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Student teacher identity formation in early childhood  
education: A cultural-historical activity theory perspective

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## **Abstract**

This study tracks the development of six student teachers during their one-year enrolment in a Graduate Diploma in Teaching (Early Childhood Education). The six students originate from China, Hong Kong and South Korea: societies which have a strong Confucian-heritage culture with an educational tradition of top-down transmission forms of teaching and learning. Using cultural-historical activity theory, this qualitative case study examines the phenomena of student teacher identity development. In this study, I conceptualise the learner as actively participating in two distinct, yet overlapping, activity systems. In this study, the formation of identity is considered an ongoing developmental process of individual negotiation and collaborative meaning making. Identity develops as a result of the student teacher negotiating understanding of self through participating in the collective social practices that contribute to achieve the goals of the early childhood setting. In some cases, the student teachers expressed ideals and hopes of a more progressive and ethical form of teaching, which they were able to implement.

This study draws on contemporary cultural-historical concepts that seek to explain both the influence of a range of settings and the role of emotions and subjectivity in the appropriation of identity by student teachers. Cultural-historical activity theory holds that identity must come from outside the individual, through the individual's engagement with self, others and the context of development. In this study, it is claimed that, true to cultural-historical activity theory and theories of expansive learning, the subject-object relationship is bidirectional in influence, meaning the subject not only acts upon the object, but the object acts on or prompts changes in the subject, which then changes the character of the object. Through the realisation of contradictions within and across activity systems, new objects are generated.

Drawing on the data and extrapolating key themes, collaboration and ethical practices are at the heart of early childhood teaching and learning. Furthermore, that culturally and linguistically diverse students are not only being changed by their involvement in early childhood teaching, but also, as a collective, they are responsible for shifts in the sector as a result of their purposeful, collaborative, and ethical efforts.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

This thesis examines case study data from a longitudinal, qualitative, empirical research study on the development of student teacher identity, among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students in Auckland, New Zealand. The participants in this study were students enrolled in a one-year Graduate Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Society is currently experiencing major societal, technological and methodological advances which have brought about significant changes in the tertiary student population, in the models of initial teacher education (ITE), and shifts in the actual goals of teacher education (Douglas, 2012; Ellis, Edwards, Smagorinsky, 2010). This study explores how such advances have influenced the development of student teacher identity, as students from international settings seek to become early childhood teachers through studying blended programmes of teacher education. This form of curriculum delivery allows students to study online while simultaneously being placed in early childhood settings, creating opportunities for expansive learning.

Since the turn of the century, the rate of students studying in countries outside their country of origin has increased by over 100% (UNESCO, 2016). This is particularly evident in Auckland, New Zealand, where the number of international students enrolled in tertiary institutions makes international education New Zealand's fifth biggest export industry and the second biggest services sector (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The presence of international students has also contributed to Auckland's super-diversity status, with almost 60 different home languages spoken by its inhabitants (May, 2016). In the private tertiary institution teachers' college in Auckland, New Zealand, where this study is situated, there has been a more than 400% increase in the number of international students studying early childhood education over the last five years. This is reflective of a global realignment by many world governments that have recognised the value of early intervention and have announced reforms focused on improving access to high quality early childhood education (Taguma, Litjens, Kim, & Makowiecki, 2012; UNICEF, 2015).

In my role as a teacher educator over the last ten years, I have witnessed first-hand the kinds of transformative experiences and challenges that learning to be an early childhood teacher can bring to newly arrived immigrant students. Many such students seek new experiences and

new conceptualisations of teaching and learning which they find in the progressive, sociocultural-informed curriculum that guides early childhood learning and teaching in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, [MoE], 1996). In this study, the focus is on the student teachers, since learning how to teach influences not just the student teachers' epistemological beliefs about children's learning and development, but also their ontological beliefs and the person they are becoming (Dall'Alba, 2009). The student teachers' experiences in local early childhood settings, and the influence of their academic studies, provide the students with opportunities to negotiate their roles as professional teachers in New Zealand. However, for some CALD students in New Zealand, the transition to being an early childhood teacher is fraught with tensions and contradictions as they struggle to adjust to a new social and cultural environment (Arndt, 2012; Cherrington & Shuker, 2012).

There might be any number of reasons why the trajectory of the CALD students does not follow the normative route, as suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991), from the periphery of the community of practice of teaching to a more central and significant position. In some instances, the CALD students may meet resistance from the very communities that they seek to join, or develop a conceptualisation of early childhood that reflects an idiosyncratic understanding of early childhood pedagogy that is denied legitimacy by the community (Hodges, 1998). This study seeks to explore the experiences of six international students from their perspectives as they seek to adjust, acclimatise, and eventually contribute to both field-practice settings and also to the activity of becoming a professionally qualified early childhood teacher. In this study, learning is understood as leading to transformation (Wenger, 1998), and the activity of developing a student teacher identity constitutes a generative dynamic that prompts the student teachers to replace their original motives with new motives aligned to collaborative ethical practices (Stetsenko, 2008). This identity development is a holistic process that takes into account the highly transformational and transactional nature of learning (Wenger, 1998).

This study is concerned with the exploration of early childhood student teachers' identities across multiple settings, a focus which has become progressively more relevant over the last two decades given the increasingly fluid and dynamic relationships between people, communities, and their learning environments (Arnseth & Silseth, 2013). This focus on transitions between settings has been particularly prominent in early childhood learning and development as the significance of young children's home environment to their effective learning in early childhood settings has become ever more apparent (Carr & Lee, 2012;

Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Flear & Hedegaard, 2013; Wong & Flear, 2012). Empirical studies of children's transitions from the home environment to the formal learning environment of the early childhood centre, is a reflection of the now dominant sociocultural paradigm of early childhood education in New Zealand and Australia. This is a perspective which has informed the construction and application of the early childhood national curricula in both countries, and one that is consistent with the preparation of student teachers in their initial teacher education programmes (Edwards, 2007; Hedges & Cullen, 2012).

Moreover, within this sociocultural paradigm in early childhood education in Australia and New Zealand, there is a noticeable shift towards a more clearly defined cultural-historical approach that draws directly on neo-Vygotskian concepts (Alcock, 2016; Brennan, 2014; Flear, 2012), with an interest in learner motivation, societal needs and social practices. Similarly, in the area of identity formation, a sociocultural conceptualisation of identity development, which takes into account the learner and his/her surrounding environment, has become common in educational discourse and resonates with Atkinson's (2013) refrain that "identity now occupies a central position in the social sciences" (p. 490). This privileging of identity as the focus of student teachers' leading activity in field-practice placements, allows for an examination of both the microsocial events in which student teacher agency is foregrounded, and consideration of the macro-social structures (Jaworski & Potari, 2009; Lemke, 2008). Furthermore, the focus on the historical primacy of material, practice-related activity over language and theory lessens the theory-practice gap (Roth & Lee, 2007).

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students**

The term *culturally and linguistically diverse* (CALD) is used to describe learners from overseas. Commonly used in Australia, it is the preferred term employed by government and community agencies as a contemporary descriptor for ethnic communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). This term has also become evident in literature in New Zealand, most noticeably from local government, and health and education sectors (Waitemata DHB, 2015). I have decided to use this term, since it captures the multiple ways in which such people are differentiated. CALD people are generally defined as those people born overseas, in countries other than those classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as "main English-speaking countries" (Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2012). Australia experiences similar levels of immigration from similar source countries as New Zealand; this extends to the recruitment of international students to tertiary programmes. Implicit in the phrase *culturally*

*and linguistically diverse* is the notion of a gap between the student's home culture and the host culture of Australia and New Zealand. While immigration into both Australia and New Zealand is still headed by people from the British Isles (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), increasingly, since the 1990s in New Zealand, there has been a significant shift to allow greater numbers of Asian immigrants into the country.

Up until the late 1990s, teaching featured on Immigration New Zealand's (2011) list of essential skills in demand, meaning that immigrants hoping to teach in New Zealand received preferential treatment when applying for working and student visas. Although this was repealed in the early 2000s, since then early childhood education has remained a popular choice for immigrant students. This is a position supported by government policies which favour international students as potential migrants and the creation of new and distinct migration pathways (Robertson, 2011). Primary drivers for this popularity are that in New Zealand, unlike many OECD countries, early childhood education is a profession, with early childhood teachers on collective contracts having achieved pay parity with the compulsory sector almost two decades ago, resulting in a rise in wages across the sector.

The second attraction for immigrant graduates is that the entrance requirements for early childhood degrees, compared to the compulsory sector, are less stringent in terms of needing to have a specialised background in one of the formal academic disciplines (Education Counts, 2017). Thirdly, early childhood education is considered less problematic than the compulsory sector, which is perceived as being potentially difficult in terms of student management, particularly compared to Asian countries, where student conformity and obedience to school regulations is a given (Campbell, Tangen, & Spooner-Lane, 2006). Lastly, in recent years there has been an exponential growth in the numbers of early childhood centres, particularly in Auckland, meaning there is generally a higher demand for early childhood teachers than for teachers in the compulsory sector (Education Counts, 2016).

Students from Asian countries, including China and Korea, form the largest group of international students in the New Zealand tertiary sector (Education Counts, 2016). For Asian students, studying in an English-speaking country and gaining a Western degree are considered major advantages, both in increasing their prospects for professional mobility and in gaining employment in their home countries (Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009). Increasingly, many international students tend to see such vocational programmes as a stepping-stone to full-time employment and a job offer, thus securing permanent residency

status in the host country (Heald, 2007). Hundreds of highly skilled and educated immigrants arrive every year, including many from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who wish to pursue a career in early childhood teaching. These graduates arrive with the hope and the expectation of entering the early childhood teaching profession, but may instead face a number of cultural obstacles that prevent this realisation (Arndt, 2014).

For universities and tertiary institutions, international students constitute an important source of revenue, and the recruitment of international students has become a focused business activity (Strongman, 2013). International enrolments provide the critical mass needed to diversify the range of educational programmes on offer (OECD, 2009). Traditionally enrolments vary by discipline, with international student intakes highest in studies relating to business, information technology, and science. However, disciplines such as education are growing, as many Asian countries are likewise experiencing significant growth in the provision of early childhood services, particularly those that provide a bilingual service. Early childhood education has been identified as a key component of China's future social and economic development (Shimpi et al., 2015). This adds to the allure of becoming a qualified and registered early childhood professional with a teaching degree from New Zealand, which is internationally recognised for its contribution to the early childhood sector (Moss, 2007).

### **Professional Teacher Identity in ECE in New Zealand**

The question of who individual students become when they experience placements in early childhood centres needs to be considered alongside the question of who individual students are obligated to be (Carlone, 2012). The notion of professional identity highlights not only the social and collective aspects of identity, but also the ethical implications. The professional identity of a teacher is framed, in part, by the dominant discourse of the sector. This refers to the student teacher as both situated in practice-based settings, which have complex histories and cultures, and as a student teacher engaged in formal academic learning in initial teacher education programmes. Such programmes are framed by specific learning outcomes that reflect the standards of the governing regulatory bodies, including the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Education Council (Education Council, 2017). Moreover, teaching is a profoundly ethical profession where the early childhood teacher is in a position of power relative to the vulnerability of the young children in his/her care. Recognising this imbalance, the early childhood teacher has a professional obligation to the children to be responsive, committed and respectful of their autonomy (MoE, 1996).

To capture the ongoing development of student teacher identity, considering the individual, social and ethical dimensions, the main theoretical framework used in this study is cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). CHAT is recognised as a “powerful theoretical and methodological lens” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 1) for analysing the problems of teacher education. Although CHAT will be discussed in greater detail later in the study, suffice to say for now, it is a post-Vygotskian, practice-based, highly transactional, and context-oriented learning theory (Roth & Lee, 2007). Engeström (2014), one of the leading authorities on CHAT, claims it as a “child of Marxist scholarship” (p. xxiv), a point that is reiterated by a number of researchers who are engaged with reviewing the works of Lev Vygotsky (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012; Ratner, 2016; Roth & Lee, 2007). CHAT, which is used in the literature interchangeably with the term *activity theory*, was chosen since it allows for the naturalistic study of participants in practice-based settings in early childhood centres, whilst also recognising the significance of external influences (Ratner, 2011; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

A fundamental belief of activity theory, and one that distinguishes it from other social constructivist theories, is that “cultural-historical psychology ... postulates that reality itself is filled with meaning and values. Human beings develop their own meanings and values not by processing sensory inputs but by appropriating the meaning and values objectively existing in the world” (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 19). Therefore, I argue in this thesis that to understand the development of professional identity of early childhood teachers, one must also understand something of the historically grounded societal practices of formal institutional education. These practices must be understood both in terms of the participants’ experiences as situated learners in their home countries, and also the practices and history of early childhood education that the participants experience as part of their programme of study (Chaiklin, 2014).

Common in early childhood teaching are practices such as observing the children’s interests as a basis for future planning, the provision of free-play experiences and the prioritisation of interpersonal relations between the teacher and the children. From a CHAT perspective, these practices have been “historically formed, imbued with knowledge, freighted with emotion and shaped by the values and purposes of the institution in which they are located” (Edwards, 2011, p. 173). It is through the student teachers’ embodied engagement with such institutional practices that the student teachers start to position themselves in the teaching community of that centre, and begin to develop a teaching identity, informed by feedback from the teachers and significant others in the settings, including the children (Gee, 2008). This focus responds

to Edwards' (2015) suggestion of greater discussion of the dialectic interplay of the person of the teacher and the institutionalised practices of the early childhood centre. For example, in many centres that have a free-play or inquiry approach, the teacher is encouraged to interact with and engage the children in dialogue to discover their interests, their learning dispositions, and their working theories. The act of engaging with the children may be done by the novice teacher, but without necessarily realising the values or theory that holds this as essential practice of the setting.

This receptiveness and responsiveness to children's sensibilities is much lauded in progressive pedagogies that articulate notions of respect, reciprocity, and the development of a mindful pedagogy (Christie, 2011). Thus, in early childhood teacher education, there is recognition that effective and ethical teaching involves much more other than being technically proficient. This is perhaps best summed up in Palmer's (1997) truism "We teach who we are" (p. 15) which recognises that being an early childhood teacher requires the teacher to draw deeply on his/her own beliefs and values, therefore supporting the notion of early childhood teaching as a highly personalised and subjective field (Gibbs, 2006; Palmer, 1997).

Professionalism in ECE in New Zealand was greatly accentuated with the publication of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), the early childhood curriculum which was mandated in all early childhood centres in New Zealand under the licensing act of 2008 (Dalli, 2012). *Te Whāriki* was written to include both Western and Māori perspectives on child rearing and early childhood education. It includes a curriculum written in English and one written in Māori for Māori medium settings. *Te Whāriki* is influenced by a range of theorists, drawing for inspiration on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, Piagetian ideals of the child as a natural explorer, and Bruner's contribution to community building. *Te Whāriki* also acknowledges the influence of Vygotsky's social constructivism as well as those concepts that pertain to Māori notions of collectivism and the interdependence of the child and the larger community (Alvestad, Duncan, & Berge, 2009).

The implementation of the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* in the early childhood sector was accompanied by the publication of a code of ethics by the then union for early childhood workers (as cited in Dalli, 2010). Under Labour-led government of the time, this was a formative period for the professionalism of the early years' work force which was latter capped with policy reforms to ensure that all early childhood teachers were qualified to a

bachelor level (Dalli, 2010). These measures, along with pay parity with teachers in the compulsory sector, were clear markers that early childhood as a sector was being taken seriously and was regarded as being as important as the compulsory sector. After years of being overlooked, according to Dalli, Miller, and Urban's (2012) metaphor, Cinderella was finally coming to the ball.

However, the global recession of 2008 (Stiglitz, 2010) heralded an era of a "contracting fiscal environment that is bruising early childhood services" (Te One & Dalli, 2010, p. 41). A significant cut in the early childhood budget since 2010 has seen a reduction in opportunities for professional development for newly qualified and qualified teachers, a cessation of publicly funded research in Centres of Innovation, and a reduction in the number of qualified teachers required in centres (MoE, 2011; Mitchell, 2011). These measures have meant an increase in the number of unqualified teachers currently working with young children (Hedges, 2013). While the current National Government agrees on the importance of early childhood in the education of young children and has continued to promote participation, it has removed some standard measures of quality (Te One, 2011). There is concern from within the sector that the government's change of tack on the agreed goal of 100% qualified teachers has led to "a cheaper, market model of staffing" (Lyons, 2011, p. 32).

For newly qualified early childhood teachers, changes in the sector, which diminish the significance of professional qualifications, also result in a reduction in their chances of employment as a qualified teacher. Early childhood centres, which operate to minimum standards, may be reluctant to employ a qualified teacher at the required rates of pay, but instead hire the same teacher under an "unqualified" contract, or seek a cheaper alternative (Carr & Mitchell, 2010). Consequently, policy reforms that devalue the professional world of early childhood teachers imply greater loss for those student teachers who have invested in undertaking professional qualifications (Heald, 2007). The educational reforms introduced after the global recession have turned early childhood teachers into a cheaper commodity, both economically and socially (Kostogriz, 2012).

### **Networked Learning**

Another pressing factor that has motivated this study are current overseas trends from policy makers who seek to make teacher education an entirely school-based activity (Ellis & Orchard, 2014). Increasingly, moves are being initiated to shift teacher education away from universities and tertiary education, back to the schools. This is the case now in England and

Wales, with the real danger that teacher education is at risk of losing its professional ties with higher education (Edwards, 2009). This reignites the crucial debate about whether learning through a situated apprentice model or participatory approach has value, or whether a continued reliance on the tertiary setting to introduce more critical and democratic discourse into teacher education should be favoured (Douglas, 2012; Edwards, 2009).

This trend for towards a greater reliance on an apprenticeship model is modified by the current advancement of online and blended learning, allowing adult students, particularly non-traditional students, who may be older and have their own families, to continue working and still return to tertiary studies for further personal advancement without serious disruption (Gold, 2014). As student teachers in a blended learning environment, students access all course materials from the student platform. This online site becomes the students' "one-stop-shop" that gives them access to course guides and required and recommended readings. It provides students the facility to send and receive marked and graded assessments online, and, most significantly, from a transactional perspective, it offers a common space for student teachers to discuss the courses and to make connections from the formal study materials to workplace practices. Another aspect of networked learning, which will be featured in this study, is the students' agentic use of digital social media to organise aspects of their own learning. These networks are developed away from the gaze of the initial teacher education, and developed by the students in a move marked by collaboration, collectivity, and intentional change (Francis, 2012; Stetsenko, 2008).

One of the benefits of conducting a longitudinal qualitative study was being able to be responsive to unexpected data. The students' volitional use of the social media and participation in examples of networked learning was one such finding that may have considerable consequences for the early childhood sector in New Zealand. Networked learning is also a social learning theory that is particular to learning both from the Internet and in the physical environment (Akyol & Garrison, 2014; Jones, 2007). Networked learning has been defined as exploring the learner's connection not just with other learners but also with the materiality of the networked system, including course materials, and the online platform. This is discussed in more detail in later sections of the study.

### **Context of the Study**

The participants of this study were all enrolled at the same initial teacher education provider. This is an ongoing private tertiary institution (PTI) which has been established as a place for

early childhood teacher education for almost four decades. From 2007, the college was accredited to deliver early childhood teacher education at a bachelor's level, and two years later the college launched its graduate diploma programme. The college is the largest specialist tertiary provider of early childhood education in New Zealand via distance learning, and seven years ago, shifted from a largely correspondence-based model to a blended model of curriculum delivery.

In the last five years, international enrolments have more than tripled, reflecting both a growth in this particular area, and also the concerted efforts of strategic planning. Of the approximately 200 students enrolled in the graduate diploma at the time of the study, 33% were international students, and an estimated 50% of those were from Asian backgrounds. During the time of this study, I was the programme leader of the graduate diploma programme.

### **Organisation of the Thesis**

This introductory chapter (Chapter 1) has set the scene by outlining the broader social context against which the study takes place, including discussion of immigration, globalisation and the changing context of initial teacher education. The literature review (Chapter 2) considers theoretical perspectives that can contribute to the discussion of identity development. The review also looks explicitly at recent moves towards furthering the Vygotskian project, based on a social justice and collectivist perspective of contemporary theory-making (Fleer, 2016; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004; Stetsenko, 2008). The literature review closes with an overview of empirical studies that examines the ongoing development of learner identity from a range of contexts, including early childhood teacher education. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework of the study. Setting this chapter apart allowed for a more complete explication of the cultural-historical framework and its application to this study.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology used in this study. This section considers the implications both ontologically and epistemologically of the position taken by the researcher, framing identity as a continual process of becoming and a site of continuous negotiation. This chapter also discusses the position of the researcher and related ethical issues that were raised in the conduct of this study. The particular methods and procedures followed; interviews, document analysis, and observations are detailed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents the findings derived from the data following a thematic analysis. Chapters 7 and 8 allow for an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to the framing literature and how this may

influence the development of initial teacher education in the future. Finally, Chapter 9 is the conclusion in which implications of the current study are considered.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature in relation to the research questions on identity development as experienced by student teachers over the 50 weeks of their enrolment in a one-year graduate diploma programme in early childhood teacher education. Teacher identity is a subordinate category of identity, which itself is a highly psychologised construct that for the last 50 years has been the centre of much debate (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013). Identity and identity development go to the heart of psychology, and a number of other fields within sociology and anthropology (Bamberg & Demuth, 2016). Recently there has been a renewed interest in identity, particularly in educational literature that promotes sociocultural and CHAT perspectives (Larreamendy-Joerns, 2013; Nussbaumer, 2012). This has led to a general discourse that fosters the perspective of the mind as socially situated, interactively constituted, and culturally mediated (Martin, 2014; Stetsenko, 2016; Wertsch, 1998).

Focusing on the relational aspect of identity, American sociologist and anthropologist, G. H. Mead held that the development of identity is dependent on the interactions and exchanges of individuals with social others (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Like Vygotsky, Mead was interested in the emergence of consciousness and self-mediation. Mead defined consciousness as becoming other to oneself and through this process, the self is able to mediate the self's own reflexes (as cited in Gillespie, 2005). The suggestion here is one knows oneself, only by perceiving how others interact with the self (Blunden, 2010). From this transactional perspective, development is realised through the dynamic dialectic of the "I-me" formation, where the "I" is understood as ephemeral and phenomenological, whilst the "me" is the place in which a more permanent identity is constructed (Babaeff, 2016; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). For Mead, the ability to communicate with others was predicated on the ability of the individual to take the role or attitude of the other, and construe the self as the object of another's experience, in other words, to see one's self from another's perspective (cited in Tennant, 2012).

In this conceptualisation, identity is viewed as a mediating term between social-structural approaches and lived, interactional experiences. In this way, identity inherits many features of earlier discourses, framed in terms of soul, psyche, persona, personality, selfhood, subject, and, agency (Lemke, 2008; van Lier, 2008). The discussion of identity in this study includes

these same aspects of identity that until recently have been the refrain of approaches based on psychological theories fuelled by individualism (Martin, 2014). Using the lens of identity to study teacher development enables a fuller theorisation about the person who is learning, his/her development as a person in the community, and the ways in which proximal and distal social environments influence that learning (O’Sullivan, 2014). Using cultural-historical activity theory, this study explores the learners’ constructs of professional identities whilst in practice-based settings. The research questions that guided this study ask:

How can cultural-historical activity theory contribute to discussions about identity development for student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in early childhood education?

How do these identities develop over time with reference to the changing contexts of practice?

### **Perspectives on Learner Identity**

There is extensive literature on identity development, particularly in the last decade. As previously explained, the notion of identity is extremely difficult to define given the broad understanding across philosophical and disciplinary domains. In this section, three main approaches to discussing identity from narrative and dialogical perspectives, postmodern perspectives and ethical perspectives are identified from the literature. All three have aspects which contribute to a cultural-historical conceptualisation of identity, and all emphasise different aspects of identity which are considered holistically in this study of student teacher development. Following this overview, the discussion will be narrowed to focus specifically on Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian perspectives of identity. The review will consider how these ideas can be extrapolated to discuss, specifically, identity in an early childhood educational context informed by cultural-historical activity theory.

#### **Narrative and dialogical perspectives.**

According to narrative perspectives on identity construction, identity is the result of the stories that people tell themselves, and others tell about them (Clandinin, 2012). Integral to this is the role of language as a determining semantic resource for teachers to frame their understanding of their environment and self, since it is through articulating stories about themselves and their experiences as students that such narratives actually become the study participants’ identities. Indeed, Sfard and Prusak (2005) claim that identity is the “missing link” (p. 15) in the complex dialectic between learning and its sociocultural context, and

suggest replacing the traditional discourse of learning through the accumulation of knowledge, to viewing learning as the construction of identities.

For researchers, this narrative perspective can be accessed through in-depth interviews with the study participants, or through written reflections, since, in recounting their experiences, respondents craft together a sequence of events, into a logical series, which otherwise may not be congruent (Kramp, 2004). These narratives reveal how subjective meanings and sense of self and identity are negotiated as the individuals' histories unfold. These subjective meanings are considered paramount, since in practice situations, teachers will give greater meaning to activities and resources which they consider most salient (Edwards, 2011). It is important to note that in this current study, narratives are understood not as "life as lived" but as participants' representations recounted from a particular point in their lives and for a particular purpose (Etherington, 2012). In other words, the aim is not to uncover an objective truth, but to explore the student teachers' perceptions.

Significantly, Sfard and Prusak (2005) distinguish between stories that are projected into the future and those that tell of the past, with concern for the future orientation. As noted in the literature, in narrative accounts of identity formation, the focus is on identity as a process rather than a product, which is complemented by the view that teachers are always in the process of being and becoming (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). According to this paradigm, learning is understood as the participant closing the gap between actual identity and designated identity, or between what the student teacher understands as his/her current position and the envisioned projected self (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This space between the actual and designated identity is another way of conceptualising the zone of proximal development, where students are supported in achieving their set goal. For student teachers who are on a programme of study with a strong vocational component, such as in this current study, their designated identity is intrinsically tied to localised notions of being a professional early childhood teacher.

Teacher identity and becoming a teacher is a matter of being perceived as a teacher by oneself and by others, and a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Gee, 2000). Identity refers to both individuals' knowledge of themselves and others' recognition of them (Danielewicz, 2014; Gee, 2000). Identity has been used as an analytic lens in a growing body of educational research, both in the compulsory sector and more recently in early childhood teaching. Justification for this

move is founded not just in new understandings of relationality, but also in a discourse of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001), which points to the complexity of being a teacher working in an increasingly diverse society with a much broader range of social and cultural differences (Dalli, 2012a).

Teacher professional identity, from a narrative perspective, captures not just the technical or regulatory aspects of what it means to be a teacher, but fundamentally the values and beliefs of being a teacher. Such values and beliefs derive from one's own sense of self, and how this shifts in relation to the authoritative discourse of early childhood teaching (Gibbs, 2006; Palmer, 1997; White, 2016). In this way, student teachers are both positioned and eventually position themselves within the discourse of what it means to be a professional early childhood teacher. The notion of teacher identity as being in constant flux is captured by Olsen (2011) when he suggests, "teachers are always engaged in situated interactions that rely on prior iterations of a self while at the same time recreating themselves as professionals in relations to others" (Olsen, 2011, p. 257).

