged the social context. She suggested that children’s learning is enhanced by some form of social interaction.

*I think children do learn through heuristic discovery on their own through just engaging with items or experiences, but I think they learn much more if there is some social interaction, either verbal or non verbal.* [Mary (I)]
Mary’s responses also indicate that her decisions regarding interactions require reflection.

_Sometimes I feel a reflective moment where I see, for example, a group of children engaged in extended play. I have a reflective moment about whether I should make steps to get them to engage with what I’ve got planned, or whether I should just leave them to it._ [Mary (I)]

For both teachers, care routines constitute clear justification to interrupt children. Mary uses her pragmatic reasoning to determine when to attend to physical needs.

_I might need to interrupt them. If he started to get distressed, and I know what makes him distressed, which is needing a drink, then I would interrupt him and give him a drink. Or he might have a dirty nappy, which doesn’t distress him, but I know I’ve got to change him or else he’ll become sore._ [Mary (I)]

_It would depend, if possibly they were hungry or they were getting tired._

[Amanda (I)]

Video data revealed that when initiating care routines, both teachers interacted verbally with children, communicating their reasons for interrupting them.

_A toddler sits at a table and begins to cry. Mary tells the child that she thinks he is hungry and tired, moving to the kitchen to get him some food. When he finishes his food, Mary takes him to bed._ [Mary (V)]

_Amanda informs David that he is being taken from the room to have his nappy changed_ [Amanda (V)]

Gauging the level of frustration was a determinant as to whether to interact with children during play. Amanda felt that it depends on whether children’s frustration is under control.
If they’re struggling with something it would depend on how frustrated they were. If I thought they were feeling fine and it was frustration, but it was under control, then I wouldn’t interrupt. If I could see they were getting to the stage where they really weren’t happy and it was too frustrating, then I would. [Amanda (I)]

Video data revealed that another reason to interact with children was when they find themselves in potentially stressful situations. Amanda responded to rising levels of emotion when several children were playing a game together.

Three toddlers play peek-a-boo around a door, getting closer and closer together. They become emotional and Amanda, remaining on the floor, moves towards them to interact. [Amanda (V)]

Damage to the environment constituted another reason to interrupt play. Mary was quite clear about the need to exert control in these situations.

I would interrupt her if she is shaking the gate. That is an example of play where I will interrupt because I don’t want her to do it because it’s damaging to the environment, so I’m going to interrupt that because I don’t want her to do it. [Mary (I)]

Certain behaviours were also a catalyst for interaction. In video excerpts, Mary responded to loud noises and the dropping of a resource. Depending on the level of disturbance, she spoke out, made gestures (see video excerpt on page 7), or moved over to where children were playing, getting down on their level in order to interact with them.

A group of seven children play at a table with lego resources uninterrupted. Adult interaction occurs when one child tips a jigsaw puzzle onto the floor, creating a loud noise. Mary approaches the table, hesitates, then crouches at their level to interact. [Mary (V)]
Control of interactions was raised by Amanda. She preferred for children to lead interactions. She also appreciated that by supporting children to lead interactions, she is able to gain some insight into their thought processes.

When I am interacting with the children, I don’t say so many things that it takes the lead of the interaction away from them. I want them still to be able to lead our interaction, partly because I think it’s encouraging for them, and supportive of their ideas, but also because I am fascinated to see where it will go. That way it’s not under my control, so it can go anywhere; all sorts of things might open up. So I get a little glimpse of what they are thinking, and I find that infinitely more interesting than the sort of scenario that I might go through with that child should I be taking the lead in the interaction. [Amanda (I)]

Mary talked about the importance of sharing interesting knowledge but not within a deliberate lesson plan. Instead, she believes in the benefit of information sharing in the context of everyday, natural conversations.

Where individuals are involved in social discussion and one individual has interesting knowledge to share, I think we should share it. I think there is room for teachers sharing knowledge, not where there is a deliberate lesson plan in mind; but just to have the experience being so regular that it becomes part of play, and you’ve got the opportunity to regularly share that information with children as part of a fairly natural conversation. [Mary (I)]

Amanda described having ideas for extending children’s experiences while being wary of the potential to interfere with children’s personal thought processes. She expresses uncertainty regarding the benefits of teacher-led interactions, questioning the benefits.

You watch very carefully what they are doing, and in your mind you come up with an idea of what might be fascinating for that child to then incorporate in their play. Maybe you’ve got some idea of what you might really like to see that they may grasp,
or something that perhaps might open up a whole new possibility of what they might want to do next. So you gauge your time, and you become engaged in their play as well. Their mind will switch, taking into account new ideas, new possibilities, and some other train of thought will happen which has been influenced by you. The child will be exposed to different things. But how much of that will be led by the adult, and will it be of more benefit to the child than following their own ideas and focusing on their own thoughts? [Amanda (I)]

Ideas about learning

Data portrayed the teachers’ beliefs and practices about social learning processes. Mary spoke about Vygotsky and sociocultural theory as an influence on her decision-making regarding interacting with children during play. She referred to children’s interactions with peers and adults.

Sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky and his notions that a lot of children’s learning is socially constructed, it does influence me. I’m very fond of Vygotsky and his notion that children learn through social interaction with others, both peers and with adults. [Mary (I)]

Amanda described her use of specific cues as a means of guiding children’s learning. Although she viewed modelling as a teaching strategy, Amanda prefers to let children learn autonomously or through social interaction with peers.

By following their lead, I can help them out with a few simple words or by using body language, eye contact, words that I think might help them. We can help them out and model things, but I think they learn so much themselves and from their peers that I like them to play a huge part in their own learning. [Amanda (I)]

Amanda also felt it was important to ensure children felt comfortable in their environment. The teachers were there to offer unobtrusive support when needed. Moreover, Amanda noted
that direct interactions required a careful, balanced approach, so as not to take over control of any given experience. She describes children initiating interactions with teachers.

As long as they’re feeling comfortable, relaxed and safe, they can learn so many things for themselves, little by little and we can be there to help and support them.

You can offer careful assistance so you’re not taking over from what they are doing, but you are there to help out if need be in the way that you think helps the situation.

They will come and hold our hands and move their arms if they want to do particular action songs. One little girl will come and hold my hands, look in my eyes and start singing the first few words of the tune. So they can initiate things for themselves. [Amanda (I)]

Written observations showed both teachers following children’s cues. Amanda verbalised in response to a child’s gestures, while Mary responded to children’s questions.

Mary moves around the environment, responding to children when they initiate interactions by asking her a question. [Mary (W)]

Amanda names the objects and people that a child points to. [Amanda (W)]

In a video excerpt, Amanda communicated verbally when welcoming a child who had been absent. The social context was clarified through the naming of those present, both teachers and peers.

Amanda greets a child who has been absent from the centre. Amanda uses verbal communication to welcome the child back to the centre, providing the names of the children and adults who are present. [Amanda (V)]
**Questioning**

Both participants held definite opinions about the practice of interacting with children to ask questions. Mary was dismissive of the practice of asking ‘rote questions’ for appearance’s sake, rather than through genuine enquiry.

> I’m not sure about using questions to extend a child’s thinking. I’d like the questions not to be rote. Sometimes I listen to teachers and I think “oh it’s just a rote question; you’re just asking it for the form of it, without you being genuinely interested in the answer or genuinely wanting the child to think of the answer themselves”. [Mary (I)]

Mary did, however, find genuine questioning useful, so long as it occurs within a natural conversation between child and teacher. She disapproved of using questions to test children’s knowledge. [Mary (I)]

> I think questioning is really important if it’s genuine, if it’s not used with the thought “I must teach this child now - I must ask them a question.” I’d like free, genuine conversations between children and teachers. If adults are asking questions, they should be genuine questions. I don’t like asking questions just to get children to, to kind of to test children’s knowledge. [Mary (I)]

Amanda also believed that questions need to be genuine, allowing that sometimes it is beneficial to question children.

> I think if you are questioning just for the point of questioning because you feel you should, then it could be an issue. So we do definitely ask them questions, so long as their answer does make a difference; that it is a genuine question that is relevant to what they are doing. I don’t question the children about things that I already know the answer to; like what colour is this? It needs to be a realistic question. [Amanda (I)]

Neither the video footage nor written observations contained any instances of Amanda questioning children. Video excerpts did, however, show that Mary used questioning in
response to a child’s request for a game from the cupboard, so she could determine which game the child wanted. Mary also asked questions when noticing something unusual, for instance an unidentified substance.

“Is there anything you particularly want?”[Mary (V)]

“Is that paint on your toe or ...? “Yes that’s black paint on your toe isn’t it?”[Mary (V)]

Written observations also recorded that Mary asked questions, in situations where she did not appear to already know the answer, for instance when ascertaining whether a child wanted help.

“Would you like some help with that? No, you can do it? Yes, you did it.”[Mary (W)]

**Responsive positioning**

The importance of physical positioning was evident in the video footage and written observations. The following excerpts are illustrative of the ways in which the two teachers were responsive towards children, and the ways in which they positioned themselves in the environment. As a finding, this was increasingly seen to be an aspect of interaction.

Both teachers moved around the environment in response to children’s movements. They appeared to reflect on interactions.

*Amanda responds to the movements of children around her by shifting her position either nearer or further away. [Amanda (V)]*

*Mary moves around the environment, alternating between standing, crouching or sitting on children’s chairs. A child tips a jigsaw puzzle onto the ground. Mary moves to his side, appearing to consider what course of action to take. [Mary (V)]*
Mary approaches a group of children who are sitting at a table, playing with lego. As she draws near, she hesitates and stands still for a few moments before placing her hands on the table. [Mary (W)]

Amanda spent much of the time positioned on the floor. Her movements were particularly calm and fluid in nature.

Amanda positions herself at floor level shifting between sitting and kneeling, except for when she stands briefly to get a tissue. Her movements are fluid, calm and slow. [Amanda (V)]

There were instances with both teachers when they were physically present without interacting verbally.

On several occasions Amanda moves closer to children without interacting with them verbally. [Amanda (V)]

Mary sits on the low dais seating. Two toddlers approach and sit down beside her. [Mary (W)]

When responding to a conflict situation Amanda remained unobtrusive, choosing to interact non-verbally.

Two children begin to disagree over ownership of a ball. Amanda shifts herself closer to them, using slow, fluid movements. She then reaches behind to pick up a ball and silently offers it to the child who is not holding one. [Amanda (V)]

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the findings that emerged through analysis of the interviews, the video recordings and the written observations. The findings were elucidated through the
constructs of ‘the value of uninterrupted play’ and ‘the value of teacher interaction’; the pertinent data is presented under each section. In the following chapter a discussion will explore these findings, in response to the literature and new ideas that have surfaced.
Chapter Four

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study explored how two experienced teachers interpret curriculum in relation to the phenomena of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. This chapter will discuss the insights emerging from the research findings; reference will be made to relevant literature. A critical examination of the data and literature will illuminate the interconnection between the polarised perspectives of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, providing a pathway whereby teachers embrace complexity, rather than attempting to reduce the diversities of learning and knowing (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). The emerging ideas that will be presented are the interaction of the new research data with the existing literature (White, 2011).

For this study, two teachers working in the early childhood education and care field for some time and from different early childhood settings were interviewed, with a focus on infant and toddler pedagogy. The teacher participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to their beliefs around the concept of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, including questions pertaining to their daily practice. In line with the strategy of triangulation, different data sources (interviews, video footage and written observations) were utilised in order to corroborate and validate the evidence. The triangulation of the three sets of data illuminated the complex constructs that influence teacher beliefs and practice. The three data sources served as an effective strategy to help clarify how the participants’ beliefs around ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ were interpreted in daily practice.

This study emphasises the need for teachers to challenge sedimented layers of theoretical beliefs (Hill, 2011) that have polarising tendencies in relation to the concepts of ‘play’, ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. The literature illustrates that there is a tension in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. For example, Hedges (2003)
contends that early childhood teachers do not share subject content knowledge when deliberately *not* interacting with children when they are playing. Other authors such as Cullen (1996) and Fleer (2010) write about the specialised knowledge required so that teachers make sensitive decisions based on insightful thinking. With authors such as Hedges and Cullen (2005) and Fleer (2010) arguing that there may be valuable knowledge for teachers and children to share, ‘uninterrupted play’ becomes a contentious topic within early childhood education. Contention gives rise to critique and analysis of current understandings, in response to new insights utilised to facilitate this discussion.

How, when and why adults become directly involved in children’s play depends on what they believe about play and about learning (Dockett & Fleer, 2002). When interviewed, the teachers emphasised the importance of ‘uninterrupted play’ for infants and toddlers. The observational data corroborated this viewpoint; however there was additional evidence that ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are intrinsically inclusive of each other. Therefore, the polarisation of these concepts, made evident within the literature, requires critical analysis so as to explore alternative perspectives. Section One will discuss the teachers’ perception of ‘uninterrupted play’ and the interpretive nature of theory. Influences included are: RIE, concentration and self-learning, risk and the environment and resources. In Section Two, meanings of ‘teacher interaction’ will be discussed in relation to a theoretical tension and the resultant complexity. Section Three will present a discussion proposing that the notions of ‘presence’ and ‘immanence’, which are responsive to critical insights, best address the polarisation that the literature contends is a problematic issue in the early childhood sector.

**Section One: ‘Uninterrupted play’ in early childhood education**

The teachers in this study expressed that they valued ‘uninterrupted play’. While both acknowledged that interruptions are sometimes necessary, their personal reasons for such interruptions were articulated through their theoretical and pedagogical interpretations. The literature highlights a tension underpinned by many teachers’ enduring allegiance to a Piagetian constructive perspective that constitutes the teacher’s role as ambiguous in relation to interacting with children during play. Hill (2011) contends that Piaget’s legacy of ‘the
structured environment’ is often embedded within the walls of early childhood centres, with the result that teachers ‘see’ the resources and not the children. Describing ‘the elusive nature of play’, Stover, White, Rockel and Toso (2010) point out that there appears to be an "uncertainty about how to 'be' a teacher with very young children at play” (p. 11). This uncertainty is in relation to the subjective, interpretive nature of the theory that influences teachers’ pedagogies.

Mary’s viewpoint supports the idea that the careful development of personal philosophy and pedagogical practice is vital. The curriculum *Te Whāriki*, intentionally subjective in nature, allows for and encourages such personal, reflective practice. *Te Whāriki* is often viewed as a socio-cultural document, yet Hill (2011) points out that the fact that the curriculum was also influenced by constructivist theory is often overlooked. An example of both theoretical perspectives in *Te Whāriki* is that children “learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection” (p. 9). Symbolic of two alternative pedagogical approaches, this statement can be difficult for teachers to interpret if ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are viewed as polarised perspectives. In terms of curriculum then, teachers are left to define their role in relation to play and interaction by aligning their practice and commitment to the national curriculum with carefully considered philosophy and pedagogy. Widger’s research exploring ‘child centredness’ found that teachers did not experience uncertainty in relation to interacting with children during play when they aligned their practice with clearly defined philosophical frameworks (Widger & Schofield, 2012). One of these philosophical frameworks was the RIE (Resources for Infant Educators) philosophy, which is well known for its alliance with ‘uninterrupted play’.

**The RIE influence**

As pointed out by Nuttall (2013), early childhood “teachers can only negotiate their actions within the constraints and possibilities of their existing definitions of curriculum” (p. 191). The findings from the current research suggest that the teachers’ commitment to the RIE philosophy was a significant factor influencing their beliefs and practices in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. According to RIE, uninterrupted play refers to a
child’s play that is free of uninvited teacher interaction, promoting concentration and independent thinking in very young children (Gerber, 2005). Both of these ideas have clear links to the theoretical perspective of constructivism, where the teacher’s main role is to create an environment where children can explore independently (Podmore, 2006). The teachers related RIE to the act of observing children, Amanda emphasising the importance of observing and not interacting so that children can experience discovery independently. Mary referred to Gerber and observation in relation to watching, listening and planning.