The role of teacher knowledge is also essential to a narrative perspective since knowledge is intertwined with identity, and understanding practice in narrative terms cannot be separated from the development of self and identity (Clandinin, 2012; Wenger, 1998). Recently, the notion of the narrative self has been extended with an increased emphasis on Herman's (2001) dialogical self, which in contemporary pluralistic society opens up new and interesting propositions. Van Meijl (2008) makes the case that with the recent unparalleled explosion in the scale and diversity of migration, the constitution of the dialogical self must take into account the increasing number of voices and counter-voices that are represented in the self of multicultural citizens. Charting how the previous concerns with homogeneity and permanence in society have since gradually fallen into disarray, van Meijl (2008) notes how the current international movements of people are quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from those in the past.

Drawing on a core CHAT principle of dialectical materialism, van Meijl (2008) makes the case that if the self is constituted through exchange with others, the newly constituted self cannot but reflect the heterogeneity and diversity of contemporary society in which s/he is embedded. The implication of this perspective is that as society becomes more diverse, so too do the inner dialogical voices that influence identity development (van Meijl, 2008). Van Meijl however, refutes the notion of striving for unity when the individual is confronted with

multiple voices, noting how the process of globalisation arouses a great deal of uncertainty for individuals. Globalisation, he holds, “challenges people to extend their selves and identities beyond the bounded domain of traditional settings, which automatically leads to a manipulation of internal positions and intensifies the multi-voicedness of the self” (p. 184). This framing of identity as influenced by multiple cultural voices aligns with the CHAT perspective that notes the source of identity as a material production external to the individual.

### **Postmodern perspective.**

A postmodern perspective rejects the assertion of metanarratives as the only legitimate way of knowing and of knowledge/truth as constant, universal and certain (Lyotard, as cited in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As with narrative methodologies, a postmodern perspective recognises the significance of local stories and ambiguities, which allows for a view on identity that is accepting of the coexistence of multiple identities within the one person. It also allows for local knowledge and narratives as legitimate ways of knowing (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Identity understood from a postmodern perspective is always in progress and is highly susceptible to the influence of discourse.

Discourses are defined as powerful sets of rules and behaviour associated with belonging to social groups, which shape perceptions of truth and knowledge through power to determine what is assumed to be normal (MacNaughton, 2005). In discussion of teacher identity, discourse can be understood as a shorthand to acknowledge how a point in time influences the way people view the world, and their place within it (Buchanan, 2015). Foucault explains the influence of discourse as developing “regimes of truth” where “truth” or the ways of being is constructed in a way which privileges certain knowledges over others at particular points of time (as cited in Peters, 2004). The way in which professional identity is expressed within an early childhood centre can be positioned as a regime of truth, that is, local, momentary and always linked to continuous debate (MacNaughton, 2005).

Over the years, there have been a number of hallmark contributions to the discussion of teacher identity from a postmodern perspective. Informed by postmodernism and the role of discourse, Britzman (2003) tracked the development of two student teachers in high schools in the US. To convey the process of becoming, Britzman draws on the notion of chronologies as framing time, space and values that influence the way in which identities are developed. In her study, Britzman noted the student teacher experiences four chronologies; the first

chronology explains the process of teacher socialisation and relates to Lortie's (1975) sociological study of the apprenticeship of observation. This notion of apprenticeship of observation suggests that as learners who spend thousands of hours in classrooms, they develop a particular understanding of the role of the teacher. However, this is considered a false apprenticeship, since the teacher is not preparing students to be a teacher, but to develop their understanding of a particular subject area. Lortie's (1975) sociological study suggests that if student teachers are deprived of formal instruction, they are likely to fall back on how they themselves were taught, to inform their own pedagogy. This is a much-discussed concept that, through the mass of empirical studies, has considerable face validity.

The remaining chronologies identified by Britzman (2003) are the student teachers' experiences in both the university and the initial teacher education setting. The third chronology is the student teacher in the school and his or her initiation to make connections with significant people, such as other teachers and the children in the setting. The final chronology occurs when the student arrives as a teacher and becomes a full participant of the teaching community. According to Britzman, "Each of the above chronologies represents different and competing relations to power, knowledge, dependency and negotiation, and authorises frames of reference that effectuate discursive practices in teaching" (p. 71). Moving through the different chronologies, the student teacher is presented with "different sets of demands and assumptions, and makes available a different range of voices and discursive practices" (p. 56). For this study, the most salient chronology is the third one, where the student teacher embarks on establishing a personal sense of meaning from a range of early childhood settings.

Britzman (2003) noted in the revised edition of *Practice makes Perfect* that "Teaching is one of the few professions where newcomers feel the force of their own history of learning as if it telegraphs relevancy to their work" (p. 1). This perspective helps to explain why student teachers who enter into the same teacher education programmes, studying the same courses, with the same lecturers, can become very different teachers as they seek to attach meaning to group collaborative practices evident in early childhood centres. In the process of becoming a teacher, how the student teacher reacts to each chronology depends on the discourse that the student teacher takes up, since not all discourses are equal in their social power (MacNaughton, 1998). Moreover, this disposition to take up one discourse rather than another, points to the centrality of the student teacher's agency. Agency is framed in this current study as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). This

definition underscores that teachers are not free agents nor completely independent of context, that, in fact, while there is choice, it is choice within prescribed limits.

Particularly corrosive to the expression of authentic identity are the cultural myths of teaching (Thomas, 2012). These include perceptions such as everything depends upon the teacher, teachers are self-made, and teachers are experts. Britzman (2003) shows through classroom interactions how both of her participants' conceptualisations of teaching and learning were swayed by their own experiences as learners, which, in turn, influenced their micro exchanges as teachers with students. Commenting on one of the participants, Britzman notes the disappointment of Jamie's first year of teaching. Although Jamie had identified the kind of teacher she wanted to avoid becoming, she was still unsure of the teacher she was to become. Britzman comments on her trajectory, "That Jamie retreated into herself must be seen as an effect of a discourse that compels her to take up an essentialist view of who she is, rather than help her act as if things could be otherwise" (p. 102). For both student teachers in Britzman's study, the almost gravitational pull of the school's institutional practices was extremely hard to counter.

Evidence for Britzman's (2003) findings regarding the influence of long-standing cultural myths is supported by Thomas (2009) in her unpublished PhD, which examines the use of the discourse of parent partnership in early childhood teaching. Using a poststructuralist approach, Thomas found that many of the cultural myths of teaching that Britzman (2003) identified, including the myth of the teacher as expert, were still as relevant in early childhood in Australia, as they had been in the US some 30 years previous. With the discourse focus on language and word meaning, Thomas draws attention to the way that, in Australia, the conflicting dominant discourse projects qualified early childhood teachers as both supervisors and colleagues to junior partners, and as both experts and managers in their relationships with parents, whilst being expected to create a partnership based on symmetrical roles. This discourse leads to the construction of inauthentic relationships in which teachers are encouraged to present themselves as experts and knowledgeable, when the reality of the situation is that, in many respects, early childhood education is just too complicated and complex to have such clearly defined binaries (Thomas, 2009, 2012). This influence of the normative discourse is shown to limit the teachers' identification possibilities.

Acknowledging the power of authoritative discourse, as informed by Foucault's critical juncture (as cited in Holland et al., 1998), is evident in a large number of studies of early

childhood, internationally. In the UK, Osgood (2006, 2012) writes extensively about the construction of the early childhood teacher from a critical Foucauldian perspective that examines the influence of policy contexts and wider societal concerns with the commodification of early childhood care. According to this perspective, the dominant discourse frames early childhood teachers as having low qualifications, and being poorly paid, which is reflective of a low status profession. This, Osgood (2006, 2012) argues, influences the teacher's comprehension of self which, in turn, shapes his/her relationships with the most significant others in the environment, including children, other staff and parents. The development of teacher identity is considered by Osgood in terms of the tension between the normative and subjective view of what it means to be an early childhood teacher.

Aspects of the postmodernist position are compatible with the current study and its focus on discovering models of identity, not at the level of sociohistorical epochs, but at more local lives and across shorter timescales. However, while postmodernists and poststructuralists perceive change to occur due to the way that language is organised in hegemonic discourse, a CHAT approach privileges activity as a generative force that fosters collaboration between people, and brings about the kinds of divisions of labour that have consequences for the positions that are made available to learners (Leontiev, 1978). For example, the role of a student teacher is inferior, in terms of power dynamics, to that of a regular teacher and especially to that of their associate teacher. Whereas postmodernism may lead to relativism and radical indeterminacy, the results are generally unsatisfying when the implications are "ontologically mute and politically indecisive" (Stetsenko, 2014, p. 182)

### **Ethical perspective.**

Teaching in early childhood is a highly ethical profession where the practitioner is constantly called upon to make moral and ethical decisions concerning children's well-being (Dalli, 2008). Teachers in early childhood are often in positions of control over the contexts that mediate the child's experiences. Situated within the value-laden practices of the early childhood centre, achieving identity has been conceptualised as a form of self-interpretation in which the student teacher is compelled take a position (Yanchar, 2016). At the heart of the teacher's dilemma is the teacher's obligation to bring about positive change in the student, whilst demonstrating respect for the child's autonomy (Snook, 2003). The written constitution of the code of ethics for registered teachers (NZTC, 2007) was designed to inform such decisions since it explicitly states both the codified teaching standards and ethical guidelines that are intended to provide direction.

However, it is noted at the level of local decision making, that such decisions are often prompted by individual teachers' own sense of morality and ethics, and deep-seated convictions (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004), and the teacher must therefore "be able to enact her identity, beliefs, or philosophy on a regular basis" (Alsup, 2006, p. 90). This epitomises a view of professionalism that both adheres to a structured code of ethics and embraces fluid, uncertain, relational ethics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004). The notion of negotiating one's own identity also draws on Foucault's description of the technology of self. The technology of self, when applied to professional identity, involves four ethico-political axes of teacher identity: the substance of teacher identity, the authority sources, self-practices, and the telos of teacher identity (Clarke, 2009).

Identity can thus be understood as inescapably moral since it provides the justification of conduct and belief (MacLure, 1993). So, while identity may be a site of permanent struggle for everyone, this will be particularly acute for student teachers who are in the process of making the transition from student to teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Becoming a professional teacher, and the process of transitioning from student teacher to teacher, involves greater participation in the process of identity formation given the "sudden and sometimes dramatic experiences" of becoming a teacher and the mediation of his/her participation in the institutional arrangements of the early childhood setting (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 219). This participation and experience of being a student teacher in an early childhood centre includes an ethical component because it is about how a person enacts their learning in the world (Dalli & Cherrington, 2009). This process is compounded when considering the transition of student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Another significant contribution to literature on the development of student teacher identity from a Foucauldian reading comes from Van Rijswijk, Akkerman and Koster (2013). The authors suggest that teacher identity derives from personal characteristics "stemming from character and biography, as well as professional, stemming from social working conditions" (p. 44). Teacher identity is the basis from which teachers make decisions about the kind of teachers they are going to be. This becomes an ethical discussion given the traditional power hierarchy of the teacher in the classroom. This reading of teacher identity calls upon the subject to recognise the external pressures on the individual witnessed through a host of super-vigilance type strategies. Students feel the undue pressure from discursive practices to conform to acting in a particular way. For Foucault, developing an ethical self depends on the subject's awareness of those pressures and the fortitude to resist (as cited in Clarke, 2009).

Teacher professional identity is an ethical imperative since it is key to understanding how teachers teach, their relationships with their students and other stakeholders, and their retention in the profession. It has also been used as analytical lens through which to evaluate the implications of education policy and reform, both in the US and the UK (Eisenhart & Allen, 2016; Parkison, 2008; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Studies illustrate the highly subjective nature of being a professional teacher in communities that have been disadvantaged by reforms which call for greater standardisation and makes autocratic demands. Countering this “technical-economic discourse” (Kostogriz, 2012, p. 398), teachers’ narratives indicate that identity is constituted of the personal, social and political ways of being within the larger socio-political context (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Recent studies that discuss the formation of teacher professional identity consider identity as an ethical imperative that informs everyday decision making and can only be realised through agentic action (Clarke, 2009; Thomas, 2012; Trent, 2014).

Teacher identity has been employed to view new teachers’ engagement with neo-liberal reforms, where policies that privilege high-stakes accountability and standardisation often conflict with the ethics and morals of socially concerned teachers (Buchanan, 2015; Eisenhart & Allen, 2016; Kostogriz, 2012). From this perspective, the decisions teachers make concerning the implementation of restrictive reforms implicates them in ethical dilemmas which compel them to conform or resist pathological pedagogies (Kostogriz, 2012). Stillman and Anderson’s (2015) study illustrates the dialectical interplay between teacher identity and reform. Xochi, a teacher in a low socioeconomic community in the US, is faced with a significant ethical and moral dilemma. A socially committed and aware teacher, Xochi is compelled to introduce greater standardisation and accountability which ultimately disadvantages her students’ holistic learning and development.

According to Stillman and Anderson (2015), the construction of identity is a process, whereby identity itself becomes a higher psychological function which, according to Veresov (2010) is the subject matter of cultural-historical theory. The development of the self is not a purely cognitive construct, but rather is shaped and continuously enacted in sociocultural interaction, action and activity (van Lier, 2008). In the process of becoming, identity becomes both the teacher’s compass and the loom (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). This metaphor captures the way in which the new teacher can position herself or be positioned by material conditions beyond her immediate control. Xochi is compelled to accept the situation given her restricted capacity to exercise her agency and is left alone feeling marginalised and

alienated. Each of the early childhood centres that the students experience in this current study will have a particular pedagogical orientation, reflective of the institution's values and interests and with implications for perceptions of authority, power and knowledge.

Later in the review we will return to demonstrate how many of these concepts have been developed in an examination of empirical studies of the development of learners' identities. Implicit in the narrative dialogical perspective is the agentic notion of the learner who makes choices and decisions, informed by wider social influences, a notion that in many ways is compatible with a CHAT perspective. A CHAT perspective also holds that the individual, as part of the "subject" of the activity system, is implicated at any one time in a number of activity systems, or "constellations of practice" which inform the development of a core identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 126). Lastly, the notion of ethics as being at the heart of identity development is central to the non-canonical activity theory (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) which provides the theoretical underpinning for this study. Before we look explicitly at this framework, we consider Vygotskian concepts and identity development.

### **Summary**

In this first section we have reviewed three major theoretical perspectives on the formation of identity for student teachers. Although there are considerable differences between the three positions, all have aspects which are relevant to this current study. The narrative and dialogical perspective provides explanation for the ways in which individuals perceive themselves, and how they relate this experience to others. The dialogical perspective adds richness and complexity to the student teachers' negotiation of new identities. The postmodern perspective allows for consideration of multiple identities in different contexts, in this study the notion of conflicting identity positions is key. Lastly, the ethical perspective is fundamental to the decisions that early childhood teachers have to make when providing care and education to young children and their families. In this current study, we develop a CHAT perspective of identity, which incorporates elements of all three perspectives, but which ultimately shows identity as both multiple and unitary, dynamic and constant, and social and individual (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This is reflected in the dialectics of Vygotskian psychology that view the social and individual as a unity (Veresov, 2016).

## **Vygotsky and the Vygotskian Project**

The preceding discussion examined identity from quite a broad perspective. In this section the focus is narrowed to consider how identity has been discussed in recent sociocultural literature, including expert text from CHAT (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004), anthropology (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1994) and cultural psychology (Ratner, 2011). Collectively, these perspectives form part of the Vygotskian project and are complementary to a theory that takes into account the cultural and historical development of both the setting and the subjects (Fleer, 2016; Grimmert, 2014; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004; Stetsenko, 2008). The term Vygotskian project is used in the literature to signal the social transformative ideological underpinnings of CHAT (Stetsenko, 2010), and to emphasise the collaborative nature of theory building, allowing for consideration of not just those colleagues and collaborators during Vygotsky era, but also recognising contributions from more contemporary scholars such as Hedegaard, Rogoff, and Moll (Fleer, 2016).

Much of the contemporary sociocultural and cultural-historical literature chooses to interpret Vygotsky's work with a deliberate emphasis on the agentic, reflexive, collaborative and transformative aspects of cultural-historical theory (Grimmett, 2014). In recent publications, González Rey (2012) has identified two prevailing tendencies in Vygotsky's work, one is orientated to objective psychology and is captured in the functionalist understanding of cultural mediation. The second tendency explores the subjective side of human performance, emphasising the role of processes like fantasy, imagination, the emotional basis of thinking, sense and *perezhivanie*. This is a tendency which González Rey (2011) considers has been overlooked, and which when considered, offers new and refreshing alternatives to Vygotsky's legacy.

Recent CHAT inspired publications tend to present an eclectic and inclusive interpretation to account for learning between activity systems (Grimmett, 2014). Whereas the Vygotskian perspective regarding the mediation of cultural tools and symbols is held to be too individualistic (Bakhurst, 2007), and Leontiev's approach too collectivist in orientation (Blunden, 2007), the Vygotskian project can be understood as an attempt to reconcile these two differing factions. At the heart of the Vygotskian project is the attempt to recognise the fullness of Vygotsky's theory and the contributions that methodological perspectives, including activity theory, sociocultural theory, cultural-historical activity theory, and cultural-historical theory all bring to empirical research on education (Fleer, 2016). Fundamental to

these models is the shared ideological underpinnings of radical social transformation and a commitment to social justice, concepts informed by Marxism (Junior, Ostermann, & Rezende, 2014; Stetsenko, 2008). This position suggests alignment between Stetsenko's articulation of the Vygotskian project and her recent discussions of transformative activist stance (TAS). Discussing the influence of the Vygotskian project on current understandings of pedagogy, Stetsenko (2010) suggests that the project "provides a foundation on which to overcome the traditional gulf that separates development from teaching-learning" (p. 11). This, she posits, is done through a threefold process of material practice, human subjectivity, and intersubjectivity; processes through which cultural tools are provided through teaching.

Indeed, the Vygotskian project and its commitment to the dialectical method provides the central theme of much of Stetsenko and Arieivitch's (1997, 2004, 2010, 2014) joint work that advocates for an ethical/political position known as the transformative activist stance. This platform has also been the starting point of many of Stetsenko's individual contributions (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2016), which seek to expand upon the platform of relational ontology and supplement it with the notion of the collaborative purposeful transformation of the world. The transformative activist stance will be discussed further in Chapter 3 and explained in relation to this current study. Underpinning the Vygotskian project are key concepts, some of which are used in this current study, to examine and explain the relations between societal, institutional and personal dimensions of teacher identity development. This elaboration of Vygotsky's work in the context of the current study is intended to both strengthen original ideas, and also add new contemporary theory and practices that are compatible with the overall intention (van Lier, 2008). However, not all scholars are in agreement with this perspective, and in a recent review of Vygotsky's work, two dissident voices have been vocal in seeking to restrict the application of Vygotsky.

The first notable contribution comes from Yasnitsky and van der Veer (2015) as editors of the appropriately named *Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky*, the underlying theme of which is to highlight the almost impossible nature of interpreting Vygotsky as was intended because of the multiple issues with translations and interpretations from a deliberately skewered sociocultural perspective. The second publication, by Miller (2011), takes this wider interpretation of Vygotsky's work by sociocultural theorists to task, holding particular criticism of the CHAT school as distorting Vygotsky and applying these theories to their own ideas in order to claim greater legitimacy. Bakhurst (2007), however, suggests that, because of Vygotsky's short life, his work was not complete, and that for his legacy to be considered

valuable, contemporary commentators need to extrapolate Vygotsky's intentions which were centred on the creation of a society that emphasised sociability and collaboration. This position is supported by Lektorsky (2009) who boldly claims "there is no doubt that Vygotsky's ideas are at the base of all contemporary variants of activity theory" (p. 77).

In this next section, we look specifically at three concepts from the Vygotsky project, which are felt to be most pertinent to the study of early childhood student teachers. First, we focus on *perezhivanie*, which relates to the unity of emotions and cognition, and supports the significance given to subjectivity in the culturally rich, figured worlds of formal education (Holland et al., 1998). Secondly, we examine the recently discussed notion of identity as a leading activity. Originally developed by Leontiev (1978), the notion of leading activity is used to illustrate the way in which a change in activity prompts shifts in the actor, as the actor coevolves with the context that s/he considers primary. This concept helps to address the concerns of the de-centralised self. Finally, from a situated learning perspective we consider how we might extend the notion of the zone of proximal development so it can be viewed in terms of developing identity through rich intersubjective exchanges.

### **Perezhivanie and emotions.**

Recently *perezhivanie* has been identified as one of the key concepts of cultural-historical theory (Veresov & Flear, 2016). Vygotsky (1972) first discussed the concept of *perezhivanie* in his foundational work *The Psychology of Art*, in which he developed an understanding of *perezhivanie* through studies of literature and art, as marking a traumatic and cathartic experience leading to a qualitative change in a person (Smagorinsky, 2011). Vygotsky returned to the notion of *perezhivanie* again, shortly before his death, and claimed it as a construct to account for the central role of affect in framing and interpreting human experience (González Rey, 2011). Vygotsky (1998) used the concept of *perezhivanie* in articulation with the "social situation of development" as a unit of human development, commenting that, "... it would be correct to say that the environment determines the development of the child through experience of the environment" (p. 294).

It has long been recognised that affective, social and experiential factors impact on learning, and in particular, they impact on longer lasting, meaningful learning (Davis, 2015). Viewing student teacher development through the lens of identity encourages a consideration of emotional and affective dimensions of learning to teach. Vygotsky (1986) was clear that emotion could not be filtered out of an analysis of how one acts in the world, arguing

forcefully that if emotions were ignored “thought must be viewed ... as a meaningless epiphenomenon incapable of changing anything in the life or conduct of a person” (p. 10). In cultural-historical tradition, emotions are taken to be those psychological functions that signal the personal meaning of one’s own and other’s actions, thereby making emotions constitutive for activity regulation as a whole (Holodynski & Seeger, 2013).

Given this acknowledgement of the significance of affect for development, *perezhivanie* has been used in studying the relationships between student teachers and the children in their settings (Brennan, 2014; 2016), with *perezhivanie* being “the particular prism” through which the influence of the environment on the subject is refracted (Veresov, 2016, p. 136).

Refraction in this context refers to how external factors are awarded differing emotional values through their transformations into each person’s emotional states (Brennan, 2014).

The implication of this position posited by Veresov (2016b) is that, “the environment influences the process of development of the individual through the individual’s *perezhivanie* of the environment. No particular social factors in themselves define the development, only factors refracted through the child’s *perezhivanie*” (p. 131).

The application of *perezhivanie*, simply put, suggests that although different people may have the same experience, their interpretation of that experience will differ for each because of his/her uniqueness (Veresov & Fler, 2016). Vadeboncoeur and Collie (2013) concur, and suggest that emotions lie at the heart of Vygotsky’s methodology. In recent discussions and analysis of *perezhivanie* in early childhood literature, the perspective taken is typically that of the young child being cared for by the teacher and the place of affect in this relationship (Veresov & Fler, 2016). However, as Brennan (2014, 2016) acknowledges, the symbiotic nature of relationships in early childhood settings suggest that we should not look upon the cared-for as a passive recipient, but recognise their role in fostering and responding to the carer, thus deepening the sense of emotional and psychological attachment (Goldstein, 1999). This point reminds us of what Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012) label, “the inseparability of consciousness and activity” (p. 19) as the subject in this example, the early childhood teacher is changed through his/her social interactions with the object of the activity, the child.

In early childhood education in New Zealand, there is a strong emphasis on the significance of pedagogical relationships that foster feelings of belonging and well-being for the learner (MoE, 1996). Promoting the space of intersubjectivity as essential for the child’s learning and development suggests the need for the teacher to establish an emotional connection with the

child. As noted by White (2015), this positioning demands much more from the teacher than just being present, but a “more active, reciprocal engagement and answerability” (p. 55).

White (2009) describes the micro exchanges between the student and the child as creating a shared physical and emotional space characterised by a lingering, loving encounter that is at its heart ethical and highly subjectivised. The reciprocal nature of the caring relationship between early childhood teacher and child also relates to Nodding’s (2013) theory of ethical care, where the interaction between the carer and the cared-for is considered as dynamic, symbiotic and wholly relational. Goldstein (1999) explores the conceptual similarity between the ethic of care and the zone of proximal development (ZPD), illustrating how both concepts share essential comprehensions of the contours of the relationship between the teacher and the learner. In both instances, through interactions and the shared experience, a level of intersubjectivity must be achieved. This additional layer of complexity enriches our understanding of both the ZPD and the ethics of care by adding an affective dimension to the definition.

Perezhivanie is most often translated as “lived experience.” Blunden (2016) describes perezhivanie as a subject’s cathartic experience, which is then processed by the subject with implications for personality or identity development. Blunden (2016) explains, through a discussion of the etymology of the word, that in Russian perezhivanie has the nuance of a *going through* and *surviving* an experience, which may not have been very pleasant, but was formative. He goes on to note that not every experience will be considered perezhivanie, but those experiences in which there is a moment of catharsis or challenge, or where there is a particular emotional reaction may be thought of as perezhivanie. Importantly, it is not the experience itself, but the amalgam of intellectual and emotional insights that lead to reflections on oneself and one’s future. Blunden (2016) goes on to extrapolate how life can be considered a series of meaningful experiences, the outcomes of which are instrumental in the development of the subject. Again, this perspective iterates the implications of perezhivanie for the social situation of development, since it is not the context per se that influences development, but the individual’s perception of that context.

Even though the early childhood setting is material and permanent, each participant will have a different subjective experience of the environment, depending on his/her past experiences and current feelings. The implication of this, as Brennan (2014) notes, is that context is not an internal setting or event “but an internal changing phenomenon that is constantly reorganised through the lens of each person’s affective experience” (p. 285). This view is supported by

González Rey (2011) who claims that such experiences are felt as external influences which appear as a result of the actual personal psychical organisation, meaning that “perezhivanie thus represented the individual psychical production rather than the mere and exclusive effect of external influences” (p. 33). Viewed from this perspective, the social environment has profound psychological relevance.

This notion of perezhivanie can be extrapolated to adults and to teachers in early childhood education. Perezhivanie highlights the dialectical unity of cognitive and affective aspects inherent in intersubjectivity. In discussing early childhood teachers’ interactions with children in play experiences, Fleer (2010) suggests that it is through skilful manipulation, teachers are able to help children shift from every-day to scientific knowledge. However, this relies on the teacher being able to engage with the child both in terms of his/her feelings and emotions and also in relation to the context of the play. Thus intersubjectivity refers to “the mutual understanding, attunement to and respecting of each other’s perceptions, interpretations, values and meanings” (Grimmett, 2014, p. 15). Moreover, studies by Page and Elfer (2013) highlight that quality care for infants and toddlers is achieved by early childhood teachers through developing empathy for the children and their families, and establishing warm, responsive and individual relationships with the children. Intersubjectivity therefore has practical implications for Vygotskian theory, since relationships in the social context are understood to be instrumental to the learning process.

Perezhivanie is a critical construct for the consideration of this study, since this study is interested in the way that the student teacher is influenced and shaped by his or her understanding of the context in which s/he is embedded. Perezhivanie is used in this study to consider the development of the student teachers’ identities in relation to their shared experiences, both as learners in the institutional settings in their home countries, and also to account for the way in which they construct and act upon relations with their associate teachers and others in the field. Perezhivanie helps to explain how individuals will experience the same context in different ways, and will have different meanings and effects for each person. As suggested in the literature perezhivanie can be understood to both account for the way in which student teachers arrive at the teacher education program, reflecting on their own experiences to date as learners, but also to account for their interpretation of day-to-day happenings while on field practice (Crick, 2012).