Video footage and written observations supported the interview data, identifying interactions that align with the RIE’s tenet of ‘uninterrupted play’ as a precursor to promoting concentration and autonomous sustained thinking. In her 2012 study, Cooper found that teachers were aligned with RIE’s emphasis on setting up the environment to support development, rather than planning to support progress in dispositional learning through interactions. Cooper recommended that early childhood teachers require education concerning how RIE, with its developmental underpinnings, can complement a sociocultural perspective. Significantly, the findings in this research revealed that ‘teacher interaction’, which is more sociocultural, and ‘uninterrupted play’, which tends to be more developmental and Piagetian, are intrinsically inclusive of each other.

**Concentration and self-learning**
Amanda stressed the importance of children following through on ideas and being absorbed in what they are doing; to interact would “spoil the whole atmosphere”. Mary also suggested that children should be left to play uninterrupted so that they can see processes through. The literature questions the practice of teachers deliberately not interacting with children during play; Stephen (2010) contends that free exploration does not lead to sustained and purposeful interactions that support learning. However, Amanda suggests that because we cannot see inside children’s minds, we do not know what ideas they are getting from what they are doing and we should leave children free to pursue their own thought processes. Hammond (2009) supports this view, arguing that pure play becomes ‘something else’ with input from another person. Mary felt that teachers shouldn’t talk to children about what they are doing because “they know what they are doing”. These references to teachers deliberately not sharing their
own insights with children are in opposition to a popular interpretation of the sociocultural perspective where shared meaning-making is a priority and the teacher’s role is prominent. Amanda restated her conviction around children’s ‘self-learning’ numerous times in the interview transcripts, reiterating that she believes that children need to develop their own concentration and problem-solving skills, emphasising the value of learning for oneself.

What became very evident in the findings was that when a teacher interacts with a child, interrupting their play, the implication is that the teacher thinks they know what the child is or isn’t thinking and doing. Fleer (2010) argues that it is important that teachers know what children are thinking and doing, so that conceptual understandings can be shared. Amanda emphasised the importance of observation as teachers don’t know what thoughts are going through a child’s mind, but by observing closely they can gain a glimpse. Mary pointed out that adults don’t know exactly what children are learning, therefore in order to respect their own independent thought processes, interruptions should be limited. Yet small interactions were frequent throughout the video footage and written observations, both verbal and non-verbal in nature. Mary prioritised the notion that children require time to think things over, which is not possible if teachers are interacting in order to interrupt. Mary also stated her interest in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, and that carefully facilitated social interactions are beneficial to the learning-teaching process. This finding is indicative of the argument presented here, that the phenomena of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are intrinsically bound notions, devoid of binary divide.

Both teachers’ emphasis on promoting concentration in young children reflects their adherence to ‘uninterrupted play’. Amanda emphasised the importance of concentration as being a central reason for supporting children to play uninterrupted. The findings suggest that both teachers felt that children’s ability to focus and concentrate was because they were deliberately not interrupted during play. Mary made the point that teachers do not need to keep interrupting infants because they [the infants] know what they are doing. This active role of the individual learner is consistent with Piaget’s theoretical perspective on constructivism and cognitive development.
**Risk**

The findings clearly linked the notions of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ to the area of risk. Both Amanda and Mary felt that allowing children to experience ‘risky’ situations without interruption is an important component of learning. This was evident both in the interview data and video data. A recent study by Dalli et al. (2011) investigating infant-toddler pedagogy highlighted a belief focused on refraining from interrupting infants at play. Rockel (2011) reports on a play episode that involved a level of risk for the children and teachers. The play episode “illustrated the teacher’s attentive presence and sensitivity when making professional judgement in whether or not to intervene” (p. 19). Video footage illustrated Amanda moving towards the toddlers tentatively and with sensitivity as a toddler fell backwards into a ball trough. Mary spoke disparagingly about student teachers being obsessed with keeping children safe, believing that this limits children’s learning. Dalli et al.’s findings support the present study’s findings that children benefit from teachers who think critically about interacting with infants and toddlers to protect them from ‘risk’. These findings indicate the belief that a degree of risk during ‘uninterrupted play’, devoid of teacher interruption but with the anticipation of ‘teacher interaction’, is crucial to the process of learning and discovery.

**The environment and resources**

‘Uninterrupted play’ is often linked by infant and toddler teachers to Piagetian theory, where the onus is on the teachers to create a stimulating environment for children to explore and assimilate new knowledge independently (Burman, 1994). ‘Uninterrupted play’ in relation to constructivist theory involves teachers making decisions regarding what, where and how material objects that might promote learning are placed in the environment.

A focus on environmental factors in relation to ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ became evident within the research findings, and Lenz Taguchi’s view on material resources became increasingly attractive as a framework of interpretation. Lenz Taguchi (2010), arguing from a distinctly critical perspective, discusses the force and impact that material objects can have in learning if the teacher/adult holds to an ethics of immanence concerned with inter-connections and intra-actions in-between human and non-human organisms. Lenz Taguchi
argues that while a constructivist/social constructivist perspective views the child as an active agent in learning, it is only human expressions that are valid; the material world is “passive and separated from the learner” (p. 46).

Video data demonstrated the influence of resources on the environment, and the ‘intra-connections’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) between the toddlers with the environment. Amanda spoke about her enthusiasm for finding and creating resources for children to explore independently without teacher interaction, noting the significance of resources and how children relate and respond to objects in many ways that may not be conceivable from an adult’s perspective. Amanda’s very sensitive movements on the floor indicate her awareness that her body is an ‘intra-active’ presence, influencing everything and everybody around her. Lenz Taguchi contends that pedagogical spaces influence “what we might say or do, or not say or do” (p. 5). Video footage showed the teachers and children interacting with “the material world as an agentic producer of meaning” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 46). Mary spoke about the Reggio Emilia philosophy, acknowledging the environment as being ‘the third teacher’.

In relation to the RIE philosophy and the environment, Amanda emphasised that resources open up many opportunities for children to use their imagination and to explore freely with endless possibilities. Amanda’s attentive awareness and deference towards making and finding resources demonstrates that she values the ‘agentic’ quality that material objects represent in the learning process. This suggests that when viewing resources through the lens of ‘uninterrupted play’ there is an indication of Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) theory that the “material world acts upon our thinking just as much as our thinking acts upon it” (p. 49).

Section Two: ‘Teacher interaction’ in early childhood education

Theory and Philosophy

The teachers in this study emphasised the importance of ‘uninterrupted play’ for children. It is evident that the teacher’s role in relation to an interpretation of the relationship between ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ is complex and necessarily problematic.
In terms of differing pedagogical perspectives on theory in the literature, Piaget is most often linked to constructivist theory and Vygotsky to sociocultural theory. Piaget and Vygotsky agreed that children learn through creating their own knowledge and have the opportunity to practise skills, knowledge and dispositions through play. Piaget’s (1951) emphasis on ‘self-discovery’ through independent exploration implies that the teacher’s role is to provide learning opportunities with which the child can interact independently. In contrast, Vygotsky’s (1978) emphasis is on children actively constructing knowledge through interactions with others, not least those significant others in their immediate cultural setting. Underpinned by sociocultural theory, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* emphasises both autonomous learning, based on constructivism, and more socially situated learning, co-constructed with others (p. 9). This duality of disparate theoretical perspectives in practice has proved challenging for teachers, who grapple with sociocultural interpretations and often ‘default’ to constructivist and even behaviourist perspectives in practice because critical reflection on this tension in the curriculum itself has never been fully addressed (Hill, 2011).

The findings of this study reflect not only the two teachers’ constructivist and social constructivist perspectives, illustrative of the sedimented theoretical layers that are likely to be inherent within interactions in 2013 (Hill, 2011), but also an overlay of critical perspectives (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) that creates a new layer of meaning by which to understand and interpret the place of teacher interaction in ‘uninterrupted play’.

**The tension between developmental/constructivist and sociocultural theories**

The literature highlights a tension between developmental and sociocultural perspectives regarding early childhood education. The tension seems to emanate from the Piagetian, constructivist view that children should be supported and encouraged to construct their own knowledge. From a developmental perspective, the role of the teacher is ambiguous in relation to interacting with children during play, with the ambiguity having the potential to cause teachers to ‘default’ to a behaviourist and directive perspective on interaction with children (Hill, 2011).
One research finding regarding teacher interaction is the juxtaposition of the two teachers’ developmental and sociocultural theoretical perspectives. While the notion of not interrupting children when they are playing is intrinsically linked to developmental theory, responses frequently demonstrated a sociocultural perspective on ‘uninterrupted play’, rather than the developmental notion of ages and stages. For example, Mary criticised what she saw as an adult preoccupation with children’s ages, instead of focusing on the child as being capable for who they are.

Both teachers’ understanding and implementation of multiple perspectives such as the sociocultural valuing of relationships and communication, as embedded within Te Whāriki alongside pedagogical views derived from, for example, the RIE philosophy, are indicative of the many theoretical layers that influence teachers’ daily decisions in 2013 (Hill, 2011). Amanda emphatically stated that ‘uninterrupted play’ is vital and the video footage generally reflected this belief. But the video footage also revealed that her advocacy for ‘uninterrupted play’ was modified by a broader understanding of play and interaction, epitomised when she moved slowly and tentatively in response to where her bodily presence alone would act as an interactive tool to support the toddlers’ play, indicative of Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) theorising on an intra-active pedagogy.

The tension between sociocultural theory and developmental theory is well documented. For example, Hedges and Cullen (2005) argue that developmental theory does not make explicit links to teaching and learning processes engaged in by children and teachers, thereby leaving the teachers unsure of their role in relation to interactions during play. The teachers in this study had definite views on sharing knowledge. Mary believed that teachers should share knowledge with very young children when there is interesting knowledge to share. Amanda referred to the importance of not taking the lead away from children, yet she was aware that as the teacher she might have ideas that she would like children to grasp. Hedges (2013) contends that teachers in early childhood should engage “naturally with children in matters related to their interests” (p. 285). What ‘naturally’ means, then, becomes a further aspect of the tension inherent in taking multiple layered theoretical perspectives in practice.
The literature discusses diverse perceptions that potentially polarise understandings of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Dalli, Rockel, Duhn, Craw and Doyle (2011) conducted a two year study with twelve teachers in five infant and toddler centres in Auckland and Wellington. They found an “intriguing co-existence of apparently contradictory views” (p. 2). On the one hand the teachers talked about being intentionally responsive to children. One the other hand, the teachers spoke about spontaneous learning resulting from children’s own agency. Dalli et al. (2011) identified this issue as a fundamental tension, reflecting multiple theoretical influences. Wood (2007) warns that when discussing play in pedagogical discussions, adult-directed interactions can take precedence. However White (2009) argues that very young children require teacher interaction to learn certain genres of play. These findings communicate the tension inherent in the juxtaposition of theoretical perspectives. For example, while Amanda was explicit in her advocacy of ‘uninterrupted play’, there was evidence within the video footage that she was very aware of opportunities to co-construct learning. Mary referred to the influence of socio-cultural theory upon her beliefs and practices, largely focused on sharing knowledge with children. Amanda spoke about ‘modelling’ as an interactive teaching strategy; this ‘behaviourist’ strategy complements the constructivism that underpins her beliefs in ‘uninterrupted play’.

*Sharing knowledge*

Mary spoke explicitly about the importance of sharing interesting knowledge, not within a deliberate ‘lesson plan’ but in a more natural flow of experiences, creating a ‘culture’ of sharing information and thought-full provocations. She related her ideas on socially interactive learning to Vygotsky’s theories. Fleer (2010) claims that children can learn important content knowledge when teachers and children engage in sharing everyday conceptual understandings. This pedagogical approach contrasts sharply with an approach that sees resources as primarily providing possibilities for concept formation. The idea promoted by Fleer (2010) contrasts with the RIE view of ‘uninterrupted play’, where children are afforded the time and space to form conceptual understandings without unnecessary adult interactions (Gerber, 2005).
While Amanda clearly aligned her practice with the RIE tenet of not interrupting play, video data revealed that her presence in the environment could be viewed as a form of ‘teacher interaction’. Lenz Taguchi (2010) emphasises the “collaborative process of meaning-making taking place between human subjects, their bodies and things” (p. 90). In the video footage Amanda seemed highly aware of her position and the influence of her physicality; for example, always remaining at the same level as the toddlers and moving with them on the floor space. Fleer (2010) describes a ‘double move’ where the early childhood teacher knows the child through “contextual intersubjectivity”, (p. 49) gauges what knowledge and concepts the child has to share, and then ‘moves’ the child in a responsive way to relevant concepts, thus creating “conceptual intersubjectivity” (p. 49). Fleer stresses that to do this is difficult, requiring great skill and a high level of knowledge about how to relate everyday experience with concepts in play-based programmes in this way. Amanda was tentative in her approach, pointing out in the interview that when she interacts with children she is aware of how much information she is sharing in relation to where the child’s thinking and ideas might be leading. Amanda was well aware of opportunities to extend children’s learning as well as questioning the validity of these in relation to more autonomous learning processes. Amanda’s ideas included gauging the most appropriate time to interact, along with recognition that this engagement would offer new ideas and new possibilities. Amanda was aware that using body language and “words that I think might help” aided thinking and learning processes. Amanda also stated that children need to feel comfortable, relaxed and safe; teachers should offer ‘careful assistance’ to avoid taking over from what the child is doing.

In relation to Fleer’s (2010) ‘double move’ it is pertinent to note that Amanda pointed out, “you are there to help out if need be in the way that you think helps the situation”. Video footage and written observations illustrated how Amanda was very aware of the children’s current understandings, making herself available to use this knowledge to affirm their current learning and possibly add to it.

**Questioning**

In this study, the notion of asking questions is an aspect of teacher interaction linked to the sharing of content knowledge (Fleer, 2010; Hedges & Cullen, 2005). Amanda stated that she
does ask questions, “so long as their answer does make a difference” and that the question “is relevant to what they are doing”. While Mary felt that sharing content knowledge was worthwhile if achieved through “natural conversations”, she also felt that asking questions to “test children’s knowledge” was not appropriate. The findings regarding ‘questions’ are seen to be relevant to Fleer’s (2010) idea that learning must be authentic and meaningful to the child. For example, Mary criticised the practice of asking children “rote questions” rather than for “genuine enquiry”. Mary acknowledged her uncertainty regarding the practice of “using questions to extend a child’s thinking”; she suggested that the teacher needs to “genuinely want the child to think of the answer themselves”. Therefore, while the importance of ‘uninterrupted play’ was clearly evident in the interviews, there was also evidence across all methods, of support for ‘teacher interaction’. This demonstrates the value of viewing the two notions as being intrinsically bound together, not separate, polarised concepts, recognising that teachers who have a responsibility for children’s learning must “understand things in necessarily more complex ways” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 24).

**Complexity**

Goodfellow (2008) contends that while the quality of teacher/child interactions in early childhood settings is reported to be fundamental to what constitutes ‘quality’ care and education, the nature of these interactions is not clearly defined. This lack of focus on interactions “potentially ignores the complexity of early childhood practitioners’ work” (p. 17). The research data was supported by the literature, and both substantiated and contributed to the complexity of interactions. For example, while ‘uninterrupted play’ was a chosen pedagogical practice for both participants, linked in different ways to the RIE philosophy, the findings exemplified the complex, multifaceted nature of daily interactions. The findings highlighted the subjective and ‘in situ’ nature of interactions. Physical responses to hunger, tiredness and needing a nappy change were reasonably clear physical indicators of reasons to interact with toddlers, being the pedagogical emphasis of RIE.