### **Zone of proximal development.**

At the heart of Vygotsky's commitment to discovering a new methodology is the principle of viewing learners not as they present at the time of the assessment, but by their capacity to go beyond with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is described by Vygotsky (1978) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86)." The ZPD is the most popularised concept stemming from Vygotsky's work, and has been given multiple interpretations by educationalists, psychologists, and others (Del Rio & Alvarez, 2007; Holzman, 2010).

An ahistorical account of ZPD supposes that the teacher, through a series of dialogical encounters, leads the learner to a pre-set learning outcome, which the teacher considers is a credible goal for the learner. However, this simplistic dyadic reading eschews the main message of Vygotsky which includes the role of cultural-historical methodology and the significance of tool mediation (Murphy, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2011). A more comprehensive interpretation of ZPD comes from a situated perspective where the ZPD is understood as being distributed throughout a setting rather than merely circumscribing to one individual's intellectual potential (Gee, 2008). Veresov (2010) agrees and argues that the scope of ZPD in Vygotsky's overall theory relates to associated concepts of the social situation of development, the general law of cultural development, the interaction between ideal and real forms, and the "new formation" of the self as a result of development. Considering the development of the learner, Veresov (2010) identifies the social environment as a primary source of development, and the interaction between ideal and real forms as providing an explanation for the moving force of development. The implication is that in a situated ZPD, the learner is made aware of the ideal form through reifications, such as the national curriculum as established in early childhood education, and the reality in the context of the field-practice placements, and the student teacher's attempt to reconcile the two as the moving force of development.

The crux of ZPD is the role of instruction in learning, and that learning depends on some form of intervention. Beyond the dyadic of the teacher and child or, in the case of this study, the student teacher and the associate teacher, ZPD can also be viewed in relation to the telos of the setting, and the appropriation of cultural signs and tools. This assumption rests on the notion of internalisation which Vygotsky and others emphasise is quite different from the

direct transmission of information (Wertsch, 2007). Rather, internalisation works on the principles of transformation and appropriation, where what is internalised by the learner is not a cognitive map transferred from the outside to the inside, but an individualisation based on the learner's previous experiences and subjectivity. These cultural signs and tools were integral to Vygotsky's (1997) overall theoretical drive, leading him to comment,

By being included in the process of behaviour, the psychological tool modifies the entire course and structure of mental functions by determining the structure of the new instrumental act, just as the technical tool modifies the process of natural adaptation by determined the form of labour operations (p. 85).

Integral to Vygotsky's ZPD and also Mead's 'I-Me' stance is the role of self-regulation and semiotic mediation to raise awareness of the learner (Gillespie, 2007). In teacher education, this is typically approximated through written reflections, where the student teacher is challenged to re-view past instances and frame them according to particular informed lens. However, while general teacher education discourse places a great deal of emphasis on written reflections, one significant caveat is the need to be authentic (Gibbs, 2006; Palmer, 1997).

Applied to this current study, there are multiple affordances for ZPD for the student teacher to realise through his/her relationships with the associate teachers and significant others which are bound together through the cultural tools that mediate the setting. The interpersonal relationships can be emotionally and cognitively both intense and rewarding, and through the kind of dialogic interactions between the student teacher and the associate teacher, it is expected that the associate teacher will facilitate the student teacher's achieving the set outcome from the field-practice appraisal document. However, when the student teachers observe and engage with their associate teachers, they are also attentive to that which cannot be explicitly taught in a classroom, for example, the use of the voice and body when speaking with young children. This perspective aligns with van Huizen, van Oers, and Wubbels (2005) when they suggest:

From the Vygotskian perspective, the overall aim of a teacher education programme is best conceived as the development of a professional identity. The teacher's professional identity to be developed through guided participation (Rogoff, 1990) consists in commitment to an image of teaching that is both publicly and personally

meaningful and underlies and directs the acquisition and further development of professional knowledge and skills. (p. 275)

Recently Roth and Radford (2010) have made an important contribution to the development of ZPD through their analysis of a teacher-child interaction in a maths class, where the teacher is understood to be scaffolding the student to arrive at the correct answer. However, their close analysis of the pedagogical interaction demonstrates the child guiding the teacher towards what she needs to do to assist him. Roth and Radford (2010) suggest that the child, through the way his questions and interjections are constructed, through the tone of voice, the gesture, and the pauses in his discussion, indirectly informs the teacher about how she should act. As noted by the authors, this reconceptualisation of the ZPD rests in a form of intersubjectivity that is grounded in the actors' common world of historical significations and ways of life which is revealed both through the setting of the classroom, and also in the shared language. The significance of the intersubjectivity between learner and teacher is also noted by Kravtsova (2009) who suggests that ZPD is a concept that "primarily relates to the development of personality in ontogenesis" (p. 14), thus reiterating a fundamental assumption of cultural-historical theory of the transactional nature of the relationships between the subject, the object and the mediating tool/sign.

Extending the notion of ZPD to consider the development of relationships and intersubjectivity between teacher and learner, Goldstein (1999) builds on Vygotsky's original concept and applies the concept of the ethics of care (Noddings, 2013) to provide a microanalysis of the affective nature of the interactions between the teacher and child in the ECE setting. Although there has been significant recent research that testifies to the competencies of young children, particularly in how they are able to instigate and maintain interactions (see Reddy, 2001, 2008), caring remains a major focus of teaching for early childhood education. This is because of the physical and emotional dependence of the young children on their caregivers (MoE, 1996), and their vulnerability. Typically, discussions of the ZPD focus on the cognitive gains made by the learner when scaffolded by the more knowledgeable other. Vygotsky (1978) described work in the ZPD as a "unique form of cooperation between the child and the adult that is the central element of the educational process" (p. 169). However, Kostogriz (2012) suggests that in the face of technocratic discourse, the principles of the ethics of care have an expansive power of ontological freedom that "cannot be controlled" (p. 397). This speaks to the power of individual subjectivity being expressed through meaningful and care-based interactions with others.

In this current study, student teachers, by definition, are both students and teachers, in their relationships with the initial teacher institution and with the associate teachers, they are considered primarily as students with specific outcomes to achieve. With the children, and in their imagined projected selves, they are teachers. This is captured in the following description of this new perspective, suggesting that in the ZPD, “asymmetries are possible because of the existing inter-comprehension of interacting participants who become each other’s teachers and students independent of their institutional positions” (Roth & Radford, 2010, p. 300). Moreover, the ethos of early childhood education as advocated in the national curriculum is a highly child-centred, dispositional focus. This encourages teachers to be learners in regard to the children in their room, to learn from observations, from discussion with parents, and from engagement with the child’s portfolio, all of which encourages the formation of reciprocal relationships between teacher and child (Education Council, 2017).

### **Identity as leading activity.**

The notion of a leading activity claims that the stimulus for identity development comes not from within the individual, but emerges from the individual’s active engagement in joint object-orientated and socioculturally mediated activities (Wardekker, Boersma, Ten Dam, & Volman, 2012). Vygotsky first developed the notion of leading activity in relation to the preschool child’s disposition towards learning from play episodes. The child is disposed towards certain activities at certain ages, so, as Vygotsky (1978) famously noted, “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (p. 102). Thus, in early childhood years, play is considered a leading activity. That Leontiev (1978) developed the notion of leading activity into a foundational assumption of CHAT is representative of the shift from focus on the individual per se, to focus on the individual as part of a defined collective, drawn together through the demands of the object-orientated activity (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012). Leontiev (1978) believed that in the course of participating in a leading activity, children develop new mental processes and motivations, which outgrow their current activity and provide the basis for transition to a new leading activity.

This process is explained by Leontiev (1978) through the example of the school child who completes her homework so that her parents will allow her to go out to play. However, when the child realises that doing homework also pleases her teacher, a new motive for doing homework is generated. The development of a new motive results in a new subjectivity which the child reflects on both in the process of the activity and after the event. This,

Leontiev suggests, will lead to qualitative changes in the child's personality. According to Leontiev (1978) the more people engage in activities, the more subjectivities and identities people are able to draw upon (as cited in Obukhova, 2012). Through this process of being embedded in an activity, the individual develops a hierarchy of subjectivities. Ratner (2015) identifies this shift in subjectivity as one of the "central insights of SCT [sociocultural theory]" adding in no uncertain terms, that it is the "cultural organisation, cultural rules, collectivity, sharing, planning, coordination, and unification/coherence, [that] stimulate and support consciousness" (p. 60)

Extending the example of the changing motives of the child doing homework to student teachers in early childhood education, one might consider how a student teacher who initially perceives the relationship between the professional teacher and the child in terms of being an objective pedagogue, might, after embodied experience in an authentic setting, have his/her understanding of the object (care and education of the child) complicated and thus lead to a consideration of different teaching strategies. Accordingly, a change in the subject's understanding of the object would lead to a different approach, which leads to changes in subjectivity over time, which would crystallise into changes in professional-identity development.

The concept of leading activity has been extended conceptually and chronologically into adulthood by Stetsenko and Arieviditch (2004) who argue that the self, or in this case student teacher identity, can be understood as engaging in a zone of proximal development which leads to qualitative changes and a new psychological formation (Veresov, 2007; Warford, 2011). Emphasising the ontological perspective of transformative learning, this perspective considers that the development of a teaching self is a process of real-life activity that is connected to, and positioned within, ongoing societal activities. The notion of leading activity has been explored in relation to young learners' engagement with maths in the UK. Studying the narratives of two maths learners, Mary and Lee, Black et al. (2010) viewed the data according to four categories: leading activity, leading identity, cultural models, and troubles/obstacles. Through the interviews, Mary revealed herself as someone who was committed to maths, enjoyed maths and drew on cultural models that helped her to understand the value of maths. In comparison, Lee seemed less focused about his choice of maths, and instead perceived it as a pathway to studying a degree in psychology, thereby realising the "exchange" value of maths. Change, in this study, is understood as "an ongoing, socially situated process whereby the internal mind and social world are always in dialectic

relation – one cannot progress without the other” (p. 69). The way in which the students engaged in maths, whether through its “use value” or “exchange value” reflects a difference in motives and different subjectivities regarding maths, which may then be reflected upon and crystallised into identity (Black et al., 2010).

In this study, I suggest with reference to identity as leading activity, that the student teachers’ placements in field-practice and field-experience settings signify a critical junction in the formation of their teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The trajectory of becoming a teacher marks a significant propulsion for the students into an established series of activity systems which generate a new hierarchy of motives (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012). Leontiev (1981) suggests that alongside new motives for engagement comes a new understanding of self. In this study, although we conceptualise students as participating in a minimum of two simultaneous activity systems, the ITE and the field-practice placement, it is claimed that the activity system of the field-practice placement is the dominant one for the students. This stance recognises the agentic notion of identity development, since, as Wenger (2010) notes:

We define ourselves by what we are as well as by what we are not, by the communities we do not belong to as well as by the ones we do. These relationships change. We move from community to community. In doing so, we carry a bit of each as we go around. (p. 239)

Leontiev (1978) argues that people are unique products of a constellation of human activities, suggesting that people encounter many motives and thus many subjectivities within their lives; “the life of each individual is made up of the sum-total or, to be more exact, a system, a hierarchy of successive activities” (p. 3). Thus Leontiev (1978) defines subjectivity as a hierarchy of personal senses of motives. For example, two motives played out in early childhood teaching could be “caring for children’s physical needs” and “allowing children uninterrupted play.” A student teacher may consider caring for the child’s needs as a priority because of his/her concern about the child’s well-being. Another student teacher may do the opposite, because s/he attaches a sense of weakness to caring for the child’s physical needs. These different hierarchies of the two motives indicate different subjective aspects. The process of decision making for the individual teacher is dialectical and involves his/her consideration of what ought to be done with their values and beliefs, highlighting the points suggested by Migliore (2015) that learning to teach is highly subjective and involves all parts of the person:

Motives are collective and are attached to social meanings. People internalize the motives behind activities and their social meanings, but then personalize them with their own personal senses. These personal senses arise from one's personal relationship with the motive/object of activity, according to their relevance to personal circumstances of life and previous experiences of internalization of other motives. (p. 586)

These subjectivities are reflected upon, and may become crystallised, as identities that relate to the specific activities in question (Black et al., 2010). For example, in the process of writing reflections on their field-practice experiences, the student teachers' subjective self-awareness is raised, giving platform to and making conscious their feelings and thoughts (Alcock, 2016). This "voice" is articulated as part of the person's self-image (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). Thus our notion of identity is historical in origin and emerges from our subjectivities as learners that are experienced in the process of taking part in socially organised activities. However, as we engage in many activities, we have a collection of identities upon which to draw at any one moment. According to Black et al. (2010):

These become hierarchically organised within the self – the socially constructed and internally reflected (psychic) pathway through our unique constellation of activities. This occurs through both processes of engagement in activity (i.e., reflection in action) and reflection on activity/identity (as in the interview situation, for example). As such, the 'self' is not a static or fixed personal attribute which we can 'have' but a process, constructed and performed through engagement in activity and always in development. (p. 58)

In the case of a student teacher, claiming identity involves negotiating new subject positions at "the crossroads of past, present, and future" (Block, 2009, p. 27). The leading activity for student teachers are the field-practice placements. As suggested above, through their engagement with these practices, students construct a hierarchy of identities; those that are consciously reflected upon by the self are most significant, as they are dependent on the leading activity. Thus the leading activity provides a structured hierarchy to the internal life of the self where certain identities become more or less important to the developing self. According to Hedegaard (2009), where expectations and practices are unfamiliar for the learner, this provokes a crisis that provides the dynamics for development and fosters change in the learner's social situation of development.

## **Summary.**

In this section, we have reviewed three major constructs from the Vygotskian project which contribute to placing the role of subjectivity at the centre of the participants' experiences whilst embedded in simultaneous activity systems. Identity as leading activity makes the case that, while students can claim membership of two distinct communities, it is the community in which they spend considerable time, have significant outcomes to achieve, and is a highly social and emotional context that is most engaging for the students. Perekhivanie helps to explain that although all student teachers experience the same programme of study, the way in which these experiences are refracted through the prism of perezkhivanie shapes how they see themselves and others. Lastly the ZPD is central to any discussion of teaching and learning from a Vygotskian perspective. The discussion in this chapter provides the reader with an affective understanding of teaching in early childhood and how this influences the person of the student teacher.

## **A Review of Key Studies**

Informed by the discussion of theoretical perspectives and constructs above, the following section is an examination of a number of studies that have attempted to capture the process of identity development. These largely empirical studies draw on a range of diverse settings to discuss learner identity, some defined by subject category and others by level of education. These settings include, but are not restricted to, being a teacher or learner of science (Roth, Goulart, & Plakitsi, 2012; Shanahan, 2009), maths (Solomon, 2007), and/or being a teacher or learner of English as a second language (Norton, 2012). Many of these studies that have chosen identity as a methodological lens to explore change and development, share a concern with the learner as a person, rather than more technocratic or instrumentalist concerns.

### **Experiences of identity shift.**

One of the most frequently cited examples in the activity theory discourse of identity shift comes from Roth (2007b). This study focuses on the outcomes of a science-based activity involving school children conducting a community project on the conservation of the local waterways in Henderson, US, and their encounters with the local community. This is conceptualised as an example of third-generation activity theory, where the subjects are participating in multiple activity systems, including the school and the community. The argument that learners participate simultaneously in several different activity systems is not new. For example, Wenger (1998) termed the way participants can belong to more than one

community, as multimembership and suggested that in such situations, individuals operate in a nexus where “multiple trajectories become part of each other, whether they clash or reinforce each other” (p. 159). According to Engeström’s (2001) third-generation activity theory, this perspective allows for greater consideration of a multiplicity of voices, and also allows for expansive learning, which places primacy on communities as learners, on the transformation and creation of culture, and on the horizontal movement and the formation of theoretical concepts (Engeström, 2014). Expansive learning should be understood as a series of constructions and resolutions of successively evolving contradictions in the activity system, Engeström (2014, p. xx) claims, “The new concepts and practices generated by expansive learning activity are future-oriented visions loaded with initiative and commitment from below”.

In Roth’s (2007b) study, one boy, in particular, who had previously been perceived by teachers as learning disabled, is shown to take an active, leadership role with his peers, which fosters the development of a new subjectivity made available through the exercise of his learner agency. Having previously been perceived as a troublemaker, the activity allowed the boy to be an enthusiastic participant in the science work project. At the forefront of this consideration of the cultural-historical perspective is the hierarchical notion of the dialectic, or, as Roth frames it, the relationship “between agency and structure” (p. 88). The use of third-generation activity theory, which is discussed in more detail later, allowed for the representation of multiple voices, including that of the students, their teachers, environmentalists and others from the community. The teachers not only noted changes in the young boy, but also in a number of other students who exhibited “different forms of identity” (p. 86) as a result of their engagement in the activity. The changes were not restricted to the school students, but extended also to others in the community, when they began to see the consequences of environmental pollutions. Viewed as participants in this ongoing community-inspired investigation, Roth (2007b) notes the way in which individual engagement contributes to the overall activity, meaning that school students both claim identity as students but also environmentalists. Their embodied engagement in the actions and operations of the activity of conservation, according to Roth (2007b), maps morality and ethics onto the CHAT framework

For Roth (2004, 2007a, 2007b), the focus on the dialectic is integral for a comprehensive understanding of CHAT. Dialectic logic is cited in multiple instances to support Vygotskian insight into the many dichotomies of classical psychology, including mind/body,

knowledge/action, internal/external, agency/structure. Roth et al. (2004) explore the identity dialectics of teacher and student in an urban high school. Noticeable in this study are the very fragile notions of identity that need to be made and remade according to the demands of the situation. This malleability of identity is a theme in Roth's work and is understood to be experienced by individuals as they negotiate the need for a relatively stable notion of identity, in contrast to the fluid nature of modern society. In particular, Roth et al. (2004) note the role of emotions and motives in the formation of identity, whilst embedded in activity systems. To capture participants' emotional experiences that contribute to identity formation from a 5-year ethnographic study of key personnel from a salmon hatchery, Roth (2007a) examines the participants' voice modulation, tone and pitch as they speak about their work experiences, such as being given notice of being laid-off, or dealing with changes in their role. Through his empirical studies, Roth (2006; 2007a) shows how emotions are "continuously" produced and reproduced as part of the participants' ongoing engagement in schools and the workplace.

Focusing on the identity shift of a newly qualified teacher in a small Icelandic community, Jóhannsdóttir and Roth (2014) analyse one teacher's trajectory from local fisherman to teacher in a small country school that is experiencing an influx of migrant workers' children who barely speak Icelandic. The key theoretical lens used to account for this trajectory is cultural-historical theory, with a particular focus on *perezhivanie*. In this study, *perezhivanie* is understood as "experiencing" and is considered a developmental category to provide insight into the "becoming as a teacher-in-a-village school" (p. 54). The use of *perezhivanie* as a sensitising category, is noted by the authors as facilitating a more holistic approach to teacher development than previously afforded in the literature.

The transition from fisherman to teacher is understood to be a critical period in the subject's life, constituting a qualitative shift in the man's experiential continuum. The authors note inner contradictions felt by the new teacher, as he draws upon his knowledge as a fisherman, and as a local entertainer, to create teaching tools to help those newly arrived immigrant children gain familiarity with the local language (Jóhannsdóttir & Roth, 2014). This process, informed by the teacher's enrolment in an ITE programme, suggests a possible "double stimulation" or double-bind which points to how being an active participant in two connected and simultaneous activity systems allows for the feedback from one activity to inform the other (Jóhannsdóttir & Roth, 2014).

Examining student teacher professional development among tertiary-level students studying to teach college English in China, Yang (2015) utilises activity theory and ZPD to understand the role of teacher agency in response to a series of government “deep structural curriculum reforms” (p. 1) dating from 2002 to 2007. The intention of these reforms was to introduce more student centred and bottom-up teacher approaches. Yang (2015) employs activity theory to consider both the cultural and contextual factors that influence teacher beliefs and practices, and to conceptualise the teachers’ internal transformation. Reporting on the cases of just three teachers at different stages of their careers and with different levels of studies, Yang (2015) found that two teachers were indifferent and resistant to the changes mandated by the reform, and just one teacher exercised her agency in supporting the transition implied by the educational reforms. Reasons for lack of implementation included the highly hierarchical educational system in China, influenced by centuries of Confucianism, which is indicative of a top-down approach, where students are recipients of predetermined knowledge sets (Birkeland, 2013). A second reason given aligns with a popular Chinese saying: “*Shang you zheng ce, xia you dui ce*” meaning “Authorities have the policies; lay people have the strategies to resist” (Birkeland, 2013, p. 190). Another culturalist perspective holds that the two teachers who showed resistance, did so because their loyalties lay not with the anonymous bureaucrats, but to their departmental leaders, due to the collectivist culture in Chinese schools.

With reference to ZPD, the one teacher Yang (2015) identifies as working to comply with the educational reforms had been using self-reflection, and also researching teaching strategies, to help her resolve secondary contradictions by redesigning activities and transforming her practice in accordance with the reform objectives. The other two teachers, on the other hand, had sought to resolve the issue of being supplied with material geared towards a specific outcome by simply avoiding the secondary-level contradictions and continuing to apply conservative teaching delivery approaches.

Reporting on the development of identities of school-age students in urban high schools in the US, Eisenhart and Allen (2016) draw on the findings of a three-year ethnographic study of high-achieving students in contexts profoundly influenced by neo-liberal policies. With reference to Holland et al.’s (1998) figured world, the authors focused on three central components of the development of student identity in context: the institutional forms that organise people for participation, the figured worlds or cultural imaginaries that provide symbolic resources, and the processes of self-authoring. In the discussion of identity,

Eisenhart and Allen (2016) point to the dialectic of the learners being defined as a result of their subject position, and their own agency through the process of self-authoring. Examining the discourse of the good student available to the students through the traditional content-focused nature of didactic teaching implied that although there were identities available, they were not personally meaningful for the learners. Rather such identities based on compliant and mundane activities are “hollowed-out” as represented in the title of Eisenhart and Allen’s study (2016).

### **Communities of practice.**

In discussions of identity shift in practice-orientated settings, some of the most-cited studies on identity shift, if not the most critically appraised, refer to Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger’s (1998) situated learning and, more specifically, the notion of communities of practice (Billett, 2007; Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Engeström (2007) suggests that Lave and Wenger’s seminal tome was responsible for three significant impacts on the understanding of learning. Firstly, the notion of acquisition was replaced by participation, moving the focus from the strictly cognitive, to a more holistic and embodied understanding of learning. Secondly, the analysis of how learning happens extended beyond the individual to include the entire community. Lastly, learning was shown to be apparent in a range of settings where productive practice was evident, rather than just formal academic settings.

Central to situated learning is the notion of identity shift, which is captured in the metaphor of legitimate peripheral participation. According to this concept, when newcomers join a community of practice, they are positioned on the periphery or the boundary of the practice. But as they gain in knowledge and competence, they move closer to the centre of the community in terms of completing more central tasks. As the learners’ trajectory moves inwards, the learners, through their active participation in shared practices, begin to align themselves to the explicit and implicit values and beliefs of the community, thus causing a shift in identity. This was explicated by Lave and Wenger through the examples of the tailors in Liberia, recovering alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and US quartermasters and trainee meat cutters. Through the examples, the authors provide a much broader understanding of identity development in terms of being positioned and positioning oneself in the target communities through the use of cultural artefacts, which constitute their figured worlds of tertiary-level artefacts (Wartofsky, as cited in Alcock, 2016). In the description of AA, the authors deliberate on the significance and meaning given to the plastic tokens which

mark participants' anniversaries and note the significance of the ritualised proceedings, which imbue the activity with a symbolic world.

Wenger (1998) developed the theme of identity in his subsequent work and nominated it as the ultimate aim of learning. The three dimensions that foster identity shift and belonging for Wenger (1998) are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. When these three characteristics are evident in the setting, it can be presumed the conditions are ripe for an effective community of practice. Like activity theory, communities of practice is a situated approach, and shares assumptions of distributed knowledge and transitions in learning.

Bradley (2004) uses Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning to reflect on the experiences of five novice early childhood teachers in the US, including herself. Not only does this study demonstrate the effective application of communities of practice as an analytical tool, it also raises awareness of the vast differences regarding the professional status of early childhood teachers internationally. Bradley (2004) uses the lens of communities of practice to illustrate the importance of access to sites of professional practice, where the novice teachers would be able to observe the more expert practitioners, ask them questions and listen to them as they spoke to the children. In Bradley's (2004) study, the author and one other trainee were denied such access and were "sequestered" from the experts. Not having access to the distributed knowledge of the expert teachers or resources, the new teachers instead reverted to practices they themselves experienced as learners, thus illustrating the truism of Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation that, without a formal intervention, student teachers are likely to teach the way they themselves were taught.

Also using Lave and Wenger's notion of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, Egan (2009) reported on the experiences of two cohorts of undergraduate ECE student teachers. As part of their course work, the student teachers were directed to engage the children in extended conversations, known in early childhood pedagogy as *sustained shared thinking* (see Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Egan reflects on how this practice of listening to children, and paying attention to their concerns and constructs, informs the student teachers' understanding of the children and thus their teaching identity. Egan (2009) acknowledges the dialectical nature of identity development as the newcomers not only take into account the values of the target community but also:

shap[e] them according to her/his own previously held beliefs and values, and fashion... them into something new and personally serviceable, an act of reinvention

of the self which will be constantly re-enacted as new practice settings and new apprentice-masters are encountered. (p. 46)

The student teachers in the study reflected on the meaning of their interactions with the children, acknowledging that engagement with the children offered them insights into the children's way of thinking, which had been relatively impervious for them. Noting the limitations of the scope of the study, with student teachers reflecting on just one episode of interactions with children, Egan (2009) suggests that making such practices routine would allow for the development of expertise. For Egan, it is the development of this expertise that is at the core of the community of practice and becomes indicative of student teachers' identity as early childhood teachers

One of the most powerful narratives on the construction of teacher identity comes from Hodges (1999) and her autobiographical ethnographic study, which examined her experiences of marginalisation and discrimination vis-a-vis a community of practice of early childhood teachers in Canada. Excluded from the group because of both her sexuality and her non-conformist thinking on child pedagogy, Hodges becomes marginalised. Unable to align with the values and beliefs of those at the centre of the community, Hodges was excepted from effective participation, thus underlining the realisation that gaining acceptance to an operating community of practice is not without problems.

Following on from their much-cited literature review on teacher identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2011) conceptualise their exploration of teacher identity by drawing attention to the boundary spaces that exist between the margins of being a teacher while being physically located in the school, and being a student in a college. Both these boundaries are spaces that allow the learner to transition between activity systems, both in terms of practice and dialogue (Alsup, 2006; Engeström, 1987; Wenger, 1998). Beauchamp and Thomas (2011) designed a three-year longitudinal study, based on a series of semi structured interviews, just 13 students of the original 48 remaining as participants after 3 years. Findings suggested that as the student teachers move from the ITE into school placements, their notion of community lessens, and thus the way they see themselves in relation to their colleagues also shifts. The authors suggest this is a reflection of the students moving away from their university cohorts and the supporting faculty structures. The authors point to the importance of relational agency, and the capacity of the students to make connections with significant others in the settings as a way of reducing isolation.

Studying the experiences of a group of teachers engaged in an online programme designed to help with their application of ITC in their schools, Mackey and Evans (2011) designed an embedded case study to gain participants' perspectives of their engagement in the online environment and how this influenced their work-based practices when they returned to their schools. The group of teachers were geographically spread throughout the country and were unknown to each other prior to this professional development. Measuring connectivity in the online discussion forums through a number of instruments, the authors were surprised to find that even one of the most verbal and communicative learners in the discussion forums professed to having only weak ties to others in the group, "a weak connection to the online community [which] was shared by all of the participants with one or two exceptions" (Mackey & Evans, 2011, p. 9).