The literature highlights the problematic issue of teacher interactions in early childhood settings (Cullen, 1996; Fleer, 2010; Hedges, 2000; Nuttall, 2013; Stover, White, Rockel & Toso, 2010). The polarisation of disparate theoretical viewpoints in the literature encourages
teachers to reduce complexity, rather than embrace the intricate, complex and linked minutiae inherent within ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ as found within this study. Mary talked about the need to reflect “in the moment” when deciding whether to encourage children to participate in her planned, “interesting” experiences or to “just leave them to it.”

In Visser’s (2006) research on teachers’ beliefs and practices in toddler art education, findings revealed a tension between developmental and sociocultural interpretations of interactions. Visser recommended that a focus on teachers sharing subject knowledge with children would be beneficial to support children’s content learning. Interactions between teacher and children would be a precursor to acquiring such knowledge. In this study, Mary spoke clearly about subject content knowledge in relation to making bread. She pointed out that infants and toddlers can come up with their own theories about the baking process whilst being involved in the essentially social process of baking. A social constructivist approach to teaching and learning tends to highlight relationships and interactions between children and people, places and things. Whilst adhering to the RIE tenet of not interrupting play, the findings revealed that the two participants enact a multiplicity of interactions.

Section Three: The complexity of polarisation

The terms ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are polarising concepts that create a tension for early childhood teachers. This tension is due to the understanding that the polar opposite to ‘uninterrupted play’ is that of ‘interrupting play’. Similarly, the polar opposite to the notion of ‘teacher interaction’ suggests ‘teachers not interacting’. Lenz Taguchi (2010) asserts that we tend to fall into the trap of an either/or binary divide, explaining that binary divides structure our thinking in reductive ways that make it impossible to create “mixtures as well as states of both-and and in-between” (p. 20). Lenz Taguchi argues that problematic attitudes should be embraced, rather than viewed as barriers to overcome, so that complex problems lead to critical insights.

The findings of this study substantiated a complexity that is not always made explicit in the literature. As the research progressed in analytic circles (Creswell, 2013) it became clear that there was a need to question conventional definitions of the two notions, recognising the need
to explore alternative meanings for the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ and the relationship between them. This study argues that the concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ require reconceptualising and continual teacher reflection ‘in action’, in a bid to overcome the problematic issue of polarising the two concepts as disparate entities that hinder a more critical approach towards working with young children. This chapter will now explore the findings at a critical level, identifying new ideas that have surfaced following the data analysis. This research argues that when the two concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ are synchronised, rather that viewed as polarised perspectives, the concepts of ‘presence’ and ‘immanence’ can be encountered. It is argued that this critical perspective is substantiated by the findings from this research.

**Teacher positioning and the body**

The positioning of the teachers’ physical selves was significant within the findings. Amanda’s movements were fluid in nature, distinguished by a smooth shifting of her body while remaining on floor level. Video footage showed her moving nearer and further away in relation to where the toddlers were situated, mostly without verbal interaction. When considering the interview transcript, video footage and written observations, it appears that a priority for Amanda is to remain as unobtrusive as possible, staying ‘quietly present’, unless a child initiates the interaction, or harm is imminent. Mary moved around a much larger area, walking, crouching to interact with children, or sitting on children’s chairs. Mary also portrayed a certain tentativeness around physically interacting with children, often observing from a distance and seeming thoughtful about whether to initiate interactions.

Through analysis of the three sets of data, and through an analysis of the literature reviewed, new literature has been sought to encompass the new understandings that have emerged. Interaction does not necessarily mean that teachers are directly and physically questioning children. The findings illustrate that a preconceived perception of interaction as being verbal and/or physical does not capture the essence of the teacher’s physical presence. ‘Teacher interaction’ becomes enriched with the notion of ‘presence’, underpinned by an ethics of immanence.
Sansom questions whether 'the body' is an endangered species; she calls for a reconceptualisation of the body in early childhood education. This reconceptualisation of the body relates to the argument that a teacher’s bodily presence must be understood as being intrinsic to ‘uninterrupted play’; children are always subject to the presence of the teacher and the impact that this has on their experiences. Focusing on a child's holistic presence in the world, everyday experiences become highly attentive moments, where children experience "ultimate freedom of physical engagement and self-understanding" (Sansom, 2007, p. 13). The research findings supported this idea of honouring the body in relation to teachers’ beliefs around not interrupting children in ‘risky’ situations. Mary talked about celebrating the fact that children want to run. Amanda referred to the RIE philosophy, declaring that children develop greater understanding of their bodies when empowered to manage their own risks.

**Immanence**

Lenz Taguchi (2010) explains ‘immanence’ as understanding that our existence is in “a co-existence with the rest of the world” (p. 15). Therefore, ‘immanence’ means that we are all in a relationship of interconnection with each other and with non-living things. Early childhood teachers are encouraged in *Te Whāriki* to remember that children learn through reciprocal and responsive relationships “with people, places, and things” (p. 9). Fleer (2010) devised a complex pedagogical model encompassing a ‘double move’ whereby the ‘field’ of the child and the ‘field’ of the teacher interconnect. The implication of this ‘double move’ for children and teachers is that teachers require great skill and insight, recognising the interconnectedness within the learning-teaching process.

The argument presented by authors such as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Lenz Taguchi (2010) is the paradox that the more teachers learn about the complexity of how children learn; the more they attempt to reduce the complexity of learning and knowing. This teacher desire to explicitly reduce complexity is directly derived from the abstract polarisation of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Lenz Taguchi therefore calls for an ‘ethics of immanence’, explaining this as viewing “ourselves in a constant and mutual state of responsibility for what happens in the multiple intra-actions emerging in the learning event, as we affect and are being affected by everything else” (p. xvii). This explanation is applicable
when questioning the term ‘uninterrupted play’, the inference being that children are free to play unhindered by adult interaction. The findings suggest that teachers are in fact always in the physical environment, bodily present and continuously observing children for signs that interaction is immediately or imminently required. Therefore, what becomes crucial is the sensitivity and tentativeness that teachers bring to the early childhood setting. Lenz Taguchi describes the ‘subtleties’ located within the video footage. These ‘subtleties’ were expanded in the interviews when Amanda advocated using modified vocabulary with children, choosing words that don’t take control of the situation, so that the learning can go ‘anywhere’. The findings showed participants responding tentatively, with video footage and written observations portraying an element of teacher respect for children’s individual trajectories while remaining aware of their social context. Lenz Taguchi (2010) explains that it is possible to “go beyond the polarisations of the binary divides, and transform teaching and learning to create something new” (p. 118).

Presence

The concept and defining notion of ‘presence’ can be useful in addressing the polarisation of the terms ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) define the notion of ‘presence’ as “being fully conscious and aware in the present moment …. deep listening, of being open beyond one’s preconceptions and historical ways of making sense” (p. 13). An idea that Senge et al. put forward is that many people find it very difficult to view anything with “fresh eyes” (p. 28). They argue that this is a universal problem; people cannot see the reality they face because they are bound by what they already know. This ‘universal problem’ is relevant to this study because as Hill (2011) contends, within early childhood education, there are sedimented ideas that are implicit in practice, influencing teachers’ decision-making regarding interactions. Hill expounds that it is important for teachers to reflect on these sedimented ideas so they can be examined in relation to newly introduced ideas. When this happens, a situation can change from “re-creating the past to manifesting or realizing an emerging future” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 14).

The findings in this study depict the notion of ‘presence’, which requires a quietening of the mind, wherein the flow of practical and defined thoughts ceases and boundaries between self
and outward manifestations dissolve. Amanda’s interview responses depicted such a notion; evidence in the video footage illustrated an ability to allow children to just ‘be’ without forming conclusions. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) noted that when simply observing without forming conclusions, fresh ways to understand children emerge.

Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) contest that problems will persist until people learn how to see with their eyes and hearts open: “breakthroughs come when people learn how to take the time to stop and examine their assumptions” (p. 33). Sansom relates this idea to the Latin term *currere*, a curriculum that acknowledges a person’s holistic ‘presence’, inclusive of the past, the present and the future. *Currere* "enables us to slow down, to analyse our own lived experiences and to become more consciously submerged in the present" (Sansom, 2007, p.13).

In the conclusion, the implication of the findings will be considered in relation to the introduction of ‘new’ ideas that have the potential to respond to the tension and complexity arising from the literature, regarding ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. The limitations of the study will be outlined and recommendations for future research made.
Conclusion

This research explored the notions of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ and the apparent tension between these notions. The research examined the perspectives and practices of two experienced early childhood teachers in order to gain a deeper understanding of this tension. Through drawing on three triangulated methods (interviews, video and observations) the study has revealed that while the two teachers believe in the benefits of ‘uninterrupted play’, ‘teacher interaction’ was an inherent part of their pedagogy and practice. The concept of ‘uninterrupted play’ does not necessarily mean that teachers follow a distinctly constructivist or social constructivist perspective. Instead, the findings indicate that viewing ‘teacher interaction’ in relation to the concept of ‘uninterrupted play’ from a more critical perspective emphasises a connected and alternative view that lies beyond constructivism and social constructivism to create “mixtures as well as states of both-and and in-between” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 20).

This research proposes that the notions of ‘immanence’ and ‘presence’, as presented in the discussion, reflect a more complex, multi-faceted way by which teachers might address any uncertainty over their interaction in children’s play. This dissertation agrees that problematic educational understandings should be embraced rather than viewed as barriers to overcome, and that complex problems can lead to critical insights (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This research supports the notion that when viewing ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ from a critical perspective, teaching must necessarily be seen as complex. The philosophy, pedagogy and practices of the two experienced teachers, as noted in the findings, highlighted the complex nature of their interactions during children’s play.

Early childhood teachers need to look more deeply at the theories they believe underpin their practice and also at the embedded theories that permeate their settings and the wider early childhood education ‘givens’ about ‘teacher interaction’ and ‘uninterrupted play’. By moving towards a critical pedagogy that draws on both constructivist and social constructivist theories as well as alternative pedagogies, teachers will realise deeper insights into their practice.
‘Immanence’ and ‘presence’, as notions about ‘teacher interaction’ in play, carry ethical connotations that can be viewed as viable moral constructs with which to respond to the tension and complexity arising from the literature regarding ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’.

An ‘ethics of immanence’ conveys the crucial importance of the sensitivity and tentativeness that teachers might bring to the early childhood setting. This research explicated the ‘subtleties’ within interactions, emphasising the subtle balance of ‘control’ exerted over children and their learning so that learning can go ‘anywhere’. This sensitivity and tentativeness was inherent in the participants’ practice, juxtaposed with their awareness of the social context.

The notion of ‘presence’ is described in the literature as “being fully conscious and aware in the present moment” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005, p. 13). This requires a quietening of the mind, allowing teachers to observe without forming conclusions so that fresh ways to understand children emerge. When teachers use these insights, adults and children can engage in processes of mutual transformation based on making use of the differences and increased complexities that exist within ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

An interesting and important concept that relates well to the notions of ‘immanence’ and ‘presence’ is Fleer’s (2010) ‘double move’. This is a pedagogical construct, which emphasises the deep insightfulness, skill and knowledge that teachers require when gauging interactions with children and shifting children’s thinking from the context (what children know) to the concept (what has yet to be learnt).

**Limitations**

The findings in this study took place in two early childhood settings and were limited to two interviews and two sets of video and observation data. While this promoted the gathering of rich descriptions and observations of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, the findings cannot be generalised across all early childhood settings. Therefore, the findings will
be open to individual interpretation in relation to each particular context, and the transferability of the findings will be dependent on the correlation with the descriptions provided.

Video footage was recorded for approximately fifty minutes at both research sites. In a larger study, to gain additional insights into ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’, a researcher could collect video footage and written observations on another day in order to gain a more robust account of the two concepts. Furthermore, it could be advantageous to analyse the video footage together with the teachers to gain their perspectives, facilitating a professional critique and analysis to ask: “When is an interaction an interruption of personal learning processes?”

This research was a small-scale research study for a 60 point Master’s dissertation. The decision to employ three data collection methods to facilitate the strategy of triangulation proved worthwhile and effective. However, the analysis of the three sets of data, particularly the video footage, was a lengthy process. Therefore, other researchers undertaking small-scale research studies and wishing to employ ‘triangulation’ should make allowances for the time required.

**Suggestions for further study**

The literature supports this research in emphasising the need for early childhood teachers to have specialised knowledge for responding to the complexity inherent within ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’. This study raises a valuable and credible argument for continuing research that examines and responds to the question of what influences early childhood teachers’ decisions regarding their interactions with children during play.

The research question has been shown to relate to the need for teachers to embrace complexity and understand that daily decisions around interacting with infants, toddlers and older children are influenced by multiple, complex theoretical perspectives.
Further studies could focus on Fleer’s (2010) ‘double move’ and explore ways in which teachers interpret and implement the theoretical constructs of ‘contextual intersubjectivity’ and ‘conceptual intersubjectivity’ in their daily interactions with children at play.

As the RIE philosophy influenced the teachers’ thinking and actions in this study, a further study could investigate how pedagogy from a RIE perspective impacts on teachers’ conscious sharing of knowledge with children. That is, if teachers deliberately support the idea of children playing in an ‘uninterrupted’ manner, how then do teachers share conceptual understandings? What other factors influence teacher pedagogy?

The notions of ‘immanence’ and ‘presence’, as outlined in the discussion, could be further explored and viewed through the lens of the polarised concepts of ‘uninterrupted play’ and ‘teacher interaction’ as presented in the literature.
Appendix A

Participant Information sheet – Manager
Dear [Manager],

This letter is to ask if you would kindly assist me with a research project I am conducting as part of the requirements for my Master of Education degree at the University of Auckland under the supervision of Diti Hill and Dr Adrienne Sansom. The research is motivated by my ongoing interest in this area and my experiences as an early childhood educator, parent educator, professional development facilitator and tertiary lecturer. The aim of this study is to learn about how early childhood teachers perceive their role in regards to uninterrupted play and their interactions with children who are engaged in play and learning experiences. The study involves an observation and a videoed recording of one teacher in relation to infants and/or toddlers, while they are involved in play and learning experiences. This will be followed by an interview with the participating teacher.

For this small research study I have selected your early childhood education service. Parents/guardians of the children will be asked to sign a consent form if they agree for their child to be part of this study.

I would kindly ask to meet with you to provide the information about the research to pass onto all the teachers so that they can have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the research if interested. I would then ask you to give the participant information sheet and
consent form to the teacher who chooses to be part of the study and the parents/guardians of the children. I have attached the participant information sheets and consent forms.

The intended observation methods are video recording and written observations. The teacher in relation to the children will be video recorded for about one hour on one day between March 1, 2013 and March 22, 2013 on a day that is predetermined to suit all people involved. Each written observation will take place on the same day for about one hour. If I perceive that the teacher participant or the children do not wish to be observed or recorded at any given time I will cease video recording. The specific aim is to only video record the teacher participant and the participating children, and for this reason no other staff member or child will be video recorded. I will provide a notice to put up on the main door of the service to advise any visitors that recording is taking place.

Children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed. The teacher will be invited to participate in one interview which will take approximately one hour. With the permission of yourself as the manager this would take place at your early childhood service premises at a time convenient to the teacher participant and yourself, between the dates of March 1, 2013 and March 22, 2013. I will digitally audio record this interview for the purpose of transcribing the dialogue.

You will have the opportunity to edit your transcript following the interview. This editing process will need to be completed within a two week timeframe from the time of you receiving the transcript.

For this research I require approval to use video and digital audio recordings of the teacher and children for the purpose of collecting and transcribing research data. Only the de-identified written analysis of the data will be included in the Masters dissertation and may be used in publications, at presentations and education conferences. The teacher’s first name will be represented by a pseudonym. The video recordings are for the purpose of data collection and analysis; the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis.

I wish to give you the following assurances. The participation of the teacher and the children is voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, or withdraw information that has been provided up until data collection ceases, without giving a reason. I anticipate this will be on March 22, 2013. The selected data will be kept indefinitely as part of the dissertation and will be archived with the dissertation or stored securely in a locked cabinet in my home.