However, when the teachers returned to their schools, even those who were relatively new to their roles admitted to successfully introducing new concepts and learning strategies developed whilst enrolled in the teacher professional development. The findings left the authors to confirm Gravenotter's (as cited in Mackey and Evans, 2011) sociological theory of the strength of weak ties compared to close relationships, the weak ties allowing for a range of voices to be expressed. In addition, the authors found the participants to adopt a "pragmatic, purposeful approach to the online community" (p. 12). This confirms the individualistic perspective to networked learning, whereby learners view the online discussion forums as places to get their answers rather than as places they can contribute, as suggested by Mackey and Evans (2011). This perspective is shared by Hughes (2010) who found that, forums where there was an active social presence by the learners, promoted trust between the participants, meaning they were more likely to contribute to the group discussion.

Approaching the development of student teachers from the perspective of conceptual development and appropriation was explored by Smagorinsky, Rhym, and Moore (2013) through the case study of the socialisation of an English teacher, Anita, to a suburban high school in the U.S. Southeast. The context of the setting was understood as particularly significant in the way that it mediated the development of concepts. The title of the article "Competing Centres of Gravity" is a reference to the myriad influences affecting the student teacher's practices, not least the setting of the placement. At the start of the field experience, Anita intended to use the kind of open-ended and student-centred pedagogies learnt during her initial teacher education. However, in the classroom, she found that as the students'

behavioural issues increased, so her enthusiasm for open-ended pedagogical strategies decreased. When attributing influence for her appropriation of pedagogical concepts, the most frequently identified factor in her teacher identity was her mentor teacher. Ironically, at the start of the study Anita had identified her mentor teacher as embodying aspects of what she considered to be bad teaching. This turn from a progressive to a more conservative teaching approach led the authors to graphically conclude:

This most proximal centre of gravity... appeared to grow in size and pull as the semester unfolded, exerting daily, pragmatic pressure on Anita to assimilate to extant school practices. Simultaneously, campus-based influences faded in weight, propinquity, and perspective in her vision of how to teach. (p. 178)

This also lends weight to the notion of the field experience being the site of the student teacher's leading activity, in terms of the development of identity.

Adding to the body of knowledge of the communities of practice, Wenger-Trayner (2015) (previously known as Etienne Wenger) has shifted his focus slightly again. The initial descriptions of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation produced by Lave and Wenger (1991) were quite rigid in their application, whereby participants were seen to be almost trapped in their communities. Wenger's 1998 publication allowed for greater consideration of the influence of a constellation of practices, rather than one monolithic stronghold. In his most recent publication, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) have consolidated this move to consider identity forming in terms of not just a single community of practice, but a landscape of knowledgeability. The extent to which the individual claims membership of any particular community within the landscape of knowledgeability rests on three dimensions, of engagement, imagination and alignment. Through this most recent iteration of communities of practice, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) have recognised the significance of individual agency in the process of identity development.

Also more prominent in this iteration of social learning theory is the significance of boundaries. With single communities of practice or activity systems, when there is just one community, boundaries have little relevance other than being understood as being peripheral. With multiple activity systems, such as third generation, and communities of practice, the individual is understood to be constantly traversing boundaries that separate one community from the next. These transitions can be assisted with the help of boundary objects and/or brokers (Wenger, 1998, 2010). A boundary object is an artefact that is designed to help the individual transition from one community to the next. A broker would be a person who is

positioned to help the learner make the transition. When applied to this study, we can view student teachers as participating in a constellation of practices, from the initial teacher education, to their home-centre early childhood setting, to two out-of-home early childhood settings. A significant boundary object to help with that transition is the field-practice-appraisal document, and the broker - the visiting lecturer.

A significant point with this development of knowledgeability is the increase in learner agency, highlighting that his/her intention, or not, to participate and join in a community of practice, is just as relevant as the community of practice being inclusive or exclusive. This is supported by the assertion that “marginality not only arises from exclusion but may also reflect a choice to resist the practices of a community or engage only provisionally with them” (Ibarra, as cited in Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, Jones, & Smith 2014, p. 44). Reporting a study of non-traditional students engaged in a nursing programme, Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, et al. (2014) suggest a model of engagement that highlights the agentic choices that students make. Like learning to be a teacher, learning to be a nurse represents the acquisition of, and participation in, a broad body of professional knowledge that is foundational, and the practices and strategies of being on placement in stressful settings, and responding to authentic situations, under supervision. One significant difference in this study is that prior to studying nursing, the participants were engaged in general healthcare support. The authors’ graphic illustration of their participants’ situation shows three distinct communities: healthcare support, nursing and, university. The transition from healthcare support to nursing is a relatively uncomplicated process, since the focus on providing care in the physical setting is similar; where students seem to have difficulties, is with the university setting.

For many of the non-traditional students in Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, et al.’s (2014) study, academic studies posed particular challenges. Many of these students had been in the workforce for a significant period and so the transition to academic studies was difficult for a number of them. This led the authors to claim two main categories of students, the *tourist* and the *sojourner*. These labels were used to categorise the students’ engagement with the academic setting. The tourists were those students who hoped to avoid serious engagement with the academic setting, since they saw their future selves as practitioners rather than academics. Their trajectory was a simply straight line from health carer to nurse. The sojourners, on the other hand, recognised the value of academic studies, and although their engagement was still provisional and temporary, it was deeper than the others. Their trajectory showed some engagement with the academic setting.

A number of challenges faced by students led to them being tourists. One significant challenge was simply the perception some students had of nurses being carers and doers rather than abstract thinkers, meaning they did not give the “book learning” any intrinsic value. Membership in the university community meant they had to learn relevant skills so they could express their voice in their academic writing, the modes of which changed between the different courses. Traversing across these boundaries, challenges learners to “forge a sense of continuous identity” (p. 53), which Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, et al. (2014) conceptualise as showing resilience “to effectively manage and balance their identities across three elements of their landscapes of practice: personal; situated; and professional. Teachers experienced a stable sense of identity when these elements were stable and in balance” (p. 53).

### **On field practice.**

In this current study, during field-practice placements, students are provided with the opportunity to enact pedagogical theory provided through the taught online courses, under the supervision of an associate teacher and in conjunction with a visiting lecturer from the ITE. Changes in identity are expected because the placements act as new and challenging environments, presenting student teachers with the opportunity to establish relations with children, staff and parents. The practices and material settings of field-practice placements both afford and constrain the student teacher’s opportunities for action and interaction. However, as Lemke (2008) notes, in a new setting, the norms and practices, as embodied by others, act to monitor, evaluate, and push new students, so that their actions comply with the institutional image of the early childhood educator. The implication is that the opportunity to learn instead becomes an exercise in uncritical apprenticeship.

Field-practice placements, by design, should lead students to make choices and position themselves with respect to identity models, and also contribute to the construction of new meanings (Leijen & Kullasepp, 2012). Field-practice placements, as noted by Larreamendy-Joerns (2013) demonstrate “the potency of higher education institutions to mobilise subjectivities by setting conditions for students to engage in authentic practices” (p. 170). Through being physically located in a shared setting, student teachers begin to form relationships with the children in their care, causing a shift in how they view themselves and the object of their teaching, the children. Recchia and Shin (2010) note how the experience of working with infants for the first time led to qualitative shifts in ways of thinking for the four student teachers in their study as they reflected on the intimacy of their bonds with the

infants. From initially feeling anxious about unintentionally harming the infant, intimate relationships between the student teachers and infants soon developed. The authors conclude that through the emotional experience of working with infants, the student teachers “transformed their sense of themselves” (p. 143).

However, the influence of the student teachers’ own personal identity, framed by their experiences as learners, is again considered a dominant factor. In an empirical study of two student teachers whilst on field practice in a secondary school in Canada, Bullock (2013) shows how their previous experiences on the receiving end of classroom management strategies, influenced the position they took as teachers. One of the participants, who as a student had been considered disruptive, empathised with non-conforming students and was averse to applying classroom management strategies when the class became hard to control. Both participants expressed emotional tension about a lack of content knowledge that undermined their confidence. However, Bullock notes the way in which both student teachers were primarily concerned with replicating the expectations and actions of their associate teacher, claiming the field practice as a false apprenticeship, due to its tacit emphasis on performance rather than learning.

In a qualitative case study of two recently qualified early childhood teachers in New Zealand, Warren (2014) applies Foucauldian critical thinking to show how the identities of the early childhood teachers were shaped by societal discourse, which limited their possible ways of being an early childhood teacher. Warren (2014) identifies three dominant discourses that shaped the two teachers’ professional identities: the authority discourse, the relational professional discourse, and the identity work discourse. The authority discourse is described as the dominant discourse, reflecting the values of “functionalist professionalism,” and derives from requirements of the ITE and the teacher registration body. Such discourses are powerful sets of rules and behaviours associated with belonging to social groups; for postmodernists, dominant discourses and language create reality since they shape perceptions of truth and knowledge through the power to determine what is assumed to be normal (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; MacNaughton, 2005).

Warren’s (2014) study of the two teachers were experienced teachers who felt compelled to return to academia to meet the new standards and acquire the qualifications necessary to continue working as a teacher in the field. This resulted in one of the teachers, Sally, who had been teaching for over 20 years, experiencing a loss of self-esteem as her formal position

within the centre plummeted and she became subject to the expectations of the ITE and the visiting lecturer. Sally responded by adopting a cynicism which signalled her resistance, and the negotiation of her subjectivities, to the powerful discursive practices of the ITE. Ruby, on the other hand, accepted her positioning as a student teacher under surveillance, but felt unsure whether she would be able to meet the academic requirements of the programme because of her academic writing; Ruby worked to reconcile her identity as an academic struggler, and as a knowledgeable and competent teacher. The study shows both students as subject to powerful disciplinary forces of authority discourse, to which they were compelled to conform, so that they could achieve rewards of status, credibility and employment by being recognised as having teaching knowledge and skills through qualification. Evident in such studies that focus on teachers while on placement, is that although the practicum is often reported to be beneficial and influence, for many participants it is also considered the most stressful experience of their ITE (Bullock, 2013).

### **CALD student teachers.**

As noted in the literature, the feat of student teachers acquiring a professional identity is problematic, especially when situated in a range of settings over a relatively short period. These settings, being the early childhood centres themselves, are the sites of historically constructed and culturally embedded goals and expectations, which student teachers are expected to acquire (Ellis, Edwards, & Smagorinsky, 2010). At a personal level, this can be a very confusing time for student teachers as they experience new settings, each with its own particular culture; a view confirmed by Arndt (2015), who notes that immigrant student teachers face significant challenges and complexities when transitioning into environments that are understood as being drastically different. The challenge for the individual teacher is to preserve some degree of both stability and continuity in the process of establishing teacher identity (Roth, 2006; Stetsenko, 2016).

Drawing on the work of the French feminist and psychoanalyst, Kristeva, Arndt (2015) explores the subjectivity of immigrant student teachers and suggests how they may be susceptible to feelings of “surreptitious marginalization and alienation of teacher foreignness” (p. 121). Central to this theorising is the notion of Otherness, a philosophical concept which supposes a state of being different from and alien to the social norm, a reflection of a person’s non-conformity with the norms of society. To be ‘Othered’ means to be marginalised, to be perceived as peripheral, and perpetually foreign in colleagues’ eyes (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). In postmodern theory relating to cultural otherness, Dahlberg and Moss (2004) write

about the inherent power imbalances of the hegemony attempting to assert control through negating difference and attempting to “grasp” the Other (p. 52). For CALD student teachers, the crossing of boundaries from one culture to the next, according to Arndt (2012), brings “intimate raw, burning sensations of being a foreigner” (p. 23). These feelings are exacerbated when this process of joining the community constitutes a “difficult ethical path” (Arndt, 2012, p. 30).

This perspective is shared in many of the empirical studies of immigrant teachers, both in New Zealand, where there are limited studies, and Australia. Using a community of practice framework to analyse the narrative of an overseas teacher in Australia, McCluskey, Sim and Johnson (2011) note that although there is an explicit need for overseas teachers in the Australian education systems, immigrant teachers often feel as though they have been excluded from the teachers’ community of practice. These feelings of exclusion derive from a racist discourse of “otherness,” which acts to exclude them because of their physical difference. In the study, McCluskey et al. (2011) note that Susan, a Korean immigrant teacher, had remained on the periphery of the teachers’ informal community of practice, denying her the opportunity to improve teaching techniques, strategies, and knowledge of pedagogy and their students, through the informal network. The authors note how such a lack of support for teachers may result in disillusionment and exacerbate premature attrition.

Similarly, in a study of eight immigrant women who had trained as teachers overseas and come to Australia intending to continue their career in Victoria, Peeler and Jane (2005) reported that the group found it severely challenged to adapt. The researchers found that the teachers’ notion of self-efficacy, and their belief in their ability to complete tasks successfully, was co-dependent on their sense of teacher identity. The overseas teachers felt pressurised to adjust and become more Australian by substituting new values for familiar ones. Central to becoming more like local teachers were the immigrant teachers’ relationships with students. However, many of the immigrant teachers found the differences in the relationship between student and teacher, in Australia as a challenge which not all were able to overcome. Overseas teachers who were accustomed to formal institutional structures, found that without a social system of support from other teachers, teaching became almost impossible for them, leading them to question their suitability for the profession, and with a severely reduced notion of teacher self-efficacy. In much of the literature from Australia there is discussion of the marginalisation of CALD students and the workplace as being monocultural and exclusionary.

Likewise, Kostogriz and Peeler (2007) came to similar conclusions in their study of overseas-trained teachers in the compulsory sector. The participants identified three principal reasons for feelings of exclusion: a lack of shared experiences, which meant that the overseas student teachers could not participate in the typical workplace communication; an inability of the overseas student teachers to participate in the professional discussions since they did not have a complete grasp of the discourse; and, lastly, for some teachers for whom English was still an obstacle, a lack of the confidence to speak with others. The implication of these obstacles was that overseas teachers were often located on the periphery of the community. Kostogriz and Peeler (2007) also discuss the notion of “dual discursive competence” (p. 115) which allows overseas students to hybridise creatively their professional and cultural identities. This hybridity suggested that immigrant teachers are able to draw selectively on the past in reconfiguring their present. The development of an activist standpoint can be taken up by teachers by counteracting patronising attitudes, resisting assimilation and retaining elements of their cultural identities.

Identifying the area of student placement in the field as being particularly problematic, Spooner-Lane et al. (2009) suggest that one of the challenges Asian student teachers have in adapting to a foreign culture, includes defining the expectations of their role and adjusting to language, communication and cultural differences. Previous studies have suggested that for some international pre-service teachers, the field placements only served to make the student teacher feel disconnected. Compounded by feelings of estrangement from their supervisor meant the whole experience left the students feeling vulnerable, isolated, confused and threatened. In Spooner-Lane et al.’s (2009) study of students on a graduate diploma programme, the students undertook just two placements of four weeks in the first semester, and six weeks in the second, in which students were expected to become progressively more involved in teacher activities (Spooner-Lane et al., 2009). The students were interviewed at two points, once prior to the field practice, the second immediately afterwards. Prior to the placement, the students’ major concerns were related to the perceived lack of English-language fluency and lack of understanding of Australian school culture. The lack of language fluency captured concerns about the students’ abilities to listen in lectures, having an insufficient vocabulary and concerns that their accent may be a barrier in communicating with the classroom students. Overseas teachers were also concerned about cultural differences, including the expectation that they meet the needs of individual students and about how a typical day is organised.

After the field-practice placement, many of the challenges that the students had initially identified were still issues. For example, the language barrier proved to be even more significant than first imagined, with students unwilling to approach their associate teacher for support when facing difficulty, leaving the associate teachers with the perception that the student lacked initiative. Student behaviour management was also another area of concern for the student teachers who experienced a culture shock regarding the casual relationship between the students and the teachers. Relationships with the supervising teacher were also problematic, with some participants suggesting that their supervising teacher hindered their practicum experience. This was perceived to have occurred either through the informal way they were spoken to by the supervising teacher in front of the children, general feelings of being unsupported, and the impression that the expectations were unrealistic. In the discussion, the researchers point to two key areas that caused hardship for the student teachers. The first was a lack of language proficiency, the second was the overseas teachers' lack of knowledge about the culture of Australian schooling. Potential solutions presented was the pairing of student teachers whilst on field practice, and the need for greater levels of cultural competence among the supervising teachers (Spooner-Lane et al., 2009).

A wide body of the literature points to the importance of the field-practice-based component of the teaching programme as being significant in terms of the development of professional identity (Bullock, 2013; Starkey & Rawlins, 2011). Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) note how student teachers from CALD backgrounds tend to perform less well compared to their domestic counterparts. One possible reason posited for this deficit in CALD students' performance in field practice is that of the person doing the assessment; the authors highlight: "the potential equity issue of assessors basing their judgements of a student's competence against practicum assessment criteria on their own (often unconscious and unacknowledged) culturally based values" (p. 49). Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) also identify English-language proficiency as instrumental in the appropriation of the culture of the preschool which suggests that pre-service teachers should be proactive in initiating discussions with the supervising teacher and should take an active role in the assessment process.

An extensive survey by Cherrington and Shuker (2012) shows that almost three-quarters of early childhood practitioners were second or third-generation European New Zealanders, implying that the early childhood workforce does not reflect wider demographic patterns. The authors were left to conclude that "educators from minority ethnic backgrounds are often the only person of that ethnicity within the team" (p. 82), a finding which led them to surmise

how this might act to silence minority students. Arndt (2012) suggests that the inclusion of overseas teachers within the workforce “disturbs known, normalised and predictable interpretations of power, and affects relationships with others and with the governing agencies” (p. 29).

Student teachers from overseas risk being discriminated against by the locals. Collecting data from interviews of 28 CALD teachers in Australia, Iyer and Reese (2013) reported multiple instances of student teachers from overseas being discriminated against, both in the university and the school settings. In the university setting the CALD students found communicating and interacting with local students very challenging. Sometimes they attributed this to their own sense of awkwardness because of perceived language ability, at other times to an established clique so that even “events and interactions did not bring the community of students close enough to develop trust” (p. 32). Those CALD students who did experience success in establishing contacts with locals, found it came at the expense of changing self or acculturation. Many of the students commented on the absence of cultural understanding by domestic students. This pattern was also repeated when the student teachers were on field experience. Where students were given the opportunity to participate in teaching practices without fear of failing, and where associate teachers were supportive and cooperative, student teachers responded well. When the reverse was evident, the pre-service teachers often become de-motivated. As many of these studies demonstrate, Hasse (2014) seems to be accurate in her assessment that the students’ diversity acted as cultural markers which excluded them from the mainstream.

### **Summary.**

There have been a number of significant studies that have examined many of the challenges and experiences of CALD student teachers, particularly from Australia (Campbell & Spooner Lane, 2006; Iyer & Reese, 2013; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009). Many of these studies have taken a communities of practice approach, looking at the individual and group experiences of immigrant students as they attempt to cross the boundaries into established communities in Australian schools. Many of these studies lament the trajectory of the immigrant student teachers who find themselves negotiating with a host environment that may be hostile or indifferent. This impedes the formation of healthy new identities, which results in learners withdrawing into their native culture, form oppositional cultures, or rebel and assert themselves in different ways (Van Lier, 2008).

The review literature reflects the sociocultural turn in psychology which has fostered a perspective that of the CALD students as part of a larger dynamic, and positioned within communities of practice which on the surface seem quite exclusionary. Cultural and linguistic differences account for many of the challenges CALD students face in the Australian context. However, in New Zealand, and in ECE in particular, there are a range of social and cultural factors that would suggest the CALD students situated in New Zealand may experience a very different reality.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter has presented the study of student teacher identity as the focus of this current study. It has discussed understandings of identity as both personal and social, fragmented and unitary, dynamic and stable. This underlines the notion of identity as dialectical and reflective of both the need to include both considerations of the self and of discursive practices of early childhood professionalism, as well as the immediate context of the development. The next chapter will describe in more detail CHAT, looking in particular how current conceptualisations might be expanded by adding a focus on subjectivity. Chapter 3 will also consider the implications of using CHAT as a conceptual and methodological tool for exploring identity.

## CHAPTER 3: CHAT AND THE SUBJECT

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate key features of CHAT, to highlight how this current study legitimises a place for the personal and subjective in this theoretical paradigm, and to make explicit its application to the current study. The theoretical and methodological lens employed in this study derives from a non-canonical version of CHAT (Stetsenko, 2005, 2008, 2013). It was suggested in Chapter 2 that CHAT is the most appropriate model for exploring the development of student teacher identity since it allows for “the study of the development of psychological functions through social participation in societally-organized practices” (Chaiklin, 2001, p. 21). As noted by Foot (2014), there is significance in each word referred to in the label *cultural-historical activity theory* and each has particular significance to this current study.

### Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

At the front of the acronym CHAT is culture; culture in CHAT, is understood to be both constituted through the practices of individuals, and reified in institutional lore, which is indicative of the realist ontology of dialectical materialism (Nuttall & Brennan, 2016). Each early childhood centre has its own particular culture, reflective of the organising pedagogical principles, practices and people (Chaiklin, 2014; Nasir, Roseberry, Warren, & Lee, 2006). Historicity is an essential component and reflects the significance of the material structures, which helps constitute the reality of working in an early childhood centre. The notion of historicity supposes that the present of an activity system is based on its past, and its future is affected by its past (Engeström, 1993). There is a unique sense in CHAT of the world both as given and as constructed. Meaning that as newcomers enter the sites of the activity, they must negotiate and navigate their way through an already populated field (Edwards, 2009). This contrasts with more phenomenologically orientated perspectives, including the communities of practice, where meaning is negotiated anew by the active learner (Arnseth, 2008).

The notion of activity as the defining metaphor for individual engagement with others and self is reflective of Leontiev’s unique contribution, which emphasises the object-related nature of the activity, meaning that there is intention, direction, and common purpose which relates to all elements present in the activity system. This notion of collective aim is well captured in Sannino and Laitien’s (2014) metaphor of forward anchoring, whereby the fishing trawler drags itself towards its projected anchor; illustrating how the collective

activity controls the overall direction of all other elements. Activities are understood to be project-like, in terms of duration and involvement (Blunden, 2010), for example, the activity of the early childhood centre is the education and care of the children, how this is achieved however depends on how the different components of the activity system align. The use of the word *theory* in the acronym CHAT is a little misleading, since the application of CHAT does not imply a particular teleological outcome, but in this current study is used a heuristic device which focuses the researcher's attention to key aspects of the activity system and the relations between the different components (Barnard, 2010).

### **The first generation of CHAT**

There have been a number of reviews of the development of the different generations of CHAT from Vygotsky, through to Leontiev and up to and including Engeström (Dafermos, 2015; Foot, 2014; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012; Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2005). The way the history of CHAT is presented demonstrates both the influence of the personal narratives of the individual theorists, and the political concerns of the period. For example, Smagorinsky (2012a) discusses Vygotsky's humble beginnings as a Jewish scholar who was very much on the margins of Russian academia until after the Russian revolution, when religion based restrictions were lifted allowing him to study and hold more senior positions. There was also much discussion of the significance of Vygotsky's work in defectology in a related text (Smagorinsky, 2012b), and how this was a prime influence on his thinking around signs and symbols. However, shortly before his untimely death due to ongoing health issues, a number of Vygotsky's colleagues were arrested signalling the likelihood of his own impending imprisonment (Smagorinsky, 2012a; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2014).

The first generation of activity theory derives from Vygotsky and his discussion of the cultural mediation of the individual by the collective cultural tools and signs, a perspective which focuses on the individualisation of the subject. According to Vygotsky's cultural law of development, individuals first notice phenomena in the social world, this then becomes internalised which gives the individual control and direction over his/her own behaviour. An obvious example, and one much discussed by Vygotsky is the role of language. Newcomers, or children learn their first language through observation, imitation, and interaction with more knowledgeable others, typically their parents. As active participants, the child not only develops an understanding of language as a means of communication, but also language as a referential system, meaning that in the process of learning language, the child also learns the conceptual knowledge valued by the community in which the individual is embedded.

Language mediates the child's way of engaging with the world, and not only gives them the capacity to refer to objects which are not present, but also the capacity to regulate his/her own behaviour. In such a way, Vygotsky suggests that the individual higher mental functions such as memory, attention and even perception are constituted by people external to the individual, and reflective of the community in which the individual is embedded. Holland and Lachicotte (2007) extend this understanding and suggest identity as an example of a higher order mental function as being acquired.

In first generation activity theory, the relationship between the subject, object and the mediating artefact is captured in the very simple diagram below (see Figure 1). For example, in the situation depicted below, the subject is the teacher, the object is the child. The relationship between the teacher and the child is mediated by the cultural tools and signs of the settings. If, for example, the teacher is in a Montessori centre, then the teacher's interaction with the child will be mediated by both the tools of the Montessori centre, which may refer to physical, material objects or the signs which may refer to ideas or philosophies. This notion that a human act is not just a response to a stimulus but is mediated by a cultural component represents Vygotsky's attempt to provide a materialist view of human action, the significance of this move was not lost on Engeström (1996), who posited:

The insertion of cultural artifacts [sic] into human actions was revolutionary in that the basic unit of analysis now overcame the split between Cartesian individual and the untouchable social structure. The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produced artefacts. (p. 132)

After some time, the teacher will internalise the tools and signs of the community, and as a result, not only is change effected on the object, but the change will also influence the subject. However, the focus of much of the early Vygotskian work is on the process of internalisation or appropriation as it was later termed, rather than externalisation and making a contribution, which is the focus of much of the later CHAT literature.

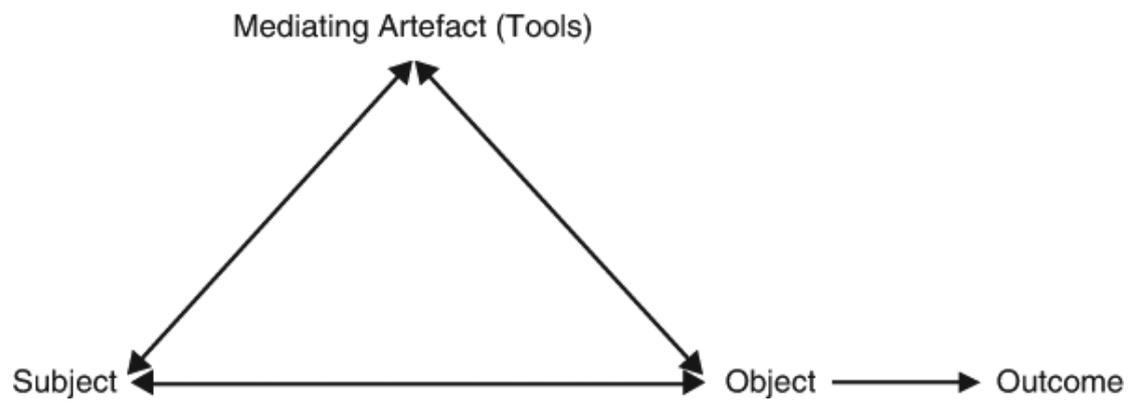


Figure 1. First generation activity theory.

### The second generation of CHAT

Shortly after Vygotsky's death in 1932, Leontiev introduced a more politically conducive emphasis for cultural-historical theory and through the notion of object relatedness brought the focus to the collective, and reflected on the way in which the activity itself contributes to the development of both the individuals as subjects and society in general (Bakhurst, 2009). The classic example of activity theory in action is described by Leontiev (1981) through the scenario of a primeval hunt, where the whole community shares a common goal of hunting and killing a beast, which is only achieved by a historically evolved division of labour completing divergent tasks with a common goal. In Leontiev's example, the beaters must scare the game from the bush, then others in the community are responsible for running the beast down, others would be responsible for butchering the meat and so on. This example demonstrates how people are shaped by the task they do.

However, in 1987 Engeström added an organisational aspect that allowed for consideration of activity theory in the workplace by adding to the triangular representation the three collective elements of Rules, Community and Division of Labour. Figure 2 below highlights the roles of these different elements and their relationship to one another. Evoking the first-generation activity theory, at the apex of the triangle are the tools and signs which mediate the subject's relationship with the object. For example, in this study the subjects are the student teachers. How the student teachers engage with the children is mediated by the centre's pedagogical perspective which is the result of the rules of the centre, the community which supports the centre and the division of labour.

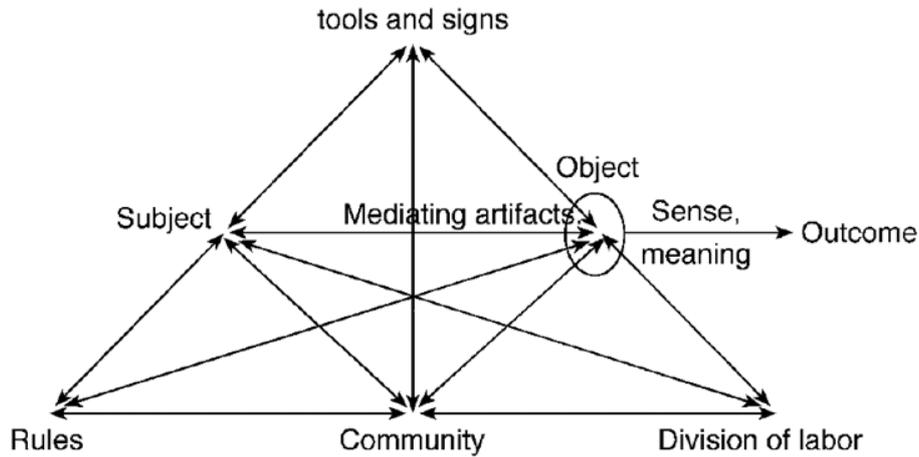


Figure 2. Second generation activity theory based on Engeström (1992).

### Third-generation activity theory.

A key heuristic tool used in this study to conceptualise the relationship between the student teachers as learners in the academic setting of the college, and the development of student teachers in their field-practice placements in early childhood settings is Engeström's third-generation activity theory (1997). The third generation acknowledges that in modern society, individuals are participants in multiple activity systems, each with a different claim on the subject. In response to these observations, third generation expands the unit of analysis from one activity to at least two multiple activity systems as the minimal focus (Engeström, 2001, p. 133). This is graphically illustrated in Figure 3 below which shows two interrelated activity systems, where the subjects in first activity system are also subjects in the second activity system. For example, drawing on this current study, the student teachers are subjects in both the ITE and the field practice activity simultaneously. Third-generation activity theory, consolidates the development noted in the description of second generation activity with the inclusion along the bottom line of the triangle of rules, community and division of labour.

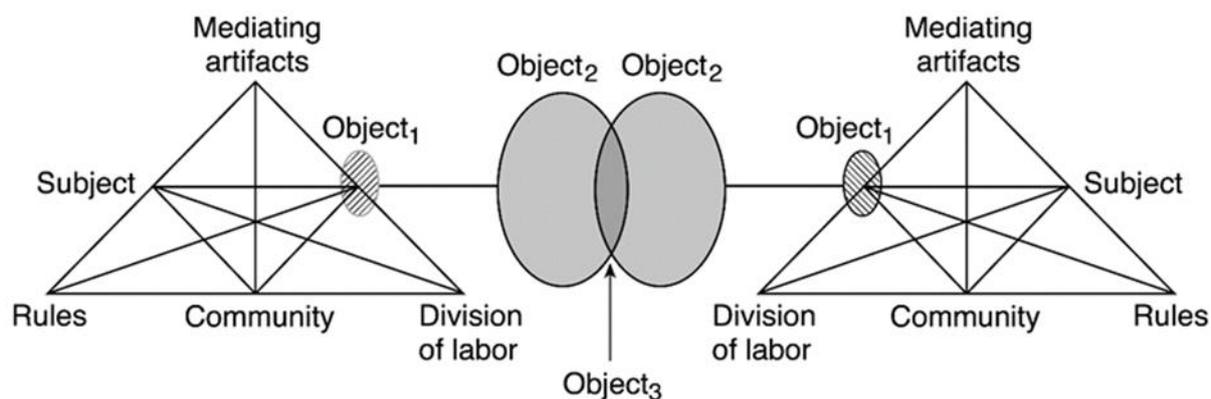


Figure 3. Third-generation activity theory based on Engeström (1992).

Studying two or more interacting activity systems can help the researcher identify how activity has expanded and what could help expand the activity and further extend learning by identifying contradictions and tensions. These contradictions may exist, for example, between the ‘rules’ and ‘object oriented activity’ and ‘division of labour’. In field practice, the student teacher is viewed as having to complete field-practice assessment criteria, they are subject to the guidance and instructions of their associate teachers.

A third-generation activity theory expands the analysis in multiple directions both at an organisational and structural level, but also at a personal and individual level with Engeström in the earlier publications noting how third generation emphasises the individual’s “subjectivity, experiencing, personal sense, emotion, embodiment, identity and moral commitment” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 1). Engeström suggests that through dialectical materialism and third-generation activity theory, the dichotomy between the social and the individual is overcome. Although third-generation activity theory is still in its developmental stage among North American researchers in particular, more recently there have been a number of empirical studies by Engeström and his colleagues that focus on organisational learning, and the development of complete systems, rather than looking specifically at the experiences of the subjects within the activity (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009).

The aim of the third generation of activity theory is to understand dialogues, multiple perspectives and networks while at the same time, “extended in a way that allows for understanding individuals’ generated system of meanings within the social world of interacting activity systems” (Fayez, 2010, p. 772). In third generation, expansive learning is considered to have occurred if the subjects realise a contradiction within their own activity

system and use existing tools in a different way to get a ‘new’ result. An expansive transformation of activity is achieved when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to have a wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous form of the activity (Engeström, 1996). In third-generation activity theory, where the two systems are interrelated, we can consider how they connect in terms of boundary objects and brokers, these are either things or people who traverse both systems, and connect them together. This concept of learning across boundaries of activity systems has been used in a number of studies (Fejes & Kopsen, 2012; Jahreie & Ottesen, 2010).

This expansion of activity to multiple systems allows also for discussion of boundary practice, objects and brokers as the reader conceptualises how the subject in one activity system, can simultaneously participate in a second. The way in which identity develops in context is the focus of many sociocultural and cultural-historical studies. The use of CHAT concepts has fostered interest in the interrelationships between learners and practice, where learning is seen as an outcome of engagement in activities shaped by culture (Lundsteen & Edwards, 2013).

While CHAT has been the dominant psychological paradigm in Russia for decades (Engeström, 2014; Lektorsky, 2009; Mammen & Mironenko, 2015), recent innovations have led Stetsenko and Arieivitch (2004) to reconsider the central role of subjectivity and self. This focus attends to the perceived gaps in the ontological status given to individuals in Leontiev’s (1978) account of activity theory. This gap in CHAT, has led other researchers to note that, “Subject-subject and within subject relations are under-theorised in activity theory... and requires expansion and clarification” (Daniels, 2010, p. 33). In addition, Roth (2004) suggests that Engeström’s (1987) concern with the structural aspects of activity theory has led to the agentive part of being human to be overlooked. The systems analysis method that focuses on organisations has drawn criticism from a number of CHAT scholars for avoiding macro-politics and positioning, resulting in what has been termed a hollowed-out systems management theory (Dafermos, 2015; Peim, 2009; Ratner, 2011; Toomela, 2008).

This next section will argue that a non-canonical understanding of CHAT (Stetsenko, 2008), informed by concepts drawn from the Vygotskian project, allows for a more complete, holistic understanding of student teacher trajectories as subjects, at both collective and individual levels. This more person oriented focus of CHAT allows for the consideration of the ‘big questions’ which are “undertheorised” in both Leontiev and Engeström’s accounts

(Stetsenko, p. 475) and seeks to reconcile the individual's 'inner space' and psychological realm with the notion of collective activities. This is achieved through an understanding of the individual as part of the collective, and recognising not just the role of cognition, but also the more affective aspects, including feelings and emotions.

### **CHAT and Subjectivity**

At the heart of activity theory is the nature of the relationship between the subject and the object. This is understood in terms of how the subject acts upon the object and how the object acts upon the subject. The subject is understood to be motivated, in the activity, by a need. The need is the object of the activity (Kapetlinin & Nardi, 2012). A person participating in an activity usually has multiple motives, thus a specific constellation of needs, goals and motivations develop for every individual, which Leontiev calls personality (Wardekker et al., 2012).

Although the individual was discussed by Leontiev (1978), and spoken about in terms of psyche and personality, it was still an individual devoid of subjectivity, devoid of his/her own individual thoughts, and devoid of personal history (Dafermos, 2015; Toomela, 2000). According to Mammen and Mironenko (2015, p. 11), Leontiev consistently refused "to look inside the individual" and the individual as a subject was totally reliant on activity for all sense of self. Whereas Vygotsky's focus on cultural mediation and sense making in the first generation of activity theory allowed for consideration of individual subjectivities, this was not the case with Leontiev. The Engeström-Leontiev focus on activity as the unit of analysis "both enhances and diminishes the original Vygotskian theory of culture as learned through mediation" (Hasse, 2014, p. 223). Rather than the emphasis being on the cultural-historical constitution of the artefacts, it is instead enfolded in the collective activities. Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012) agree and suggest that Leontiev lost sight of the person as the active subject of the motive, whereby the "need-object" relationship is replaced by the "motive-person" relationship.

To address these deficiencies, this study aims to incorporate concepts that align the Vygotskian project to the CHAT framework, and to elicit a more holistic and personalised understanding of identity development (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). This suggests CHAT as a suitable theoretical framework for the analysis and understanding of the development of student teacher identity through the subject's internalisation and externalisation of cultural artefacts in the bounded settings of the early childhood centre and the ITE. The role of

subjectivity in CHAT aligns with agency and the development of expertise. In practice-based situations, as practitioners become more familiar with the setting and the rules, they begin to see themselves in terms of the current practice. In an early childhood setting, the longer the individual is engaged in the socially organised activities of the community, the more likely s/he is to adapt the rules according to the needs of the situation (Wenger, 1998). In doing so, new motives for the activity arise, and the subject decides what matters or what the most salient point is for them.

For example, in a routine childcare episode of nappy changing, the teacher's action is guided by multiple rules and policies of the centre to protect the health and safety of both the teacher and the child. In a setting that values relationships, the functional activity of nappy changing is transformed from one concerned primarily with hygiene, to one where the teacher engages with the child in a pedagogy of listening where the child's voice is respected and the teacher follows the child's cues. This shift in the meaning allocated to the task by the teacher from one which is strictly instrumental and functional to one which is concerned with developing relationships can be understood of how in activity system, the object of the activity may be transient.

This example of nappy changing aligns with Engeström's notion of expansive learning, where the subject involved in the activity begins to question existing practice and develop new forms of the activity to overcome the contradictions causing the tensions in the current situation. As noted in the literature about teaching the under 2s, student teachers often find themselves developing feeling of intimacy and care when drawn into relationships which recognise the ethic of care as a defining principle. Roth and Lee (2007, p. 198) reflect on the relationship between the subject and object suggesting that; "equivalent to the mutual change of object and subject in the process of activity; human beings plan and change the material world and societal life just as these settings mutually transform agents and the nature of their interactions with each other. Learning ... occurs during the expansion of the subject's action possibilities in the pursuit of meaningful objects in activity".

### **Transformative Activist Stance (TAS).**

Perhaps the most significant contribution to CHAT in recent years, in terms of considering the relevance of the personal self and subjectivity, is that of Stetsenko (2005; 2008) and Stetsenko and Arieivitch (2004). This was first articulated most comprehensively in two related articles, in 2004 and 2005, titled "The Self in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory"

and “Activity as Object-Related”. Stetsenko and Arieivitch seek to establish a framework that recognises the significance of agency and subjectivity to activity theory. However, both researchers emphasise that their version of non-canonical activity theory seeks not to discredit previous contributors to activity theory, but to build on their work. Consequently, Stetsenko proposes “expanding” activity theory by theorising the self as part of the human collective, and being positioned to make a positive contribution to the world. Another key concept discussed is the notion of relational ontology.

Relational ontology has explicit connection to Leontiev’s activity theory since it claims that social and psychological phenomena are processes that exist in the realms of relations and interactions. That is, relational ontology is embedded, situated, distributed and co-constructed within contexts. The implication of this position is that development and learning are understood as existing in the flux of individuals related to their world, driven by relational processes. A corollary position suggested by Edwards (2005), is the notion of relational agency. Relational agency is defined as the “capacity to align one’s thought and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations” (pp. 169-170), it develops in a dynamic process which involves working with others to expand the “object of activity,” when one is aligning one’s own responses to the newly enhanced interpretations.

Relational ontology and notions of collective agency seem particularly appropriate to early childhood teaching, since the intimate nature of the working environment means that teachers are required to work with other practitioners, and to draw on those resources that may be distributed across systems, to support one’s actions (Edwards, 2005). Exercising relational agency enables the actor to bring to bear the best resources available to work on the problem. A similar mechanism to explain intersubjective relations within activity systems is Lave and Wenger’s (1991) legitimate peripheral participation, whereby the social relations between those already entrenched in the community and the newcomers are understood as pivotal for the socialisation of neophytes. However this perspective has been heavily criticised for emphasising a normative and functionalist perspective that seeks to condone the status quo rather than liberate the individual from his immediate context (Engeström, 2007).

At the core of this new development of transformative activist stance (TAS) is Stetsenko and Arieivitch’s (2004) call to develop Leontiev’s (1978) description of the process of internalisation and externalisation from the notion of a “two-fold transition” to a three-fold

transition. Leontiev's two-fold transition was from the social to the personal or from the collective to the individual, and was considered more or less a replication of Vygotsky's general law of cultural development which suggests that human mental functioning emerges first as distributed between people and other people, and only then as individually mastered by the person himself or herself. Stetsenko (2005), however; suggests a shift to a three-fold transition involving the student teachers' contribution to material production, intersubjective exchanges, and human subjectivity. This reformulation of CHAT addresses the failure to reconcile the subject's inner space, or psychological realm, with the notion of collective activities (Stetsenko, 2013).

As an expansive approach, transformative activist stance lays emphasis not on the constitution of the individual through the internalisation of higher order processes, but on the contribution of the individual within a collective body (Stetsenko, 2013). The term *activist* used by Stetsenko, underlines the notion that whether conscious or not, all individuals are part of a wider collective, thus are understood as social subjects since they are inherently implicated in collaborative processes, and as members and contributors to community practices and agents of communal history. Individuals are understood to contribute to collective practices by changing them through their own individually unique contributions, which is instantiated in each and every act of knowing, being, and doing (Stetsenko, 2013). A transformative activist stance holds that people transcend the here and now, in a non-adaptive fashion, based on a commitment to and vision of how the world ought to be.

At the core of the transformative activist stance (TAS) is the notion that people come to know themselves, and their world, and ultimately become human only and through collaboratively transforming the world (Stetsenko, 2008). Thus all human activities are understood as profoundly imbued with ideology, ethics, and values (Junior, Ostermann, & Rezende, 2014). In discussion of the theoretical and conceptual influences of TAS, Stetsenko (2010) notes how recent literature and thinking about connectedness and interrelatedness fosters a worldview that is reflective of much wider concerns, beyond just education and learning and development, and based on a fundamentally transactional model that views reality as one moving matter:

All living organisms find themselves in an unbreakable, intricate connection with the world, and their existence takes the form of a constantly ongoing, open-ended and

every changing interactions and back-and-forth exchanges with the world – exchanges of energy, resources, forms, products, and so on. (p. 83)

However, empirical applications of Stetsenko's transformative activist stance are limited (Ritchie, 2008). Considering the application of TAS to previous studies, Murphy and Carlisle (2008) examine the processes of coteaching and cogenerative dialogue between teachers and suggests that engagement in these processes and interactions with each other and the students, provides the stimulus for a shared contribution. This, the authors suggest adds even greater potential for realising a TAS. This mirrors Roth and Tobin's (2005) findings, that for new teachers, co-teaching prompts opportunities for expanded learning that would not be realised otherwise. Through consideration of co-teaching, Murphy and Carlisle exemplify how new teachers' experience a shift in their understanding of their role as a teacher, and the implicit moral and ethical implications.

### **Application to Study**

This current study focuses on the application of third-generation activity theory. In this study, there are two principle activity systems, the activity system of the ITE and the activity system of the early childhood centre in which the student is completing field practice. In the field-practice activity system, as illustrated in table 1 below, the rules of the centre reflect the influence of both nationalised standards and regulations and also the policies of the local centre. While standards and regulations apply to all centres, policies will be reflective of the philosophy and pedagogical stance of the early childhood setting. The second element of community refers to the larger societal conditions in which the activity system is nested. In an early childhood centre, the community includes stakeholders such as the parents, local iwi, and others. The element of the division of labour recognises how the workplace is divided in terms of specific tasks depending on the roles. For example, the role and responsibilities of the student teacher may differ from one centre to another, in one place the student teacher might be expected to make a contribution to centre processes, in another the student teacher may be cast in a more observational role. The third-generation activity theory also captures the influence of history on the activity. The historical influence often overlooked in more contemporary accounts of learning and development such as in communities of practice (Engeström, 2007), is intrinsic to activity theory. In early childhood education, history can explain a profound influence, given the often grass roots movements from which ECE approaches derive. For example, the origination of the Reggio Emilia approach is commonly

attributed to the local community's reaction to the obedience shown by the population during Mussolini's fascist regime (Nimmo, 1998).

*Table 1*

*Elements of Field-Practice Activity System*

| Subject         | Tools and signs    | Object   | Outcome                     | Division of labour                   | Community | Rules                        |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Student teacher | Rules and policies | Children | Care and education of child | Student teacher<br>Associate teacher | Families  | National and Centre policies |

The second activity system in which the students are active participants is that of the ITE. Likewise looking along the bottom line of the triangular representation of activity, the same components will have different meanings. Rules consist of both national standardised regulations concerning the induction of early childhood teachers, and the rules will also be reflective of the local policies of the specific ITE. Rules determine entrance requirements for students taking the course, prescribe levels of English language proficiency, and give details regarding study expectations of the students including timing and duration of field-practice placements. Under the element of community, fit all potential stakeholders who influence the ITE activity system, including Lecturers, Government auditory bodies, Centre management, support staff and many more. Finally, the element of the division of labour, signify the range of specialist tasks and functions employed by the ITE to help students achieve their intended outcome, to pass the qualification and become a practising early childhood teacher.

In terms of the application of theory to the study of becoming a professional early childhood teacher, it is important to recognise how both activities might be unpacked to allow for a consideration of identity formation across both personal and interpersonal, and at institutional levels. Since, as is noted by Birkeland (2013), the activity is an abstraction and cannot be observed directly, the researcher must look to goal-directed actions as observable data. This also relates to Leontiev's hierarchy of motives and goals which contribute to the constitution of identity (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Levels of Activity: To Explain Learning and Development in Collective Activities*

| Level of activity        | Characteristics  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Activity (Macro level)   | Culture, history; objectives and outcomes; usually unconscious |
| Action (Meso level)      | Actions and goals; conscious                                   |
| Operations (Micro level) | Habits and reactions: unconscious                              |

Considering the level of activity in the student teacher's field-practice placement, at an operational level, where the physical setting acts to help shape teacher identity, much of the student teacher actions here are often unconscious movements; for example, when speaking to a child, the early childhood teacher practice involves getting down to the child's level so that the teacher is not towering over the young child. At a fundamental level, the embodied practices of being an early childhood teacher are captured at the level of operations. At the level of actions are the premediated actions that are the objects of practice by the student teacher in collaboration with more experienced teachers, often the associate teacher.

Through a ZPD and guided participation, the new teacher observes and imitates the actions of those more experienced teachers, and begins to appropriate practice and underlying values according to his/her own understanding. At the macro level is the activity itself, the activity of the early childhood centre will depend on its pedagogical orientation and teaching philosophy. This will differ from centre to centre. For example, in a preschool setting, the intent of the activity will have a cultural, historical dimension reflecting particular ideals of the community. When working in the centre, the nature of the activity will not always be evident, but all actions and goals will make some contribution.

The field practice is determined by the prescribed goals of the appraisal document set by the initial teacher education provider and also by the rules and policies of the centre. Key to the student teachers' formation of their identity is the role of subjectivity. Through the relationship between operations, actions and activities it is posited that subjectivity evolves, which constitutes towards teacher identity.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided further explanation for the CHAT approach for this study of teacher identity development. It has been noted that until recently the notion of affect and learner subjectivity had been largely overlooked in the literature. This chapter highlighted the significance of subjectivity to CHAT and also to the construct of identity development. It also conceptualised the two interrelated activity systems of ITE and the students' field-practice experiences as "culturally distinctive systems of human psychological and practical activity" (Nuttall & Brennan, 2016, p. 2).

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The broad assumptions about how the world works and how people come to understand it are powerfully implicated in all research activities, penetrating and affecting all of their layers, operating beneath the surface of even simple definitions and procedural decisions... acting like the oceanic deep undercurrents that invisibly but powerfully affect the whole mass of water including its utmost surface levels. (Stetsenko, 2010, p. 77)

### **Introduction**

As the quote from Stetsenko (2010), above, captures, paradigmatic choices including questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology shape all aspects of the research process. This includes the choice of topic, the methods used, the means of analysing data, and the presentation of findings, through to the study's conclusion. These choices reflect the value-laden nature of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and underline the perspective that, in qualitative interpretative research, there is no "immaculate perception" (van Manen, as cited in Hammersley, 1997, p. 26). From this perspective, it is apparent that the researcher is fully accountable and answerable for the decisions made. The implication is that, in qualitative studies, the researcher must be explicit about the assumptions that influence the research design and demonstrate to the reader how the design affords "methodological coherence to ensure congruence between the research question and the components of the method" (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers, 2002, p. 18).

The aim of this chapter is to make explicit the methodological approach taken in this longitudinal qualitative case study, to provide both rationalisation and to demonstrate the rigour that was adopted through the reporting of the theory and practices which framed this current enquiry. As noted in Zubrick, (2016) longitudinal studies are characterised by their focus on the collection of data on the same sample elements on multiple occasions over time. It is generally considered, because of this revisiting, longitudinal methods offer some of the most powerful ways to study developmental change.

This chapter begins by providing the details of the qualitative, interpretivist approach employed, and considers the theoretical perspectives that inform this approach. The chapter also provides a brief recount of third-generation cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Roth, 2007b) to springboard the discussion of the ontological and epistemological considerations that have influenced the choice of the theoretical perspective.

Also in this chapter, I discuss the researcher's position since, given the prominence of the researcher as interpreter in qualitative studies, it is essential to be reflective and to be explicit about one's own position relating to the research areas (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Furthermore, the crucial area relating to trustworthiness in qualitative studies is described in relation to this study. This chapter closes with a consideration of the ethical perspectives that have helped to provide parameters for the researcher- participant relationship.

## **Research Design**

This study utilised a case study methodology, supported by qualitative methods in order to answer the following research questions:

How can cultural-historical activity theory contribute to discussions about identity development for student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in early childhood education?

How do these identities develop over time with reference to the changing contexts of practice?

Nardi (1996) suggests four broad methodological principles for CHAT-informed research, which this research design reflects. Firstly, Nardi holds that the research time-frame should be long enough to understand users' objects, including, where appropriate, changes in objects over time and their relation to the objects of others in the setting studied. Secondly, Nardi recommends attention to broad patterns of activity rather than narrow episodic fragments. Thirdly, there should be a varied set of data-collection techniques, and lastly there should be a commitment to understanding things from the users' points of view. I would suggest that this current study meets all four of those principles, in that the study lasts for the entire duration of the one-year graduate diploma course, it looks across the whole programme with a particular emphasis on field experiences, and hopes to foreground the students' integration of theory and practice. A range of methods was used in this study, and the researcher's inside perspective gave me an insider's insight.

## **Qualitative approach.**

This study takes a qualitative approach, which aligns with studies that are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In qualitative studies, the researcher interprets the data collected from interviews, observations and, in this study, document

analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The qualitative approach allows for naturalistic studies, so the research participants can be viewed whilst engaged in their normal everyday activities, such as teaching and interacting with children in early childhood centres. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with attaining an in-depth and a multi-layered understanding of how things have become the way they are, implying an emphasis on processes and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The defining characteristic of a qualitative approach to research includes the search for meaning and understanding. In this process, the researcher, following an inductive investigative strategy, is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, with the aim of having a richly descriptive end product (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

An inductive approach is integral to qualitative studies since the research moves from the concrete to the abstract, meaning that the starting point of the research is what is being seen or heard, as Lichtman (2012) notes: “Researchers begin with data and use those data to gain an understanding of phenomena and interactions” (p. 11). That qualitative methods start from the perspective and actions of the subjects studied is one of the few distinguishing features, described by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) as differentiating qualitative and quantitative approaches. As has been noted in the literature review, the area of early childhood education and the education of pre-service teachers is largely neglected in empirical studies and while inferences can be drawn from the compulsory sector, there are characteristics that position early childhood education as unique and culturally and contextually specific (Rodd, 2012). The nature of this current study suggested a holistic focus, since there is no one variable that would account for, or help to explain, the construction of student teacher identity. The notion of identity captures the student teacher’s personal, social and situated self, meaning that a holistic approach was necessary to capture the enormity of this experience.

This study is particularly interested in viewing early childhood centres as cultural sites, with their own cultural artefacts and tools. Such settings are “soaked in social meaning” (Hesse, 2014, p. 69). Each centre has its own rules, and communities, and divisions of labour, all of which mediate the activity which, in general terms, is the care and education of young children. From this perspective, an ethnographic study is interested in the exploration of the culture of the centres. By culture we mean the constellations of practice that have been historically developed and dynamically shaped by communities in order to accomplish the purposes they value. “Such practices are constituted by the tools they use, the social networks with which they are connected, the ways they organize joint activity, the discourses they use and value” (Nasir et al., 2006, p. 489).

### **Theoretical considerations.**

The theoretical and methodological lens employed in this study is non-canonical cultural-historical activity theory (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). This perspective argues for a self that is not socially determined alone, but real, agentic, and unique. The methodology had to be considerate of participant subjectivities, intersubjective exchanges in collaborative, practice-based settings, and the appropriation and application of cultural artefacts of the micro culture of the settings (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). CHAT provides researchers with both a methodological framework, and the practical tools of application (Wilson, 2014). At the heart of cultural-historical theory is the relationship between the human subject and their environment that is mediated by tools that develop over time and within specific contexts and cultures. Cultural-historical theory as developed by the troika represents a broad and wide-ranging theory that takes into account development from a societal, community and interpersonal/intrapersonal level. As discussed in the previous chapter, Leontiev's contribution shifted the emphasis away from the individual and questions of mediation to concentrate on the significance of the object as the focus for the attentions of the collective. When used as a heuristic tool, CHAT allows the researcher to address core questions of what and how student teachers are learning. Douglas (2012) notes how:

Because of its emphasis on settings (social contexts and practices which are the product of cultural history) CHAT looks at how teachers and student teachers' beliefs are affected, and accounts for changes in their thinking, this is, how social systems affect decisions and behaviour. (p. 287)

### **Ontological considerations.**

In the next two sections regarding ontology and epistemology, I will reflect on the position I have taken as the researcher and consider how this is reflective of CHAT considerations. As noted in the qualitative research literature, there are two broad ontological positions: realism and constructionism, considered as poles (Bryman, 2015, Sarantakos, 2012). The realist position asserts that reality is fixed, exists independently from human consciousness, and is uniform, generating the same meaning for all people, which can be discovered by a researcher. In contrast, the constructionist position rejects the assertion that meaningful reality is objective and fixed, awaiting discovery, arguing that reality is constructed by people and comes into existence as they engage with the world. Crotty (1998) sums up constructionism as: "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent

upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42).

Constructionism recognises a place for both the natural and the social world, it recognises that objects exist in the world prior to human consciousness, but that without consciousness they have no meaning. As Crotty (1998) notes “They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them” (p. 43). A significant component of constructionism which has implications for CHAT theory is intentionality. Intentionality, used in this context, is not purposeful or deliberate, but rather refers to “referentiality, relatedness, directedness, ‘aboutness’... When the mind becomes conscious of something, when it ‘knows’ something, it reaches out to, and into, that object.” (p. 44). Intentionality suggests that the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective is untenable.

This active relationship, framed by intentionality, or motives, between the subject and the object, is also integral to the CHAT perspective, since at the root of CHAT is Vygotsky’s notion of the active learner, learning from the environment and from more knowledgeable others. An example from Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012) illustrates this point as they reflect on learning maths as being a mutually constituting process. The learner develops skills as a result of experience and, whilst the solving of the problem determines the person’s maths abilities, the authors were left to conclude “subjects do not only express themselves in their activities, in a very real sense they are produced by the activities” (p. 12). Through the learner’s engagement with the social world, the development of his/her higher order psychological processes, such as memory, classification, and ways of organising information, are internalised by the learner. It is through the subject’s engagement with the object, mediated by cultural artefacts, that the subject internalises what is considered to be important (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012; Peim, 2009).

In the same way, Stetsenko (2008) accounts for the way in which human beings interact through the concept of relational ontology of human development, and more specifically, that of human active engagement with the world. This idea was based on the notion that “*collaborative purposeful transformation of the world is the core of human nature and the principled grounding of learning and development*” (p. 474, emphasis in original). Through this process of collaboratively transforming the world in view of their goals and purposes, people come to know themselves and their world, as well as, ultimately, to be human.

Stetsenko claims that the manifold relationship between material production, subjectivity (psychological processes) and intersubjectivity (culture, politics, ideality) needs to be emphasised within CHAT.

This dialectical perspective, which Stetsenko (2010) suggests is shared by Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky, proposes a transactional view of human nature that highlights how the individual is shaped by his/her interaction and participation in socially organised activities. Through these claims, Stetsenko (2008) seeks to reinstate both the materialist ontology of human subjectivity and the humanist ontology of material practice. A relational ontology, which can be viewed through the ZPD, suggests that the individual is embedded, situated, distributed, and co-constructed within contexts while being intrinsically interwoven into these events (Roth & Radford, 2010). According to a relational ontological perspective, individuals are “seen as existing in the flux of individuals relating to their world, driven by relational processes and their unfolding logic, and therefore as not being constrained by rigidly imposed, pre-programmed scripts or rules” (Stetsenko, 2008, p. 477). Ontology in this study is understood as the ongoing continuous process of becoming, which is a highly social activity, which concurs with the constructionist paradigm that recognises both the importance of subjective meaning, but which does not reject outright some notion of objectivity.

### **Epistemological consideration.**

The second fundamental consideration of social research is epistemology which is concerned with the nature of knowledge and can be divided into positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2015; Sarantakos, 2012). Whereas positivism draws upon empiricism to assert that knowledge comes from sense experiences, thus observation and experience are valued in the acquisition of knowledge, the interpretivist position contends that the social world cannot be understood using the same procedures, and is based on a need to understand, rather than explain (Bryman, 2015). Interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

This study is interpretative because it is concerned with gaining the student teachers’ emic perspective of experience in their natural context by means of interviews, observation and document analysis through which participants make attributions to influential sources in how they teach. According to the interpretive paradigm, reality is a subjective complexity which is dynamically constructed and interpreted by human beings in their daily activities. As

teachers' practices or actions are guided by their beliefs, their actions are intentional and meaningful. The ontological and epistemological positions suggest a qualitative approach.

## **Case Study**

There are many possible definitions of case studies, leading some frustrated researchers to go as far as claiming that case study as a term is a definitional morass (Gerring, 2007). However, there is some sympathy for this view, given the sometimes-contradictory perspectives put forward by some of the principal advocates. While Yin (2008) can be said to take a more objectivist, scientific approach, with a focus on the process, Stake (2005), on the other hand, seems to be more holistic in his approach, and seems to deliberately distance himself from traditional perspectives. According to Stake, a "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" and "as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p. 443).

Simons (2009) represents a similar perspective, defining a case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real-life' context" (p. 21). This focus on the singularity of the phenomenon is one of the few points of consensus within the literature, and dates back to Miles and Huberman's (1994) definition of a case study as being concerned with "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). This is supported in the literature by Yin (2008) who suggests that "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). The case studies approach is desirable when the many variables are inseparable from the participants and from the context. Yin adds that a case study approach has a distinct advantage for *how* and *why* questions and in those situations where the investigator has less control, or if variables are particularly embedded.

This relates to this study's interest in the development of student teacher identity by CALD students. The goal of a case study is to truly understand a single case, and not to compare it with other cases in order to make general claims. By emphasising the uniqueness of a case, the expected outcome of a case study is particularisation and not generalisation. A case study allows for an in-depth explanation of social behaviour. As suggested by Thomas (2009), "the key [to case study] is to draw rich, interconnected information from this singular focus and derive unique insights from the analysis that follows" (p. 44). The strength of the case study

is this singular approach, which allows the researcher to seek to “uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). Stake (as cited in Merriam, 2009) also elucidates, suggesting that through this process of examination of the single phenomenon under study, “previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get the way they are can be expected from case studies” (p. 44).

For the purpose of my research, the reason for the choice of case study aligns with Merriam (2009) when she identifies that “the most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (p. 40). It is this shared characteristic with activity theory that makes case study so compelling. Moreover, unlike other methodological approaches such as ethnography or phenomenology, there is much more scope for the researcher in terms of use of methods and their interpretation. Both ethnographic and phenomenological approaches have tied-in ontological and epistemological assumptions which do not pertain to case study. In addition, case studies are optimal when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined, such is this study in which the student teacher becomes a student teacher in the context of experiencing teaching in field-practice contexts. This focus on the unit of analysis sets it apart from other types of qualitative research which are defined by the focus of the study rather than the unit of analysis.

The decision to adopt case study as the primary methodology was instigated primarily because of its strong alignment with activity theory. There are a number of shared characteristics that position case study as the most applicable methodology. Yamagata-Lynch (2010, p. 63) suggests that “case studies are particularly compatible with the theoretical assertions and analytical intentions involved in activity systems analysis.” The reason for this assertion lies in a number of shared characteristics between case studies and activity systems analysis. At the fore is that case studies allow for a naturalistic inquiry paradigm. This is uppermost since activity systems aim to capture the social, historical and cultural factors that constitute the participant’s context.

Yamagata-Lynch (2010) goes further and states that “the role of an activity theory investigator is to vicariously experience, make sense of, and become able to report participants’ lived experiences” (p. 65). For the researcher, capturing these lived experiences

in the student teachers' construction of identity-in-practice is significant, since it is one's emotional reaction to the lived experience that helps to shape identity. According to van Manen (1990) "Lived experience is the breathing of meaning as it assigns meaning to the phenomena of lived life through mediations, conversations, daydreams, inspirations and other interpretative acts" (pp. 36-37). This notion of lived experience has been taken up from a Vygotskian perspective by other authors, and is also known in the literature by the Spanish term *vivencia* (Quiñones, & Fler, 2011).

Activity theory implies that the participant is embedded within a bounded recognisable system that allows the investigator to clearly define the limits of his/her inquiry. In activity theory, the most appropriate unit of analysis for understanding the development of student teachers is not the individual conceptualised as a learner of decontextualized and generalised knowledge and skills, but rather the learning activity system in which s/he participates. The unit of analysis is the activity system which integrates the subject, object, and the tools and signs into a unified whole (Engeström, 1993). In the case of the student teacher in placement, one activity system in which the student teacher is embedded is the early childhood centre. This is a physically and time-bounded system in which where key components are easily identifiable and there is a clear beginning and end. The subject or collective subject are the student teachers, the object is the care and education of the child. The community includes all stakeholders including other teachers, management and administration, the children's parents and the wider community.

The division of labour reflects the often hierarchical organisation that is apparent in even small early childhood centres, including, from the bottom up in terms of accountability and responsibility, the student teacher, casual reliever, room teacher, head teacher, manager and owner. The tools are both the psychological tools of the environment, including centre philosophy and policies, curriculum guidelines, as well as the kind of hands-on resources that mediate the child's understanding. This demarcation of the bounded system allows the investigator to examine the relationship between the phenomena, variables, and the overall context. This brings an organising framework to the study to help maintain focus that makes case studies a viable option.

There are different types of qualitative case study noted in the literature. Merriam (2009) calculates three different types including historical and observational, intrinsic and instrumental, and multisite case studies. More commonly used typologies are examined by

Stake (2010) and are differentiated by the researcher's interest, and include intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Yin (2008), on the other hand, categorises case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive, and he also differentiates between single, holistic case studies and multiple case studies. This case study is an explanatory case study since its explanations are based on in-depth understanding and coverage of a topic and "where the phenomenon ... needs 'unpacking' the connections between different parts of the issue need unravelling and the case study offers a route to explanation" (Yin, 2008, p. 132).

### **Researcher's Role: Reflexivity**

Reflective research has two basic characteristics, which are careful interpretation and reflection (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Interpretation depends on "the utmost awareness of theoretical assumptions, the importance of language and pre-understanding" (p. 9). Reflection includes the researcher turning attention inwards, to themselves, and outwards to the broader research community to consider the "interpretation of interpretation" (p. 9), meaning that the researcher must be aware of his/her own biases and those of the community which will influence perception of the research data.

Reflexivity in qualitative research has been defined as "the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (Berger, 2015, p. 220). This entails turning the researcher lens back onto oneself and questioning the influence that one's own situatedness may have on the setting, the people being studied, and the way in which the findings are interpreted.

Reflexivity in qualitative research has been increasingly recognised as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge. Reflexivity includes consideration about the ontological, epistemological and axiological components of the self, intersubjectivity and the colonisation of knowledge (Berger, 2015). In seeking to consider the meanings that emerged from this study, it is important also to explore how my position related to that of the student teachers who participated in this study. In my role as the programme leader, I have an emic understanding of the different courses, the programme and the intent of the field-practice experience, as a way of helping students to make connections between their academic coursework and their practice in early childhood centres. Working as an early childhood lecturer for the last 10 years has given me entrance in to hundreds of early childhood centres

in Auckland and the surrounding regions, and an insider understanding of the use of community artefacts to shape the teaching and learning environment.

I believe passionately in progressive education that seeks to honour the individual subjectivities of the children in early childhood and in the value of *Te Whāriki* as a guiding document that invites community participation. In addition, I, too, am an immigrant of sorts, having left New Zealand with home-sick Irish parents to be raised and educated in London. Moreover, my partner of the last ten years is from Shanghai, China, which I have visited on a number of occasions. Also, prior to working in early childhood, I was an English-language teacher, who had worked extensively both domestically and overseas with mostly young Asian language students, including both Chinese and Koreans. Explaining some of this background to my participants, over the course of the meetings, helped in achieving a rapport and establishing the grounds of a trusting relationship.

This was particularly true of Leo, a gregarious male with whom I exchanged updates about family and partners. Initially I had resisted such attempts at personalising the relationship, being conscious of how my views might influence the interview and in an effort to maintain my image of a fairly objective researcher. However, the most illuminating discussion with Leo was the penultimate interview, when he chose to revisit some of the comments he had made previously about a “successful” placement, as he was now ready to reveal the truth of the placement. Monique, who perhaps demonstrated the most shift over the course of a year, would regularly ask for advice and seek suggestions for how to improve herself as an early childhood teacher.

During these meetings, I was very aware of the power relationship that existed, so made very deliberate attempts to address this. For all participants, at various stages, at the start of the interview I would repeat ethical statements regarding the right not to answer any question, and the right to withdraw, and remind them that their identities would be kept confidential from all others in the workplace. Students were very frank during these interviews, whereas in their portfolios and documented work they were careful to frame their perspective in accordance with mainstream early childhood beliefs. These latter views were sometimes flatly contradicted in the interviews, suggesting that I had achieved some level of success in exploring the student teacher perspective.

In some interviews, I felt this power dynamic being reversed. This was particularly true when seeking to explore the students’ perspectives on aspects of their field practice. In this

position, I was ignorant of the specific social practices and routines of the centre as experienced by the participants, and they were, in fact, in the expert position. I felt that many of the participants enjoyed this as an empowering experience, and this encouraged them to give a much more comprehensive account of their engagement in the centre setting than perhaps would have been available otherwise.

My status as the programme leader affected the process of data collection and data analysis, in studying the identity shift of the early childhood teachers, because it allowed me to approach the study with some knowledge about the subject, and to address certain topics more easily or even to be aware that I should address them. But because of this insider position, I had to be constantly on alert and to reflect rigorously on how my own opinions could have shaped the findings. However, coming from a shared-experience position, I was better equipped with insights and the ability to understand the student experience, and was more sensitised to certain dimensions of the data. For example, early on in the research I was particularly interested in questions of exclusion from the established community, which had been much discussed in the literature. However, this was not supported in the participants' interviews which spoke mostly of multicultural settings where fellow teachers also came from diverse backgrounds. For example, in Monique's home centre, the other teachers were from India, Brazil, Venezuela, and China, whereas the literature that had informed my perspective was mostly from Australia where the reported demographics were quite distinctive. Occurrences such as the above reminded me of the importance of not "pushing" participants to tell their stories in a certain direction.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, an insider's position and familiarity carry the risks of blurring boundaries; imposing own values, beliefs, and perceptions by a researcher; and projection of biases (Berger, 2015). There was also the very real danger of presuming that we shared the same language of early childhood education. However, the students' discussion and understanding of core ECE principles, and accurate use of key theoretical constructs, were often still very much developing, and verified the notion that performance precedes competence (Cazden, 1981). For example, a discussion of *Te Whāriki* by one of the participants, Leo, suggested a very superficial engagement, which was belied by his written work in both the student teacher folder and in assessment tasks.

As a researcher, I was concerned that the participants would consider my interviews were somehow judgemental. This was particularly true for Chen, who towards the end of the

process adopted a much more defensive attitude; this perception was far from the truth, and although I had pedagogical issues with some of the opinions expressed, as an individual I admired their courage and regularly reflected on my actions as a researcher. This fitted well with the refrain that “reflexivity is situating the researcher as non-exploitative and compassionate toward the research subjects” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

The researcher position in a longitudinal study such as this can be quite fluid, particularly where the main source of data is interviews which rely a lot on the level of rapport the researcher is able to establish. Initially I had sought to be “objective,” to refrain from sharing my own experiences, and I had excluded myself from lecturing on their courses or observing them in practice in an official capacity as a visiting lecturer. Over the year, however, relationships with participants developed to the point where there was a level of intimacy and friendship that I had not considered would be such an important part of the research process. Being reflective throughout this process, by keeping a personal journal and speaking with colleagues about such experiences, has made me realise the profound way in which the researcher influences the study.

### **Maintaining Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence or trust one can have in a study and its findings (Robson, 2011) and in qualitative research this is made up of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria, originally proposed by Guba (1981), have been readily accepted and applied by many (Shenton, 2004). Credibility relates to the quantitative measure of internal validity. This seeks to establish that the participants’ constructions of reality have been accurately understood and reconstructed by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This, Shenton (2004) suggests, can be done through a number of different strategies.

In this study I explored the perceptions, experiences, feelings and beliefs of the student teachers through multiple interviews. After each interview I would write notes and draw inferences related to theoretical considerations. Early on in the study, one of the principal focuses was on the question of whether the student teachers felt as if they were welcomed and accepted by others in the community. Given that this is potentially a very sensitive area, it was a question that I was careful to frame in empathetic terms. However, there was very little evidence from the students’ interviews or documentation that the type of exclusion evident in Australian studies of CALD students was part of their experience. In such a situation,

member checking was used to question the validity of my line of questioning. This also happened with the question of the students' use of WeChat. The significance of this as a tool for identity development was not clear until near the end of the study.

Member checking happened at two levels (Shenton, 2004), the first involved myself as the researcher sending the participant the typed transcript of the interview to verify that it had been recorded accurately and whether there was anything they would like to change. This posed a problem, since my transcriptions had been verbatim, so sending students an exact written transcript tended to highlight language errors, which may have been embarrassing for the students. The second level of member checking often happened during the actual interviews, especially towards the last two rounds with Vicki and Anna. This involved verification of the researcher's emerging theories and inferences, as formed as a result of the interviews. However, while I consider such member checking served a purpose, it was done only with those two participants because they showed an interest in the study's application of theory, and I felt they were able to grasp the subtleties of the theory.

Transferability, which relates to the quantitative measure of external validity, refers to the degree to which the results of the qualitative research might be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2015). Because of the scale of many qualitative studies and the influence of the environment, it is difficult to establish transferability. However, this is achieved if the research process is extensively and thoroughly described so that others can follow and replicate. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce a "thick description" that provides a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to another milieu (Bryman, 2015).

Dependability questions whether the same results would have been obtained if the same phenomena had been seen twice. However, this is problematic in qualitative research as human behaviour is in a constant state of flux, and replication of the study will not provide the same results. Of greater importance is whether the results are consistent with the data collected; namely, whether others would agree that the results make sense, after an examination of the research process. Strategies that could increase the dependability of a qualitative study include triangulation. Triangulation could include where data were collected at different times, the number of methods used together, or when more than one researcher is involved (Sarantakos, 2012).

The three methods of interview, observation and document analysis held potential for the triangulation of findings. However, the purpose of such triangulation is not to discern a single truth or to interrogate the participants about which version of reality is the truth, but to explore where there were apparent contradictions in what was said, and what was written and done. Stake (2010) views member checking as a “win-win situation” (p. 124) since, if participants’ accounts are confirmed, this makes us more confident, and, if there are contradictions, as with this current study, it implies there are more meanings to unpack.

These contradictions, of which there were many, pointed to the internal tensions many of the participants felt as a consequence of needing to meet field-practice criteria based on a free-play and child-centred approach, in settings which had contradictory pedagogical priorities. Triangulation of the three methods was essential to account for the multi-voices of the participants. Another strategy I employed, which brought about surprising results, was iterative questioning. This was a strategy I would adopt at the start of the interview, as we reviewed the previous interview to ascertain that my working hypotheses were tenable. With Leo, in the last interview, I decided to revisit his experience of field practice three in the out-of-home centre with the under 2s. Previously, the student had spoken about the field practice without mentioning any complications; however, in the last interview, when asked again, Leo told me how he had felt deliberately excluded by the associate teacher for a perceived slight on the centre.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The social relationship between the researcher and participant, understood through the dynamics of power, traditionally frames the researcher as having the power and participants as being the subjects of the process (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Since, in this study, the principal researcher was also a lecturer who taught on the graduate diploma programme, issues of power and influence needed thorough consideration. Therefore, it was important to generate confidence that there were no overt or covert penalties attached to non-participation, nor any pressure to participate. Students received an invitation to the study through a news item in the college online platform, rather than the researcher approaching students directly. Once students viewed the invitation, and links to the participation information sheet (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B), the researcher then contacted the participants to discuss the procedures once again in more detail. Prior to visiting student teachers on field practice placements, I made contact with the early childhood centres,

informed them of my study via participation information sheets (Appendix C), and if agreed, managers were invited to give their consent by signing the consent form (Appendix D).

As a novice researcher, I found great value in reflecting on my role as both researcher and lecturer, and on how my professional and research positions affected the study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Initially in the research, I understood my role as the researcher was to remain objective and non-partial in my communications with the participants. However, over the course of regular meetings and communications, my relationship with the participants was strengthened as I became aware of the importance of sharing information with my students about my own personal and professional journey, as a way of creating a more “open” environment (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). As an emigrant from the UK, I was able to empathise with their sense of “newness” to New Zealand and, in some cases, to teaching.

Through discussions of influences on their choice of career, it became obvious that such questions could only be addressed by the participants by sharing personal accounts of persuading or following their partners to New Zealand. News that my wife is Chinese and that I had been to the Chinese Eastern Seaboard and travelled to Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing, and had taught in Korea, meant that participants accepted I had some understanding of their context. For example, the student teachers’ narratives of their own educational context and that of their children were features of Asian life I was already familiar with, having worked with international students both in language teaching and in an early childhood lecturer capacity for almost 20 years. In many ways, I was keen to present myself as an insider to this study to build trust and rapport.

Once the cycles of interviews started, student consent was revisited at the start of the first interview, and reviewed again at later cycles, to ensure the participants remained fully informed and aware that they could withdraw at any time or ask for a response to be deleted (Murray, 2013). An example of the types of questions asked of the student teacher participants can be viewed in Appendix E. In my dual role of researcher and faculty member, there were also occasions when I needed to differentiate responsibilities and encourage candidates to report or refer to the most appropriate person or service in the college, when a personal or academic issue was disclosed. This stance recognises some of the complexities of the situated nature of research ethics (Simons & Usher, 2000) around the location of the tutor/researcher and student/becoming professional/research-participant. For me, this was perhaps the most challenging area in this new role of teacher/researcher, since many of the

participants were intrinsically interested in speaking about their own teaching practices and those of their centres. The interviews, to some extent, were seen, although this was not intended, as pedagogical support. I could not help but become a critical friend of sorts for participants eager to test their own understanding (Hedges, 2010). This was perhaps most noticeable with Monique and her appropriation of the concepts and discourses of Reggio Emilia settings.

The focus of this research, however, is not to subjugate the participant but, through the research process, to raise awareness of the possibilities of the multiple identifications open to the student teacher, and, through the process, to give prominence to the student teachers' voices so that their perspectives can be understood and shared. The process of interpretation was done in consultation with the student teacher so that this voice was not silenced, and to also lend greater reliability to the study.

An added complexity of this research is my own position within the college where the study is situated and my professional relationship with my colleagues and the students. There is the potential for moral hazard in studying students from one's own college, in that a professional bias may be evident in favour of the institution I work for and the colleagues with whom I work. However, by being conscious and considerate of this potential dilemma and keeping an audit trail of the research process, I planned to avoid any such conflicts of interests.

Borrowing from early childhood education, the approach taken in this study was one of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013). This entails not only the meeting of minimum standards of ethical behaviour but also recognition of the importance of the dialogical and relational process that lies at the heart of ethical responsibility (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). This approach also supports the ontological perspective of qualitative research which is to present the experiences of the participants from the participant perspective in constant consultation and collaboration; such an approach also supports the validity of the findings. Therefore, components of participant autonomy and informed consent, as well as privacy and confidentiality, were considered in dialogue with the research participant.

There is always an element of risk of harm or injury with social research. Through this discussion, however, potential risk areas were identified, as well as ways to avoid them. For example, one such risk for the participants was that discussions of study and workplace practices may have provoked feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty, particularly in students who may already be struggling to come to terms with the demands of being a student teacher

aspiring to professionalism. Harm, in this instance, can also be considered as setting back or thwarting. Therefore, it is important that the researcher was sensitive to such issues and was able to offer support or avenues of support.

This, however, cannot mean the role of the researcher is one of accomplice. But, if support is sought, where there is an apparent conflict of interest that support may only be given in a mediating capacity, rather than an active one. It was also important, since the student was discussing issues relating to workplace and study practices, that no harm was done to the student's standing within either community, so that after the research was conducted, the student teacher was still able to participate in that community as before. This meant ensuring the confidentiality of the participants was uppermost in my consideration. Through a description of the college settings, and given the relatively limited extent of the early childhood ITE sector, there is a presumption that readers who are familiar with the ECE context in New Zealand may be able to identify the provider. However, it would be highly unlikely that individual centres would be recognised from descriptions alone, and extremely unlikely that participants' identities could be revealed from the use of pseudonyms.

### **Chapter Summary**

The challenge in this chapter was to explain the methodological implications of choosing a CHAT theoretical perspective, since this influenced all other parts of the methodology, from considerations of ontology and epistemology. As Stetsenko (2010) noted, in the opening quote at the start of the chapter, the kind of theoretical decisions that are made influence all parts of the study and must be shown to be compatible and must be understood as part of the qualitative approach undertaken in this study. The goal of this chapter was to lay the foundations for a reading of the findings chapter, where significant themes are identified and extrapolated, and to account for the alignment of methods.

## **CHAPTER 5: METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of the research process, beginning with an overview of the participants, how they were selected, and a review of the application of data-collection tools and procedures. We start with consideration of the participants, and an explanation of the structure of the programme in which they were all enrolled. We then consider the early childhood field-practice placement settings, since it is acknowledged that contextual factors merit their own attention in research that stresses the fundamentally social nature of developing identity (Smagorinsky, 2012). The use of the CHAT perspective was intrinsic to identifying how the settings differed, with each setting having distinct artefacts and activities which were reflective of their distinctive organisation and pedagogical cultures.

To address the research question which framed this study, the focus was on transformations in student teacher identity as a result of their engagement in complex activity systems of both the early childhood settings and the community of learners, as part of the formal initial teacher education programme. In both settings, student teachers were required to demonstrate competence and provide evidence of the appropriation and application of course concepts and negotiation of their role as student teachers.

### **Recruiting Participants for the Study**

To recruit participants for the study, the researcher posted a news item on the students' online platform, of the Graduate Diploma programme at a large tertiary provider, which only recently enrolled students would be able to view. The news item broadly outlined the area of the intended research and asked for willing participants to reply to news item. The researcher received ten responses, two from students of Indian heritage and the remainder from East Asian students. Of the 10 respondents, one could not be involved, since in my role as programme leader I had already needed to intervene to help resolve an issue in the student's home centre. The graduate diploma qualification attracts a significant number of international students, approximately 40%, but more than 60% have English as a second language, and the largest ethnic grouping is East Asian. The two Indian students who responded to the initial email, did not respond to the follow-up email which gave more details of the study. Three participants were initially recruited; following this, another two participants came forward, and the last participant came forward at the end of 2014. This recruitment reflects the rolling

enrolment policy of the provider, meaning that students can start their programme at their convenience.

At the time of the study, all students who had English as an additional language were required by the registering body of professional teachers, the New Zealand Teachers Council (now replaced by government decree to Education Counts), to have completed a three-year bachelor degree or higher with a New Zealand or Australian provider, or to have achieved the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at Level 7 or higher in all skill bands. This was then revised, by the then New Zealand Teachers' Council, to a flat rule that all student teachers who had English as an additional language had to achieve seven in each of the IELTS four language proficiency areas.

In addition, as part of the programme requirement, all full-time students were required to be either working or volunteering in a self-nominated, registered teacher-led early childhood centre for a minimum of 16 hours-per-week. This is termed *field experience* and, unlike the period of *field practice*, does not have specific learning outcomes tied to it. This time of field experience, stipulated by the Teachers' Council for field-based students, allows students to get first-hand experience of being in a home centre for an extended period, which facilitates the development of relationships between the student and his/her associate teacher, and relationships with the children and with their parents. Often, the early childhood centres will approach the student with the view to employing them as a reliever to cover sick staff and holidays.

### **Participants.**

In summary, student teachers were recruited for this study as they enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at the teaching college. As Table 3 below shows, of the six participants, one was male, just two had no previous teaching experience, all were graduates of their home countries, with Vicki earning a second bachelor's degree at Waikato University. Just one student was from South Korea, all others were from Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, or more precisely, the prosperous Eastern coastal areas. Two of the student teachers, Monique and Anna, were married and were parents of young children, both had brought their children to New Zealand and the children were enrolled in full-time early childhood education, and primary school education, respectively. The names shown are pseudonyms but have been chosen to reflect the origins of their names, for example where the student teacher has chosen an "English-sounding" name, this is also reflected in the chosen

pseudonyms. The participants have been ordered to reflect their recruitment to the study, with Leo being the first student who volunteered, and Anna the final student.

*Table 3*

*Participants' Demographics*

| Student teacher | Age     | Place of origin   | Time in NZ prior to programme | Previous teaching experience          | Previous academic qualification    |
|-----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Leo (male)      | 25 yrs. | Hong Kong         | Six months                    | No teaching experience                | BA in history and Japanese studies |
| Hong            | 24 yrs. | Shenzhen/China    | Six months                    | Registered English-language teacher   | Bachelor of Education              |
| Chen            | 25 yrs. | Shanghai/China    | One month                     | Qualified as Chinese language teacher | Bachelor of Education              |
| Monique         | 34 yrs. | Fujian/China      | One year                      | No teaching experience                | Urban planning                     |
| Vicki           | 26 yrs. | Seoul/South Korea | Three years                   | Three years ESOL teacher              | Bachelor in Hospitality            |
| Anna            | 35 yrs. | Beijing/China     | One year                      | 18 years early childhood teacher      | Bachelor of Education              |

### **Study context.**

This was a 50-week full-time programme delivered in a blended mode using online technology to deliver curriculum, but also utilising face-to-face components such as the field-practice component, weekly international tutorials and two block courses. The programme consisted of nine academic taught courses which ran sequentially, each course lasted approximately 40 days. The field-practice component was delivered alongside the taught courses and, in terms of programme requirements, constituted a tenth course. In the taught courses, students were graded on the completion of the assessment, typically made up of at least two separate but related tasks, which were due at the end of the 40-day period. For students to pass the field-practice component, all 22 learning outcomes from the field-practice-appraisal form had to be met within four placements. Students who were not able to complete all learning outcomes, were given an additional placement. If all remaining

outcomes were still not met, the student would receive a grade of fail and would be required to re-sit the field-practice course.

Whilst enrolled in the taught courses and the field-practice placements, students had access to discussion forums specific to that particular taught course. The discussion forums were composed of two plenary forums, one titled *academic forum* and the other *student support*. The intention of the academic forum was for the course lecturer to develop a dialogue with the learners that related to the course content and to their field-based experiences, thereby helping students realise a praxis-based approach that sought to make transparent to the learner the integral connection of theory and practice, and to overcome the widely discussed and long-perceived disconnect between campus and field-based education (Zeichner, 2006). For example, one of the learning outcomes from the field-practice appraisal document, that students would be expected to meet during their first placement, requires them to “Demonstrate a range of appropriate professional and personal practices”; examples of how this could be met are given, such as: “initiates communication with parents/caregivers,” “listens to children and allows them to complete what they want to say,” and “begins to develop and reflect on personal philosophy.”

By completing these examples of practice and reflecting on their value and application to practice situations, the students are encouraged to review the taught courses and consider how these inform their meeting the field-practice learning outcome. The graduate diploma programme has been designed specifically with field-based students in mind, with the intention of encouraging the students to interact with the children, and their associate teachers, from the first course; this was further developed and expanded upon in later learning outcomes. Once past the “general” focus programmes, the courses became more specialised. Table 4 shows the relation between the learning outcomes of the taught courses and the timing of the student teacher placements. For example, students would need to engage with children’s health and safety, the significance of play as a pedagogical tool, and the framing of sociocultural assessment, whilst on their first field practice and in their home centres.

Table 4

*Courses in the GD Programme and Timing of Field-Practice Placements*

| Course in chronological order | Focus of course according to LOs                                | Timing of field-practice placements | Block course        |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Introduction to ECE           | Health and safety, and being a reflective practitioner          |                                     |                     |
| Play as a framework           | Play as vehicle for children's learning                         | Home-centre field practice one      | First block course  |
| Sociocultural assessment      | Documenting children's learning via learning stories            |                                     |                     |
| Bicultural practice in ECE    | Honouring the Treaty and using te reo                           | Out-of-home field practice one      |                     |
| Inclusive practice            | Including all children in teaching and learning experiences     |                                     |                     |
| Lifespan development          | Post structural and postmodern approaches                       | Out-of-home field practice two      | Second block course |
| Quality curriculum            | Quality perspectives and curriculum review                      |                                     |                     |
| Leadership in ECE             | Leadership theories and practices common in ECE                 | Home-centre field practice two      |                     |
| Early childhood research      | Compose literature review and proposal on topic of own interest |                                     |                     |

This current study is more concerned with the period of field practice. Over the course of the 50-week programme, all students must complete a full 14-week field-practice placement. The timing of the field-practice placements is similar for all students, but there is a degree of flexibility if the student needs to delay a placement. Otherwise, all students will start their first 3-week placement, in the student's second month of the commencement of the programme, in their home centre. This is followed approximately two months after by a 4-week out-of-home placement, and, approximately two months after, another 4-week

placement in an out-of-home centre, followed by a final 3 weeks in the home centre. Unless there is a specific request from the student to be placed in a particular centre, the centres are chosen by the field-practice administration team on the basis of availability, location and lecturer availability.

Data were collected from participants through four observation and interview cycles that occurred during the year-long enrolment on the graduate diploma programme. Prior to the start of the observation cycles, there were preliminary interviews with all six participants. Each observation cycle consisted of observation recorded via field notes, an examination of students' portfolios of written documentation pertaining to the most recent placement, and postplacement interviews which were digitally recorded. There was also provision for the ongoing data collection from observation of students in discussion forums and examination of participant assessments.

### **Settings of Field-Practice Experience and Placements**

Early childhood education in New Zealand offers a diversity of service providers, each with their own methods of funding, from a historical public model of centralised funding, to an increasingly buoyant and politically privileged, private sector (Education Review Office [ERO], 2012; Hill, 2011; H. May, 2014). Labelled a “paradigm of diversity” (Smith & May, 2006, p. 96), the ECE sector presents parents with a choice from a range of philosophical backgrounds, many of which developed from grass-roots initiatives within a particular cultural and historical genesis (Mitchell, 2011). Actual teacher practices have been observed to fit in with the particular philosophy of the centre, and are also supported by the non-prescriptive national curriculum in their planning and assessment (ERO, 2013; Widger & Schofield, 2012). This confirms findings from other researchers that the culture of the educational institution mediates teachers' thinking in powerful and lasting ways (Daniels, 2012; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

In this current study, each student experienced three different early childhood education settings over the 50-week-long programme. These settings were defined by the initial teacher education (ITE) as home-centre settings or out-of-home settings. Prior to beginning the course, prospective students had to find an early childhood centre that will act as their “home” centre. In these centres, students had to be assigned an associate teacher who, as a fully qualified and registered teacher, could act as a mentor and guide for the student. As part of the student agreement with the ITE for field-based students, the student must complete a

minimum of 16 hours-per-week in the home centre as part of their weekly field-experience hours.

In addition to field-experience requirements, student teachers, as part of the graduate diploma programme, must complete a total of 14 weeks on field-practice placement, as illustrated in the Table 5 below.

*Table 5*  
*Description of Field Experience/Practice*

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Field Experience | All students must be situated in their home centres for a minimum of 16hrs per week, other than when on field practice  |
| Field Practice   | Each student has four field practice placements over the one year duration. Students expected to maintain full-time hours while on placement, both during home and out-of-home placements |

Typically, the field-practice placements are scheduled as 3 weeks in the home centre for a minimum of 35 hours-per-week, then two 4 week periods in two separate out-of-home centres, with the students completing the final 3 weeks in the home centre at or near the end of the programme. Table 6 lists the six participants of this current study and provides indications of where they completed their field-practice placements.

*Table 6*  
*Student Teachers' Placement Over 1 Year Programme, by Centre Philosophy*

|                | Leo             | Hong     | Chen           | Monique  | Vicki    | Anna                 |
|----------------|-----------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Home centre    | MS              | PK       | Mon            | Under 2s | IBPYP    | MS                   |
| Out-of-home I  | MS              | Under 2s | Under 2s       | Reggio   | MS       | Under 2s<br>RIE      |
| Out-of-home II | Under 2s<br>RIE | MS       | Reggio/<br>Mon | Reggio   | Under 2s | Reggio/<br>Christian |
| Home centre    | MS              | Reggio   | Mon            | Under 2s | IBPYP    | MS                   |

MS = mainstream, PK = public kindergarten; Under 2s = under-two-years-old; Reggio = Reggio Emilia; RIE = Resources for Infant Educators; Mon = Montessori; Christian = as is; IBPYP = International Baccalaureate

In the table above, the early childhood centres have been differentiated in terms of both funding and teaching philosophy. The issue of funding has implications concerning the centre governance and the inclusion of the community in the centre's decision-making process. This will influence the level of community and often the parent contribution to the centre. The philosophy of the centre will have a tremendous influence on the policies and practices promoted in the centre. The centre philosophy will shape the social and cultural practices and objects of the early childhood settings, and influence the intersubjective exchanges that occur between student teacher and child, and student teacher and other teachers (ERO, 2012). As noted by Hill (2011), nowadays, early childhood practitioners have a greater choice of theoretical perspectives to choose from than ever before, testament to the diverse range of settings. In this sense, each centre has its own miniculture with a shared understanding of competence, values, and perspectives (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In each setting the teachers can be understood to be representative of a historically situated educational community. Below Nuttall (2013) notes how each setting would have their own particular cultural artefacts which may be unique to that setting;

... tools appear not only within theories of learning but also as part of complex aggregations known as curriculum models or "approaches." Most experienced early childhood educators entering a Montessori-based kindergarten would immediately recognise the nature of the programme without advance warning, simply by noticing the distinctively Montessori combination of artefacts available to the children. (p. 180)

Student teachers Leo and Anna both shared the same home centre; however, no other locations were duplicated, meaning there were a total of 17 different settings. As part of the criteria for graduation, each student teacher has to complete at least one setting with young children under the age of 2, known as the under 2s setting. While the students are in centres, whether on field-practice experience or during periods of formal "placement," they are encouraged to engage with their associate teacher to discuss centre philosophy and policy; to negotiate the meanings of the field-practice appraisal-document learning outcomes, with reference to the context; to be involved in an exchange of views and opinions, and to be involved with the design, planning and implementation of the curriculum.

In sociocultural theory, settings are understood as a principal determinant in the shaping of the subject's consciousness. This is achieved through both explicit and implicit means (Wertsch, 2007; Wortham, 2004). In this study, the settings are understood as cultural

settings, comprised of peopled communities, with tools and artefacts which were integral to the student teachers' understanding of early childhood education and their role as an educator. These contexts provided both constraints and affordances for the student teachers (Grossman et al., 1999). Discussing the influence of settings, Smagorinsky (2013) discusses notions of telos and prolepsis. He aligns telos with explicit mediation, which Smagorinsky suggests provides the setting with a definite direction, which might be evident in the support and guidance extended by the associate teacher to the student teacher.

Prolepsis, on the other hand, is where the telos of the centres is implicitly suggested, perhaps in the everyday language or practices, but where the axiological dimension is not made explicit. Prolepsis, according to van Lier (2004), "create[s] invitational structures and spaces for learners to step into and grow into" (p. 162). For example, in a preschool setting that values independent learning, students might be given their own desks which will allow them to keep a distance from one another. These practices, whether explicit or not, have definite consequences for the development of the learning community (Rogoff, 1994). Daniels (2012) adds to this point, remarking that in the institutional setting of the early childhood centre, "the way in which the social relations of institutions are regulated has cognitive and affective consequences for those who live and work inside them" (p. 44). In activity theory, both the telos and prolepsis should be evident in the early childhood centre's philosophy statement and/or the organisation's mission statement.

### **Mainstream settings.**

Centres with a mainstream philosophy make up the majority of early childhood settings. Mainstream in this context refers to centres whose philosophy, policies and practices most closely align with the national curriculum. This mainstream approach is the most common pedagogical approach used in early childhood centres in New Zealand and is developed on notions of free play where children are encouraged to develop their own interests and where the teachers provide nurturing care in a safe and healthy environment, whilst helping children acquire dispositions and knowledge that will help develop a healthy attitude towards learning (ERO, 2012). However, even within the notion of a play-based approach there are substantial pedagogical differences, with teachers who work from a more developmental understanding of children's learning and development being less likely to intervene in the children's play, than those teachers informed by sociocultural theory who are more likely to use scaffolding and overt teaching strategies (S. Edwards, 2007; Thomas, Warren, & deVries, 2013). The decisions about when and how to intervene in child's play, and how to recognise teachable

moments, are supported by *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) which recognises the importance of responsive and reciprocal relationships between child and teacher.

### **Montessori settings.**

Despite centres claiming to follow philosophies, such as Montessori, there are of course different levels of being authentic to the original intent of the philosophy. Compatible with a cultural-historical approach, there is value in tracing the origins of individual philosophies to identify underlying features or aims. Montessori, who originated her notions of early childhood care for orphans and children with developmental delays, created a curriculum that sought to shape children who were able to perform simple domestic chores, and work independently, and where the teaching took a hands-on approach (Isaacs, 2014). As discussed in the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, partnership with parents is advocated; however, according to Montessori philosophy, parents are not welcome into the room, there being a clear distinction between the home and the formal educational setting for the children.

Teaching in such centres tends to be very structured, with a pre-planned curriculum; children are allocated levels of literacy and maths, and play is considered recreational. Also distinguishing a Montessori setting from any other early childhood setting, is their promotion of specifically designed teaching and learning resources, which are used to promote number and alphabetical literacy among children (Isaacs, 2014). However, there are definite processes that the teacher must learn before she is allowed to demonstrate the use of the resource to the child. In addition, within the Montessori traditional approach, there are also set activities such as sewing, and needle work in general, which have prescribed and fixed outcomes. This very much in contrast to a mainstream setting, with the focus on process over product (MoE, 1996).

### **IBPYP settings.**

The other preschool setting in this study created their curriculum from a fusion of International Baccalaureate (IB) and *Te Whāriki*. This setting also presented as a very structured teaching environment, similar to a junior classroom in a primary school, with children spending a great deal of their time in chairs at desks formed into small groups. The curriculum was constructed according to the principles of IBPYP (International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme) and with consideration of the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. As with the Montessori preschool, play was understood as

recreational. Both the Montessori centre and the IBPYP setting had three “rooms” with approximately 20 children in the Montessori and approximately 12 in the IBPYP centre. In both rooms the majority of children came from Asian, and specifically Chinese backgrounds. Many of these children were recent immigrants to New Zealand and their spoken English was still developing.

### **RIE settings.**

Two of the under 2s settings were influenced by the RIE (Resources for Infant Educators) philosophy. This is based on humanitarian and progressive notions of demonstrating respect to infants and toddlers through practices such as always communicating with the children about what is happening, asking children’s permission before touching them at all, not placing children into positions which they would be unable to get into themselves and encouraging peer collaboration and support by limiting interactions between teacher and child to prevent dependency (Christie, 2011). In under 2s settings the teacher/child ratio is lower than with the older children, and the centres included in this study all supported lower ratios than those imposed by regulatory bodies.

### **Reggio Emilia settings.**

The other specialist curriculum was informed by the Reggio Emilia approach. This has considerable face validity in early childhood education in New Zealand given its strong similarities to the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). Both foster a strong community of learners and promote belonging to the group as a highly regarded attribute (Edwards, 2011). Reggio has also gained distinction for its approach to the arts, and the belief in the metaphor of the hundred languages of children which can be realised through the creative arts. There is also a strong emphasis in planning for the children’s interests and an emergent approach to planning which means a child’s project will be continued by the teacher as long as the child shows an interest. This is a progressive, child-centred approach with an emphasis on the development of the individual within a community setting that promotes creative expression. During this study there were four separate settings that professed a Reggio Emilia orientation. Two were experienced by Monique in two out-of-home centres, one experienced by Chen in her second out-of-home placement, and the final experienced by Anna in her second out-of-home placement.

## Data Collection

The research utilised three main methods of collecting data: interviews, observations and document analysis. Soon after the students confirmed their participation in the study, I conducted a brief preliminary interview, specifically to gain some general background. The bulk of the collection data, however, occurred in observation cycles, where I visited the centre, conducted field based observations, and followed-up approximately a week later with the interview. There were two parts to the document analysis: an analysis of the student teachers field-practice portfolios, and an examination of the centres' publicly available philosophy statements and policies.

Each student was visited in their centres and interviewed four times over the year-long programme, as shown in Table 7 below. The exception to this was Hong who, after her second field-practice placement, moved from Auckland to Wellington. The remaining two interviews were conducted using Skype. The three methods of interview, observation, and document analysis were used to provide triangulation, and to confirm and support findings from the interview by cross referencing to the field-based observations or the students' field-practice portfolios. Also, contradictory evidence was investigated when the opinions expressed by the student teacher during the interviews were inconsistent with statements made in the field-practice folder, the search for disconfirming evidence is considered a valuable strategy for assessing the credibility or validity of qualitative research claims (Antin, Constantine, & Hunt, 2015).

*Table 7*

*Dates of Observations/Interviews*

| Student teacher | Preliminary interviews | First obs/interview | Second obs/interview | Third obs/interview | Fourth obs/interview |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Leo             | 08/08/2014             | 21/08/2014          | 22/10/2014           | 11/12/2014          | 10/05/2015           |
| Hong            | None                   | 23/10/2014          | 20/02/2015           | *08/05/2015         | *10/07/2015          |
| Chen            | 05/11/2014             | 12/11/2014          | 05/03/2015           | 07/05/2015          | 19/08/2015           |
| Monique         | 10/11/2014             | 18/11/2014          | 14/04/2015           | 05/05/2015          | 22/08/2015           |
| Vicki           | 21/03/2014             | 26/03/2015          | 04/06/2015           | 03/09/2015          | 22/10/2015           |
| Anna            | 28/04/2014             | 12/05/2015          | 16/06/2015           | 24/09/2015          | 17/11/2015           |

\*No observation of teaching practice

This study took an abductive approach to the data, which was evident in the way that the initial semi structured interview items were constructed. Abductive, in this sense, refers to using elements of both inductive and deductive methods of framing the data; inductive refers to a method whereby the researcher creates categories and themes from examining the data alone, whereas deductive refers to the creation of categories and themes a priori (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The impetus for this study was firmly grounded in activity theory; as such, the interview questions were grouped around exploring the students' perceptions of their interaction with the different activity system components.

These largely flexible categories allowed for a range of questions that covered all aspects of the student teachers' field-practice experiences. As noted by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), abduction is probably the most often used method in many case-study-based research processes. Abduction allows the researcher to consider both the theoretical aspects that s/he brings to the data set, as in inductive measures, but also consideration of the empirical data that is characteristics of deduction. Alvesson and Sköldbberg, however, claim that abduction is more than simply a fusion of these two approaches, and adds its own unique characteristics. This uniqueness is glimpsed at in the way that the researcher alternates between theory and empirical facts, allowing the discovery of patterns as a source of inspiration. Patton (2002) shares a similar perspective on the question of the divide between deductive and inductive approaches to data, suggesting the researcher shift from the two positions is less like a rigid binary, than a continuum allowing the researcher to engage with theory to form a working theory, but still remain open to other data, Patton captures this saying, "Emergent designs, dependent on flexibility and openness, foster creativity and adaptability – and differ dramatically from rigid blueprint and fixed protocol approaches" (p. 274).

### **Interviews.**

The principal method used in this study to collect data was in-depth semi-structured interviews, which, as Packer (2010) notes, are so ubiquitous that he refers to them as "the workhorse of qualitative research today" (p. 43). These interviews were conducted four times for each student and timed to occur after field-based observations by the principal researcher. Since activity theory drove this study, interview items sought to link the individual participants with a range of features of the broader environment, pertaining to their practices, learning, aims, and frustrations, as student teachers and aspiring teachers. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour,

feelings or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88).

Interview results can provide researchers with new information about the natural setting that is not accessible through observations, and can verify the accuracy of observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviews can also help identify how participants view their own experiences and draw attention to the idiosyncratic language, cultural practices, and artefacts with symbolic significance that are embedded in participants’ everyday activities. From an activity theory perspective, interviews can provide insights into identity information about the subject, existing or lacking tools, and the subjects’ perspective about the object. Participants may also share information regarding documents and artefacts that relate to existing rules and divisions of labour. It is also likely that participants will be able to provide information about the communities in which their activities are situated (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). We view the stories students tell us in these interviews as narratives of identity: narratives on which students draw to recount troubles, obstacles and resources as they map the trajectory of their professional life.

The primary method of this study was the in-depth qualitative semi structured interviews. Characteristic of this type of interview was that the researcher was looking for rich and detailed information; the questions were open-ended, meaning that the interviewee could respond any way he or she chose; the questions were not fixed, meaning that the interviewer did not have to adhere to a given set of questions if they did not make sense at the time (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 29). Grossman et al. (1999) point to the efficacy of interviews in giving a “deeper sense of individual or institutional history” (p. 10). The semi structured interview items were composed initially according to the components of the activity system, including questions relating to the tools of the activity system, their interactions with other participants, discussions of centre rules and policies, questions around the influence of parents on the setting, and the students’ thoughts about their “status” as a student teacher to address wider concerns relating to the division of labour. These questions invited the students to talk about their perception and their interactions with the different elements and also provided a template of sorts for the students’ responses.

### **Semi-structured interviews.**

Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a broad outline that can be followed in terms of composition of specific items, while allowing for deviations within (Sarantakos,

2012). Semi-structured interviews are useful when the inquirer “does not know what he or she doesn’t know” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 269) about a phenomenon. This is in contrast to accounts where a freely flowing stream of consciousness is valued, such as in narrative interview. It was decided that for this study some degree of structure was necessary for the interviews in order to assert control over the direction of the discussion. This control was needed so the researcher could “take stock” of the situation, to clarify and expand upon material previously collected, to validate the researcher’s reconstructions of the participants’ constructions, and to explore avenues of thought. As noted by Murray (2013), in her study of student teacher identity development, “Semi-structured interviews require interaction and encouragement to develop full responses without the interviewer impugning personal disposition or unduly influencing or directing the response” (p. 533).

The interviews were scheduled to last approximately one hour and occurred after the observation of the student teachers’ practice at a time and place of mutual convenience. Depending on availability, this was sometimes up to one week after the observation; although the initial intention was to interview directly after the observation, this was not always practical. The structures of the interviews followed a general pattern, with the first semi structured interviews focusing on the student teacher’s background, previous experiences with early childhood, if any, and on their own learning experiences as students. These are noted as “preliminary” interviews, and occurred for all students other than Hong, because of timing complications. This first interview was key since much of the literature on teacher education suggests that teachers will teach according to their existing conceptions of learning and teaching which were developed over years of being a learner, rather than the formal theories taught in initial teacher education programmes (Korthagen, 2010). Key to ascertaining how identity has shifted, if indeed there was a shift, was noticing the transformation of student teachers’ everyday knowledge to evidence-informed professional formal knowledge.

The first interviews after the first home-centre field practices attempted to ascertain the student teacher activities within the centre, their understanding of core practices and routines and the formal thinking and pedagogical theories that support these. Some of the core activities identified by Howie and Hagan (2010) as significant for student teachers and indicative of community practices include: playing with children; cleaning; choosing set up; preparing learning; facilitating learning; guiding; scaffolding; documenting learning; planning and assessment meetings; centre meetings; changing nappies; communicating with

parents; and administrative tasks. It was anticipated that, over time, student teachers would take on more responsibility and participate in and lead activities that were considered to be of greater importance. A community of practice perspective suggested that the more student teachers were able to perform these activities, the more comfortable and more routine these would become, thus gaining competence and being accepted by the community as someone with legitimacy to claim identity as a teacher. Also, since identity is influenced in equal measure by participation and reification (Wenger, 1998), the focus was not just on the participation but what was understood to be the principles and theories that supported the particular practice. Reification refers to the written or formal text that captures the practices; Wenger (1998) notes that without reification, participation is meaningless, and reification without participation likewise.

According to Vygotskian tradition, cultural tools and artefacts can be considered as both material and ideal, or in other words, physical and symbolic (Holland & Cole, 1995). Whilst the initial interest in tools in the CHAT methodology can be understood to stem from Hegel, Vygotsky extrapolated this understanding, so that tools could also be considered in terms of the impact on the psychology of the individual (Blunden, 2007). Another key area focused on in later interviews was the students' ongoing understanding and unravelling of leading artefacts of early childhood education in New Zealand, such as the national curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) or the pedagogical approach of play as a framework for learning. *Te Whāriki* represents the reification of the collective experiences of early childhood education, it is the guideline through which all planning is arranged and is also the philosophical underpinning of early childhood education in New Zealand.

The interviews also discussed the student teachers' feelings and understanding of the value of free play. This is an example of the emergent nature of the questions. Free play became a significant topic following student teachers' engagement in varying activity systems, which all had a different value regarding free play. Another cultural artefact discussed was the role of the teacher in early childhood education, since, again, this differed enormously from one setting to the next depending, in part, on the centre's philosophy and formal allegiance to particular theoretical-based practices.

Many of the questions posed to the students in the first two interviews were repeated in the later interviews, since part of what this study aimed to do was to track the development of identity over the duration of the academic programme. Grossman et al. (1999) note that to

understand the influence of teacher education on the individual “one must look not only to the ultimate goal of teacher development but to the past” (p. 9). Timperley (2013) suggests that one of the key characteristics of an expert teacher is the way that teachers are able to examine evidence of their own teaching and make changes that will lead to greater engagement and learning for all students. So, although student teachers are expected to grow more familiar with the routines and activities that are central to their practice as early childhood practitioners, the value of these practices may not be realised if they are participated in without reflection on their personal significance.

Questions for subsequent interviews were also shaped by responses to previous interviews, suggestive of an emergent research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A key technique that was used within the semi-structured interviews was to ask students to think of and comment about a critical significant incident (Flanagan, 1954). This technique was used in the first interview to ask student teachers to reflect on their decision to become a teacher and what prompted this decision, whether it was a specific incident that they could identify or a culmination of factors that had shaped their motivation. A critical-incident technique asks the students to reflect on what they consider to be the most important thing that happened (Flanagan, 1954). This technique was also able to be used in later interviews to encourage the student teachers to describe their relationship with other staff, children and children’s parents. What is of note here is that it was used not to check the validity of what was being said, but to access the student teacher’s perspective.

As they told their stories about critical incidents from their home environment or in the centre, when needed, I prompted them so that I could get a clearer understanding of the importance or significance of the incident. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed; as soon as this was done, copies were sent to the student to verify the accuracy and also allow them to make changes. An example of how the spread between the different interviews allowed for an iterative discussion of major topics was around the student teachers’ use of the WeChat forum. This did not emerge as a significant theme until the second interview with Hong. In this interview, I learnt how the WeChat community had organised a field-trip to an area of natural conservation to learn more about local history and culture. In all subsequent interviews, the student teachers’ use of WeChat was discussed and were featured in the Findings chapter.

It is worth noting here, in the words of Edwards (2015) that, with the methods available, including semi-structured interviews “we can, at best, access the actor as ‘person’ as they interpret, negotiate, resist and so on, we cannot access the self, the well-spring of desires and intentions that is so often connected with notions of agency” (p. 781). This, I feel, is a crucial point in that it emphasises not so much the impracticality of the researcher’s tasks, but underlines the significance of the interpretative role of the principal researcher and the importance of that same researcher being able to claim an etic perspective that allows for an insight into the student teachers’ world, other than just through their words.

*Table 8*

*Methods Utilised*

| Research Method        | Description   | Frequency   |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Interviews             | Semi-structured face-to-face interaction where questions acted as a guide, but the ability to deviate from the schedule was permitted. Participants were asked to recount incidents of particular significance to them which allowed for the construction of a narrative. | Undertaken at least four times during the student’s field-practice placements. These were set to occur at approximately 2 monthly intervals and to begin in the student’s second month. |
| Classroom observations | Field notes taken prior to the interviews when the student was in the field.  | These were undertaken just prior to the interviews and lasted for approximately one hour.   |
| Document analysis      | Electronic copies of the participant’s field-practice reflections as well as course outlines, student course materials and resources for students.  | Field-practice reflections were collected once the student had completed each of the four field practices.  |

**Observations.**

The third method of data collecting was field observations. The initial intent was for these to be non-participant observations, with the researcher determined to stay in the background and quietly and unobtrusively observe the student. However, over the course of the study, I became more active in the observations. In early childhood teaching, the teacher, unless assigned a specific duty such as nappy changing or during regular meal time, is able to follow

the children, to observe their interests and engage them in constructive exchanges. During my observations, if the student teacher was not engaged at that time with the children, the observations also became a time to catch-up with the student, and for the student to tell me more about the actual setting. My role as an observer changed to match what was happening during the time of the visit. When the student teacher was engaged with the children, I sat back, unobtrusively, and maintained field notes.

The focus of the observation was on the whole setting, allowing the researcher to view the physical environment, which can have a considerable influence in the quality of the care and education provided, exerting itself as a “silent voice” that may prohibit “responsive, flexible, routines” (Te One, 2011, p. 60) and also on the people within it. Particular attention was given to the student teacher’s interaction with children, staff and, when present, parents. Over the course of the four observations, the researcher became more observer as participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), engaging the student teacher in light conversation during free moments. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that, while observations can be time consuming and overwhelming, they do provide investigators with first-hand experience of the participant’s everyday activities. Moreover, non-participant observations also provide the opportunity to observe theory-in-action, rather than espoused theory (Sarantakos, 2012).

There were four observations of each teacher, lasting approximately two hours, and these immediately preceded the face-to-face interview. There were two exceptions to this; after Hong’s second placement she moved from Auckland to Wellington, meaning the last two interviews were done via Skype. These teacher observations gave me an understanding of the student teacher’s composure in the natural setting and also their embodiment as early childhood professionals. This embodiment refers to the way the early childhood teachers move through the classroom being mindful not to knock over or push aside children who may barely reach their knees (Hayashi & Tobin, 2015). Moreover, the location-specific observations also allowed the researcher to view how the student teachers responded to the demands of the practices. For example, in all centres there are mandated practices that must be observed for the overall maintenance of the centre. These practices create their own demands (Edwards, 2015). For example, in early childhood centres in New Zealand, the teachers are also responsible for keeping the environment clean and hygienic. The implication of this is that the teacher must be circumspect when choosing when to complete such tasks, since they are still expected to be responsive to the needs of the children.

The four observation of each teacher also allowed for observations of teacher intimacy with the children, especially during the under 2s placement, and prompted a number of discussions with the participants about the way they saw their role. The observations also provided the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of the particular context of the room and of the centre. From the observations, the researcher was able to see the physical environment, get an idea of ratios, the decoration and spacing of the room, the level of noise and some indication of the student teacher's interactions with the children and other members of staff. These observations also acted as prompts during the interview, allowing the researcher to ask about specific examples of teaching practice or interactions with significant others.

### **Document analysis.**

Another method of data gathering was a document analysis of the student teachers' field-practice portfolios which consisted of documentation that the students were required to compile and present as part of their assessment towards the end of each and every field practice. The field-practice folder comprised four prescribed sections. The first section consisted of photocopies of the centre philosophy and key policies pertinent to that particular placement. Section 2 is the student teacher's personal teaching-philosophy statement which is intended to reflect how the most recent placement has influenced the student teacher's own values and beliefs about teaching. Section 3 is the required written component of the field practice, which consists of three pieces of written work per week that demonstrate how the student has met the chosen learning outcomes for that placement, and also show engagement with an ongoing sense of becoming a professional teacher. The final section is comprised of reports completed at the end of the field practice by the associate teacher, student teacher and visiting lecturer.

Section 1 of the folder, which was concerned with pertinent centre policies and philosophy, gave me an understanding of the character of the early childhood centre in which the student was placed, the rules and division of labour that influence participant engagement in the centre's everyday activities, and the stated objectives of the centre (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). For example, one of the settings says, on their website:

it is a "whole child" approach to education. It aims to do more than teach facts.

Through active involvement in his education the child experiences the joy of learning and gains the characteristics necessary to complete his most important work, the development of the adult he will become. (Montessori, 2016)

Such official documentation serves to reify centre rules and to present to outsiders their stipulated intended outcome, according to which each component of the activity should be addressed.

Within the folder are summative reports completed by the student teacher, associate teacher and visiting lecturer, discussing aspects of their practice and the student's achievement of the assessed learning outcomes, once the placement has been completed. These provided greater triangulation and acted as a source to confirm or disrupt perspectives discussed by the students during their interviews. The field-practice folder is also an historical account of the student teacher's field-practice, giving an indication of the student's development across the year-long programme. The written reflections provided both an indication of what the student had done, but also how each was able to weave academic coursework through their practice in the centres.

Of particular interest and relevance in the student teacher portfolio were iterations of their personal teaching philosophy, which is a required component, completed towards the end of the field-practice placement. The portfolio also included a number of "reflective" writings in which students considered how they had met the prescribed learning outcomes. Table 9 below illustrates how the learning outcomes are set out in the field-practice appraisal document. On the left in bold is the specific learning outcome the student must meet while on placement. To the right of the learning outcome are six examples of teaching practice that the student teacher will implement. The example in italic script, prescribes to the student that these particular criteria must be written to, typically in a reflective piece of writing.

Table 9

Field-Practice-Appraisal Form

| <b>Learning outcome</b>  | Example of teaching practice                       | Example of teaching practice  | Example of teaching practice   | Example of teaching practice                      | Example of teaching practice   | Example of teaching practice                                |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Demonstrates a range of professional and personal practices</b> | Discusses progress with AT and is open to feedback | Listens to children and allows them to complete what they want to say | Uses questions and statements to encourage independence and self-help skills | Initiates communication with parents / caregivers | Demonstrates an awareness of appropriate ethical and professional practice | <i>Begins to develop and reflect on personal philosophy</i> |
| Visiting lecturer's Initial/Date                                   |  |   |  |   |  |   |

While the field-practice portfolio did include some key documentation regarding the development of teacher identity, there were also a number of technical assignments such as the writing of learning stories and observations of children, in which the focus was on the child rather than the student teacher. Thus the portfolio hopes to address two purposes; the first stresses student teachers' competency in describing their practices in the centre and how they are able to identify underpinning values, and relate these to the centre philosophy, their own philosophy or to the national curriculum. The second purpose relates to the realm of process-oriented writing whereby, through written reflection learners engage in enhancing and developing their personal and professional development (Habib & Wittek, 2007).

A fundamental assumption of a CHAT perspective is that activities are always connected to the use of cultural artefacts and to the community where they are used. At different times, the student teacher portfolio is both tool and object of the activity system. The student is a tool in the sense that the compilation of the portfolio is intended to consolidate new perspectives or give the student teacher new perspectives on their trajectory towards becoming a teacher. Secondly, the portfolio is also an object in that it is a significant part of the field-practice assessment process, since the written reflections and pedagogical documentation become evidence, along with the associate teacher interview, that the student has been successful in completing the prescribed learning outcomes. The portfolio, and in particular the written reflections on practice, encourages the student teachers to re-evaluate their experiences in the early childhood centres and to make meaningful, personal, connections to key literature. The portfolio encourages a non-dualistic perspective in that the individual nature of the learner, their values, and beliefs, are addressed in relation to the aspirations of the collective as discussed in the literature, suggesting that "the portfolio therefore needs to be understood as a tool that is involved in activity and as an artefact that is constituted by the tensions and dynamics between persons and tools within the realm of this activity" (Habib & Wittek, 2007, p. 270).

### **Data Analysis**

There were two significant stages of the data-analysis process combining elements of both deductive and inductive inquiry (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The first stage followed a deductive approach involving the close examination of the data and the categorisation and coding of major and significant themes, following the processes described below. The second stage, once the main categories had been refined, was a consultation of the major theoretical

themes in which the study is situated, which meant a review of key sociocultural and cultural-historical activity theory literature to inform the final themes. In this way, theory was considered as both a resource for ordering and making sense of the data, and interpreting these data (Smagorinsky, 2012).

The way in which the data were coded, the decision as to which parts of the data were significant, and the creation of categories, embodied not only a theory but the principles within that theory and their relations to one another. Smagorinsky (2012a) suggests that the process of coding data makes manifest the theoretical approach used to frame the analysis. This was achieved through the continuous categorisation of data that implied different levels and sets, and establishes the principles and their relations to one another. Smagorinsky concludes that “coding establishes the researcher’s subjectivity in relation to the data and the framework through which data are interpreted” (p. 250). The principal method used for data analysis was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This required the researcher to examine the data initially by gaining an overview of the key points made by the participants and starting to determine initial codes. This was then followed by collating codes into potential themes. The themes differed from codes in that they were more abstract and generative. Then followed a closer examination to identify common topics which were subsequently labelled. Finally, an examination of the topics derived from the data was made to consider how these may relate to one another and to provide an analytical code.

While Smagorinsky (2010) privileges the major categories of tools, setting and goals to begin the process of coding, Yamagata-Lynch (2010), on the other hand, advises keeping the coding as open as possible, whilst conceding there are some activity-theory researchers who use pre-specified activity-theory codes, namely, Mwanza’s (2001) eight-step-model. This process of thematic analysis, and the constant reviewing of data until conceptual codes can be sorted by the researcher, is common to many qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and includes the constant comparative method as described by Yamagata-Lynch (2010) in her description of the coding process. In focused coding, I pursued a selected set of central codes throughout the entire dataset and the study. This required decisions about which initial codes were most prevalent or important, and which contributed most to the analysis. In theoretical coding, the researcher refines the final categories drawn from theory and relates them to one another, which is the process of making sense of evidence and the construction of new knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical coding was most appropriate for this research because “theorizing about the data is a step toward developing a theory that explains

some aspect of practice and allows the researcher to draw inferences about future activity” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 215).

Qualitative activity-theory data analysis is an inductive process that leads to a thick description of participants, their activities and the activity setting. Qualitative researchers “seek strategies of empirical inquiry that will allow them to make connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and the here and now” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 199). The modes of activity theory provide a powerful orientating device to structure the collection and arrangement of data from complex learning contexts and were used at all stages of the research (Barab, Schatz, & Scheckler, 2004). Initially, they were used to inform the focus and design of interview schedules. Secondly, they became useful “buckets” for arranging data during fieldwork stage. Ultimately, the use of the components ensured a thorough analysis of the empirical evidence.

Data analysis is an opportunity to find the participants’ stories (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The process of data collection and analysis is said to be both recursive and dynamic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study proposed to explore the experiences of six student teachers from the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education). The continuous nature of enrolment in the institution meant there were no strict cohorts; this flexibility allowed for an emergent and iterative research design and data analysis. This meant that reflections on the success of the first interview helped determine the design and implementation of the second interview, and so on. The same iterative process occurred for data analysis, meaning that it was an ongoing process which occurred simultaneously to data gathering. With qualitative data, however, the focus was on “reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal[ed]” (Patton, 2002, p. 276). With the data from the interviews, since the questions were intended to elicit quite specific information, the responses were already categorised. However, with the field-practice folder and the reflections on workplace practice, there was more sifting through of data of the sort associated with constant comparative analysis. This involved the sequenced coding of the data according to emergent themes; these were revisited and revisited again until an achievable number of categories emerged. This was done for each of the field-practice folders.

The data were then categorised according to Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis, which consists of the personal, interpersonal, and institutional/community planes. The three planes of analysis are held to be mutually constitutive; however, each individual plane can be considered in isolation for the purposes of analysis. At the micro level is the development of the student teacher identity, taking into account subjective experiences which have contributed to the development of their personal identity and learning dispositions. While subjectivity relates to the individual's feelings and thoughts at a particular time, this also influences future actions as well. In the example of a student teacher unsure of how to address the children, through observation of her associate teacher s/he develops the confidence to speak directly to the child. The interaction goes well, which influences the teacher's thoughts about future interactions with the child. In a cultural-historical perspective, subjectivity is a reflection of the actor's engagement with the object.

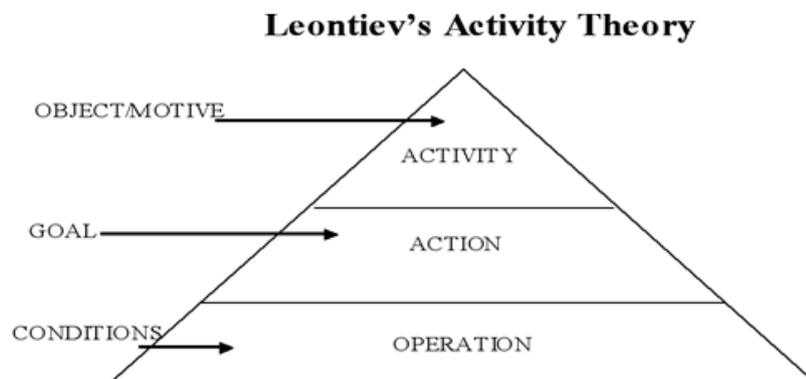
At the meso level are the student teachers' interactions and exchanges with others in the field-practice setting, and their contribution towards group processes and activities in the childcare centre. This includes engaging children in play experiences, fostering learning through inquiry, documenting children's learning and planning, and implementing children's learning. Perhaps the most significant contribution at this level is the relationship between the student teacher and the associate teacher, and the process of guided participation. Guided participation is at the heart of the learning process, and neatly captures the fundamentals of Vygotsky's ZPD. Whereas ZPD was focused on the cognitive gains of the learner and how these are scaffolded by the more knowledgeable other, Rogoff's (1994) guided participation is more process orientated and explicitly concerned with the relationships expressed through this dyad of student teacher and associate teacher. This intermediate level is explored in the findings through the lens of contextual identity, with an explicit interest in the student teachers' interpersonal relationships with associate teachers, children and other significant individuals.

At the macro level is a higher level consideration of the student teachers' contributions to and participation in early childhood institutional practices. This relates to larger structural considerations of student teachers' contributions to early childhood and also consideration of structural objects which have an influence on the development of student teacher identity. This level is concerned with the student teachers as part of a larger body of students who have to comply with rules and regulations issued at a national and government level. This level allows for consideration of student-teacher status from a societal perspective, and how

being subject to rigid immigration and visa laws regarding rights to stay and work influence teacher identity.

The student teachers' process of appropriating cultural tools needed to be considered, as competent professional educators can be understood with reference to Rogoff's (1995, 2016) three planes of analysis. This perspective allows for each social plane of being to be fore-fronted for analytical purposes. Rogoff's three planes of analysis allow for consideration of interplay between the three different planes, implying that the teacher's subjectivity will influence their relationship with significant others, which may in turn influence the student teacher's acceptance by the established community.

These three different planes relate to participatory appropriation, guided participation, and the apprenticeship model of cultural organisation. In terms of cultural-historical theory, these levels also relate to Leontiev's (1978) hierarchical levels of human functioning, where the individual's actions are considered in terms of simple operations directed at conditions, then mid-level actions that are aimed at achieving goals, and, finally, the direction of the whole system towards the activity itself (see figure 4). Informed by literature on student teacher identity, related to Rogoff's sociocultural settings, and then mapped with an understanding of the hierarchy of motives, this provides us with a perspective from which to consider the development of identity.



*Figure 4. Leontiev's activity theory.*

When the process of identity development is viewed through the methodological lens of third-generation activity theory, which evokes two activity systems, this process becomes increasingly complicated. In this study, we conceive of the student teacher as belonging to at least two activity systems. The first activity is the student teachers' field-practice placements in early childhood centres, and the second activity is the student teachers as participants in the

initial teacher education programme of study. In this situation, not only do we need to consider the ways in which the student teacher experiences the potentially conflicting philosophies and policies of places of practice within one activity system, but also the connection between the activity system from the subject position and an examination of tensions and contradictions across activity systems, from the field-practice placement to the initial teacher education system.

Third-generation activity theory allows for consideration of the relationship between the subject, the student teacher, and the object. This movement is considered as bidirectional and reinforces notions of identity and learning as being intertwined. A cultural-historical perspective holds that tension and contradictions are the driving force for learning, and when tensions are uncovered, it is the student teachers' appropriation of cultural tools and the modification of these to a different activity system which is indicative of expansive learning (Engeström, 2014).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the methods utilised to elicit from the student teachers their experiences of learning to be a student teacher in a variety of settings. This was primarily done through in-depth interviews, teacher observations and document analysis of the student teacher field-practice portfolio. This chapter has shown the compatibility of the research methods to the methodology and to the overarching theoretical perspective of CHAT.

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The findings from this longitudinal qualitative case study are presented in three sections and have been organised according to three broad categories derived from the literature on student teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006; Izadinia, 2013). The categories are personal identity, professional identity, and contextual identity. Considered together, these three facets of identity present a holistic understanding of the ontological nature of becoming a student teacher. This process of identity formation is considered in relation to three sensitising concepts sourced from the literature on the Vygotskian project (Fleer, 2016; Grimmert, 2014; Stetsenko, 2008; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) comprising leading activity, *perezhivanie*, and the ZPD. This inclusion allows for consideration of the unity of the emotional and cognitive experiences and how these have prompted development. In this study, professional identities are understood to emerge from the complex dialectic of the student teachers' ontogenetic selves and the sociohistorical and sociocultural dimensions of the practice-based early childhood education settings.

The data have been collected from multiple sources including in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations. The data set has been managed, sorted and interpreted and rendered into thematic findings in order to address the research questions stated at the start of the project (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hammersley, 1997). The findings are presented in the form of description, direct quotes and observations, and throughout this chapter there is a layer of interpretative commentary that is designed to bring cohesion across the data set. A more complete rendering of the findings in relation to the theoretical CHAT literature is found in the discussion chapter that follows.

The research questions which framed this inquiry are:

How can cultural-historical activity theory contribute to discussions about identity development for student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in early childhood education?

How do these identities develop over time with reference to the changing contexts of practice?

In this first section, the focus is on the student teachers' personal identities. Each student will be introduced so that the reader can get an overall understanding of the different personalities. A dialectical perspective holds that a student's identity development is a result of interaction and changes of the teaching contexts, the ITE programme, and the student teacher's own notion of self (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). This threefold dialectic allows for a consideration of the values and beliefs of the student teacher which were developed through engagement in the material practices prior to studying to be an early childhood teacher. These values took shape when the students were active participants in the formal educational institutions of their countries of origin, and shared in the cultural models or intersubjectively shared cultural schemas of the settings (Ratner, 2015).

These models not only shaped how the student teacher understood their past experiences, but also shaped how the student teacher engaged with current and future settings. This notion of self as being constructed from one's emotional and cognitive experiences and relations with others, involves reflections on one's subjectivity and intersubjective experiences. This relates to Stetsenko's (2008) suggestion of moving from a strictly dialectical understanding of identity development as suggested by Leontiev from internalisation to externalisation, to a threefold dialectic of material production, local and extralocal dimensions of intersubjective exchanges, and subjectivity.

### **Personal Identity**

Since students do not enter into the early childhood teacher education programme as *tabula rasa*, it was necessary to consider the influence of the social and cultural histories that the participants brought to the settings. Developing a professional identity in communities of early childhood teaching is a complex process which includes the negotiation of the extent to which aspects of identity formed prior to the start of the programme are expressible within the new teaching context (Fenton-O'Creavy, Dimitriadis, & Scobie, 2014). In this section on personal identity, we consider the influence of the student teachers' prior personal experiences and how these shaped their engagement with learning to be an early childhood teacher in New Zealand. As noted by Wenger (1998), the significance of capturing the history of the person in practice reflects the understanding that; "an identity is a trajectory in time that incorporates both past and future into the meaning of the present" (p. 169). In this section, it is suggested that through the participants' experience of schooling, both as learners

and students, they developed shared cultural beliefs that, as a distinctive group, influenced their trajectory as early childhood student teachers in New Zealand.

### **Formal experiences as learners in schools.**

All participants' formative educational years, from primary through to tertiary levels of study, were in educational settings with a pronounced Confucian-heritage culture. An exception to this was Leo, who completed university entrance and a bachelor's degree in Australia. The settings for the other students were on the prosperous Eastern China seaboard, Hong Kong, and South Korea. In these settings, although there had been recent national attempts to reform the educational approach to a more student-centred pedagogy, a Confucian-heritage culture still shaped teaching and learning through the prism of direct instruction and rote learning (Fees, Hoover, & Zheng, 2014; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). According to this traditional pedagogical approach, the success of the teaching rests with the teacher's presentation of content in a way that stimulates and engages the learner, to ensure that they are able to accurately replicate the information. Individual differences such as intelligence, motivation, and aptitude are held to account for variations in student achievement (Fees et al., 2014).

While the student teachers' biographies entailed a range of experiences as learners in public schools, all students relayed similar narratives of large classrooms of 40 or 50 children, with one teacher whose role was to lead the learning. The student teachers spoke of having to study for very long hours during the week, from primary school onwards, with additional extracurricular academic activities on the weekend. All the student teachers complained about the stressful nature of the exam-orientated education system. These examinations were extremely important for the students since they help determine which subjects, which schools and, eventually, which universities the students could apply for. The student teachers' experiences with the rigid hierarchy of the formal educational system were extremely relevant when discussing their developing identity as early childhood teachers. Speaking about the teaching methods and exam orientation of education in China, Monique's comments captured the overall impression:

We studied in classes of more than 50 children. We learnt from a text book, then afterwards we would have all kinds of tests and those tests were based on the same text books. This was the whole system. So the teacher had to teach us the text book so that we could pass the test. What else could she do with such a large class? (Monique: First interview, p. 2)

When speaking to the students about their experiences, all of them identified the dominant top-down transmission of information as being detrimental to their motivation and ultimately to their enjoyment of learning. However, an attitude of acceptance was noticeable in all dialogues on this subject. This was acceptance of the instructive, direct style of teaching typical of a Confucian approach, which was generally accepted on the understanding that it was unavoidable due to the levels of overcrowding in Asian classrooms.

Another popular refrain among the student teachers was that the traditional approach to learning in China was due not only to the sheer pressure of numbers of students, but also the extremely competitive job market that students must confront when they graduate; Anna remarked on this point:

The competition in China is really high and with such a large population you have to be really good, then you can find a job and a good life. That's why the teachers want the students to be the best. On the other hand, though, the way they push the children, they destroy the children. (Anna: First interview, p. 9)

The criticism levelled by the student teachers was not at the teachers, the schools or the system, but at the 'anonymous' issue of overcrowding or competition, issues which were perceived as beyond the concerns of education alone (Birkeland, 2013). This reticence to attribute fault is perhaps reflective of a culture that places an emphasis on harmony and respect for authorities (Huang & Cowden, 2009).

### **Vicki's learning and teaching experiences.**

The one Korean student in the study experienced similar conditions to the Chinese students in her formal schooling. Vicki spoke of large classes and the significance attached to the formal examinations for later academic opportunities. Vicki also spoke about the strict hierarchy that she experienced in schools in Korea, where respect for the teacher was demanded, and where corporal punishment was a regular feature and implemented for even minor infringements of the rules. Even at the age of 17 Vicki was subjected to corporal punishment for not bringing a text book to class. Corporal punishment aside, Vicki reflected on the Korean style of teaching and learning:

Koreans, including myself, work really hard, I guess too hard. I grew up in a society that focused on results more than process. The education in Korea that I experienced was teacher-directed learning. The teacher was the leader, and I was just a follower. (Vicki: Portfolio. Second placement)

As implied by Vicki, above, schools and the education system in Korea were very product-focused. At around the age of 12, those students who achieved high scores in national pencil and paper tests were encouraged to follow the academic route, while those who failed to do as well were assigned to the vocational stream. This practice of streaming students at such a young age, seemed to have a marked influence on the development of Vicki's learning identity. Although considered capable by her peers, in early adolescence, Vicki was streamed into a vocational school rather than an academic high school. Vicki stated that she preferred to go to the vocational school to avoid having to endure the same kinds of intense pressure to study that her peers experienced. At the vocational school, Vicki was able to succeed without too much effort and regularly received high grades. Vicki comments:

I didn't study in school, I was a bad student in terms of studying ... not behaviour! I didn't need to study hard so I went to vocational school... I didn't want to study and go to university, because after high school I wanted to get a job and earn money [smiles]." (Vicki: First interview, p. 2)

In this passage, we see Vicki identify herself as a "bad student" because of her attitude to studying. After school, Vicki was persuaded by her family to enrol in a two-year degree in science in a Korean university, which qualified her to work as a laboratory technician. After two years of working in the laboratory, Vicki travelled to New Zealand and studied for four years for a Bachelor in Hospitality Management at Waikato University. Vicki achieved excellent grades at Waikato University. She enjoyed the course, emphasising the hands-on aspect of the programme, which included a prolonged placement in an international hotel chain. She attributed her success to the largely "practical" nature of the degree.

The emphasis on being hands-on and practical was a consistent theme in much of the data set relating to Vicki. When Vicki spoke about being an early childhood teacher and the kinds of things she was interested in, her conception of being a teacher was aligned with the image of a doer rather than a thinker. When Vicki spoke about teaching, she spoke in terms of creating activities for the children rather than discussing pedagogy, teaching approaches or achieving learning outcomes. In one of the first interviews, when talking to Vicki about her aspirations for the graduate diploma programme, she made it clear her focus was on the practice aspect:

I don't want to learn about the psychology of the child, I want to learn basic things first like the system of education in New Zealand, the different curriculums, and I want to learn about child development. I want to learn how they (children) react to things, and what kinds of things they should be able to do by a certain age.

SD: You mean, for example, when the child is four, he should be able to recite the alphabet or count to 100, like descriptions of what they can do?

Yes, that's what they do in my home centre. Yes, like at a certain age the children can say so many words or begin to form sentences, or they are able to hold a pencil.

(Vicki: First interview, p. 8)

In this quote, by dismissing the “psychology of the child,” Vicki was distancing herself from discussion of theory and abstraction. Her interests were in what she considered to be the most significant and immediate, including what to teach the child, how the child learns, and how to measure that learning. The reference to the child being able to hold a pencil, perhaps demonstrates a narrower understanding of learning than the more holistic-process approach, as suggested in the New Zealand ECE curriculum (MoE, 1996).

Vicki's understanding of what it meant to be an early childhood teacher was also influenced by her previous occupation as an English-language teacher in a hagwon; hagwons are known locally as “cram schools” in South Korea. After graduating from Waikato and unable to find a suitable job in hospitality in New