To protect the identity of participants, consent forms and data will be stored separately and securely by my supervisor at The Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. The data from the written observation and interview will be kept for a period of six years and then destroyed. After six years, written data will be shredded and digital audio recording data will be erased.
Every attempt will be made to protect the identity of your setting although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Any information provided will be reported or published in a way that does not identify you or your centre as its source. I also seek your assurance that the teachers’ and parents’/guardians’ decisions to participate or not participate in this research will not affect the teachers’ or parents’/guardians’ relationship with yourself as the manager, relationship with the Centre, or employment. At the completion of the study the participant teacher will receive a copy of the dissertation by post.

As the researcher I will retain ownership of all of the collected data. If you have any further queries please contact me or my supervisors. I do hope you will agree to your service participating in this research. If so, I would appreciate you signing the Consent Form and returning it to me in the envelope provided.

Yours sincerely

My contact details are:
Susan Widger
Phone: Mobile: 021 1028760
Email: swid010@aucklanduni.ac.nz

My supervisors are:
Diti Hill
Senior Lecturer
School of Teaching, Learning & Development
Faculty of Education
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Senior Lecturer
School of Curriculum & Pedagogy
Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
a.sansom@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48400

For ethical concerns please contact:
The Chair
The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12/12/2012 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 8637
Appendix B

Consent form – Manager
Consent Form – Manager of Early Childhood Education Service

This form will be held for a period of six years

Manager:
Researcher: Susan Widger
Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings
Date:

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been asked to give permission for the researcher to approach a teacher in my service to participate in this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that the researcher will ask me to provide the information to the teachers so they can choose to volunteer for the project if interested.
- I understand that the parents/guardians will be asked to sign a consent form if they agree for their child to be part of this study. I understand that the teacher participant will be asked to sign a consent form if he/she agrees to participate.
- I understand that observation involves a written observation, a video recording and a digital audio recording (interview) of the teacher and children during March, 2013. I understand that if the researcher sees that a child is disturbed by the observation or recording she will cease the observation and/or recording immediately. I understand that no other people will be incidentally video recorded including myself. Children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed.
- I agree to the teacher participant being interviewed at my early childhood service premises at a time convenient to the teacher participant and myself, between the dates of 1 March, 2013 and 22 March, 2013, and that it will be digitally audio recorded.
• I understand that the teacher participant and children will be video and digital audio recorded and that only the de-identified written analysis of the data will be included in the Masters dissertation and possibly in future presentations, conferences and publications. I also understand that the video recordings are only for the purpose of data collection and analysis and that the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis.

• I agree that a pseudonym will be used to represent the first name of the teacher participant.

• I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that the participation of the teacher and children is voluntary. I give my assurance that the teacher participant’s and parents'/guardians’ decisions to participate, or not participate in this research will not affect the teacher participant’s or parents'/guardians’ relationship with myself as the manager, relationship with the Centre, or employment.

• I understand that I may withdraw my permission to participate in this research at any time, without giving a reason.

• I understand that I may withdraw information that has been provided at any stage up until data collection ceases on 22 March, 2013, without giving a reason.

• I understand that data from the written observation and interview will be kept for six years, after which they will be destroyed. I understand that this Consent Form will be securely stored separately from the research data for six years beyond the completion of the research, when both will be destroyed.

• I understand that while every attempt will be made to protect identities through using pseudonyms to represent the teacher’s name, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to participate in this research project (please circle one)  YES  NO

Manager’s name  ........................................................................................................

Signature..........................................................................................................................

Date..................................................................................................................................
Appendix C

Participant Information sheet – Teachers
Teacher:
Researcher: Susan Widger
Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings
Date:

Dear

This letter is to ask if you would kindly assist me with a research project I am conducting as part of the requirements for my Master of Education degree at the University of Auckland under the supervision of Diti Hill and Dr Adrienne Sansom. The research is motivated by my ongoing interest in this area and my experiences as an early childhood educator, parent educator, professional development facilitator and tertiary lecturer. The aim of this study is to learn about how early childhood teachers perceive their role in regards to uninterrupted play and their interactions with children who are engaged in play and learning experiences. The study involves an observation and a videoed recording of one teacher in relation to infants and/or toddlers, while they are involved in play and learning experiences. This will be followed by an interview with the participating teacher.

The intended observation methods are video recording and written observations. You will be video recorded in relation to the children for about one hour on one day between 1 March, 2013 and 22 March, 2013 on a day that is predetermined to suit all people involved. Each written observation will take place on the same day for about one hour. If I perceive that you or any of the children do not wish to be observed or recorded at any given time I will cease recording. Children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed. The specific aim is to only video record the teacher participant and the participating children, and for this reason no other staff member or child will be video recorded. I will provide a notice to put up on the main door of the service to advise any visitors that recording is taking place.
The video recordings are for the purpose of data collection and analysis; the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis. Only the written analysis of the video recordings and the observations will be used as part of the Master’s dissertation and any subsequent publications or presentations.

You will be invited to participate in one interview that will be approximately one hour. This would take place at your early childhood service premises at a time convenient to you between the dates of March 1, 2013 and March 22, 2013. I will digitally audio record this interview for the purpose of transcribing the dialogue. A pseudonym will be used to represent your first name. During the audio and video recording process you have the right to stop the recording process at any time if you so wish and during the interview you can choose to switch off the recorder, or choose not to answer specific questions, in both cases without giving a reason. You will have the opportunity to edit your transcript within a two week time frame from the date you receive the transcript.

I wish to give you the following assurances. Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time, or withdraw information that has been provided up until data collection ceases, without giving a reason. I anticipate this will be on March 22, 2013. The selected data will be kept indefinitely as part of the dissertation and will be archived with the dissertation/or stored securely in a locked cabinet in my home.

To protect the identity of participants, consent forms will be stored separately and securely by my supervisor at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. The data from the written observation and interview will be kept securely in a locked cabinet for a period of six years and then destroyed. After six years, written/printed data will be shredded and digital/audio recording data will be erased. Every attempt will be made to protect your identity through the use of pseudonyms, however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Any information provided will be reported or published in a way that does not identify you. I have received assurance from your manager that your decision to participate or not participate in this research will not affect your relationship with the manager, relationship with the Centre, or employment. At the completion of the study you will receive a copy of the dissertation by post via your manager.

As the researcher, I will retain ownership of all of the collected data. If you have any further queries please contact me or my Supervisors. I do hope you will agree to participate in this research. If so, I would appreciate you signing the Consent Form and returning it to me in the envelope provided.

Yours sincerely

My contact details are:
Susan Widger
Phone: Mobile: 021 1028760

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**Email:** swid010@aucklanduni.ac.nz

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My supervisors are:</th>
<th>For ethical concerns please contact:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diti Hill</td>
<td>The Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Teaching, Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
<td>Office of the Vice-Chancellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:d.hill@auckland.ac.nz">d.hill@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td>Auckland 1142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48584</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Adrienne Sansom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior lecturer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Curriculum &amp; Pedagogy</td>
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<td>Faculty of Education</td>
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<td>The University of Auckland</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:a.sansom@auckland.ac.nz">a.sansom@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48400</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For ethical concerns please contact:
The Chair
The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
Appendix D

Consent form – Teachers
Consent Form - Teacher

This form will be held for a period of six years

Teacher: ____________________________

Researcher: Susan Widger

Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings

Date: ____________________________

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been asked to give permission to participate in this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that observation involves video, digital audio recording and written observations during March 2013, beginning March 1, 2013 and that if the researcher sees that a child is disturbed by the observation or recording she will cease recording immediately. Children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed. I also understand that other staff will not be video recorded.

- I understand that I will have the opportunity to edit my transcript within a two week time frame from the date I receive the transcript.

- I understand that only the de-identified written analysis of the data will be included in the Masters dissertation and possibly in future presentations, conferences and publications. I also understand that the video recordings are only for the purpose of data collection and analysis and that the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis.

- I understand that I will be digitally audio recorded by the researcher in an interview. I also understand that I have the right to stop the recording process at any time and switch off the recorder or choose not to answer specific questions without giving a
reason I agree to a pseudonym being used to represent my first name in the publication of the research.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand I have been given assurance that my decision to participate or not participate in this research will not affect my relationship with the manager, relationship with the Centre, or employment.
- I understand that I may withdraw my permission to participate in this research at any time, without giving a reason.
- I understand that I may withdraw information that has been provided at any stage up until data collection ceases on March 22, 2013, without giving a reason.
- I understand that data from the written observation and interview will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I understand that this Consent Form will be securely stored separately from the research data for six years beyond the completion of the research, when both will be destroyed.
- I understand that while every attempt will be made to protect my identity through the use of a pseudonym, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to participate in this research project (please circle one) YES NO

Teacher’s name ........................................................................................................................................
Teacher’s signature .....................................................................................................................................
Date...........................................................................................................................................................

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12/12/2012 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 8637
Appendix E

Participant Information sheet – Parents/Guardians
Participant Information Sheet – Parents/Guardians

Parents/Guardians:
Researcher: Susan Widger
Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings
Date:

Dear [Parent/Guardian],

This letter is to ask if you would kindly assist me with a research project I am conducting as part of the requirements for my Master of Education degree at the University of Auckland under the supervision of Diti Hill and Dr Adrien Sansom. The research is motivated by my ongoing interest in this area and my experiences as an early childhood educator, parent educator, professional development facilitator and tertiary lecturer. The aim of this study is to learn about how early childhood teachers perceive their role in regards to uninterrupted play and their interactions with children who are engaged in play and learning experiences. The study involves an observation and a videoed recording of one teacher in relation to infants and/or toddlers, while they are involved in play and learning experiences. This will be followed by an interview with the participating teacher.

For this small research study I have selected the early childhood service that your child attends. You will receive a consent form asking for your permission for me to observe your child during play and learning experiences that are in relation to the teacher participant. The intended observation methods are video recording and written observations. The teacher in relation to the children will be video recorded for about one hour on one day between March 1, 2013 and March 22, 2013 on a day that is predetermined to suit all people involved. Each written observation will take place on the same day for about one hour. If I perceive that any of the children do not wish to be observed or recorded at any given time I will cease recording. Children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed. You may be incidentally video recorded if you are in the area. A notice

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will be put up on the main door of the early childhood service to advise any visitors that recording is taking place.

I require approval from you for video recordings of your child should he/she be playing in relation to the teacher. The video recordings are for the purpose of data collection and analysis; the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis. Only the written analysis of the video recordings and the observations will be used as part of the Master’s dissertation and any subsequent publications or presentations.

I wish to give you the following assurances. The participation of your child is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your child from this research at any time, or withdraw information that has been provided up until data collection ceases, without giving a reason. I anticipate this will be on March 22, 2013. To protect the identity of participants, consent forms will be stored separately and securely by my supervisor at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. The data from the written observation and interview will be kept for a period of six years in a securely locked cabinet in my home and then destroyed. After six years, written data will be shredded and digital audio recording data will be erased. Every attempt will be made to protect the identity of your child, although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Any information provided will be reported or published in a way that does not identify your child.

I have received assurance from the manager that your decision to participate or not participate in this research will not affect your relationship or your child’s relationship with the manager or the centre. If you have any further queries please contact me or my Supervisors. I do hope you will agree for your child to be part of this research. If so, I would appreciate you signing the Consent Form and returning it to me in the envelope provided.

Yours sincerely

My contact details are:
Susan Widger
Phone: Mobile: 021 1028760
Email: swid010@aucklanduni.ac.nz
**For ethical concerns please contact:**
The Chair
The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12/12/2012 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 8637
Appendix F

Consent form – Parents/Guardians
Consent Form - Parent/Guardian

This form will be held for a period of six years

Parent/Guardian:
Researcher: Susan Widger
Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings
Date:

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been asked to give permission for my child to participate in this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that my child will be observed and recorded.
- I understand that observation involves possible video recording of my child for approximately one hour’s duration between March 1, 2013 and March 22, 2013.
- I understand that if the researcher sees that my child is disturbed by the observation or recording she will cease recording immediately.
- I understand that children whose parents have not given permission for their child to be videoed will not be videoed.
- I understand that only the de-identified written analysis of the data will be included in the Masters dissertation and possibly in future presentations, conferences and publications. I also understand that the video recordings are for the purpose of data collection and analysis and that the video footage (including all images of children) will be deleted immediately following data analysis.
- I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary. I understand I have been given assurance that my decision for my child to participate or not participate in this
research will not affect my relationship or my child’s relationship with the manager or the Centre.

- I understand that I may withdraw my permission for my child to participate in this research at any time, without giving a reason.
- I understand that I may withdraw information that has been provided at any stage up until data collection ceases on March 22, 2013, without giving a reason.
- I understand that data from the written observations will be kept securely stored for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I understand that this Consent Form will be securely stored separately from the research data for six years beyond the completion of the research, when both will be destroyed.
- I understand that my child’s confidentiality and my own confidentiality cannot be guaranteed but any information provided will be reported or published in a way that does not identify your child.

I agree to participate in this research project (please circle one)     YES         NO

Child’s name ..............................................................................................................................................
Parent/Guardian name ..............................................................................................................................
Parent/Guardian signature.........................................................................................................................
Date............................................................................................................................................................

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12/12/2012 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 8637
Appendix G

Interview questions
Interview Questions
For Teacher Participants

Researcher: Susan Widger
Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings

Date: ...../...... /2013

Duration: Interview of approximately one hour

Teacher participants: The interview is for the teachers who are responsible for the education and care of the infants and toddlers in your early childhood setting.

Teacher participants: The researcher will remind the participants that for teachers to feel able to express their views, confidentiality will be the objective. Teachers will be reminded that they are being digitally audio recorded and that a pseudonym will be used in the publication of the research.

The interview will be digitally audio recorded and then transcribed. I may take brief notes during the interview if necessary for clarity.

First I will explain the purpose of this research project and why this topic is of interest to me. I will inform them of the fact that they are one of two early childhood services involved in this project.

The interview questions will then be asked and participant respondents will be given the opportunity to respond.

The interview questions are semi-structured to allow participants to express their views, from their own perspective.
The indicative questions are:

1/ Do you believe children benefit from uninterrupted play and learning experiences?

2/ Do you ever feel confused about your interactions with children when they are engaged in play and learning experiences?

3/ Do theoretical perspectives such as socio cultural theory influence you in relation to interacting with children during play and learning experiences?

4/ Have recent philosophical influences such as Magda Gerber (RIE) influenced your decisions around uninterrupted play and teacher interaction?

5/ Do parents’ expectations of what may be deemed a ‘learning’ environment impact on your decisions on how you interact with children when they are engaged in play and learning experiences?

6/ Is there anything else you would like to contribute regarding your daily interactions with children when they are involved in play and learning experiences?

Researcher: Susan Widger
Phone: 021 102 8760
Email: swid010@aucklanduni.ac.nz

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My supervisors are:</th>
<th>My supervisors are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diti Hill</td>
<td>Dr Adrienne Sansom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:d.hill@auckland.ac.nz">d.hill@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:a.sansom@auckland.ac.nz">a.sansom@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
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<td>Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48584</td>
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Appendix H

Notice (Audiovisual recording)
ATTENTION VISITORS

TO:

AUDIOVISUAL RECORDING
IS TAKING PLACE
TODAY

Date ______________

From ____________ (am/pm) to ____________ (am/pm)

Title of research: ‘Uninterrupted play’: An exploration of teacher interaction in early childhood settings

Date: _____/_____/2013

If you have any queries please contact the researcher: Susan Widger
Phone 021 1028760
Email: swid010@aucklanduni.ac.nz

My supervisors are:
Diti Hill
The University of Auckland
d.hill@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48713

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Phone: (09) 623 8899 extn 48400
APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON ...................... 2012
FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 8637
References


doi:10.1080/09575140903402881


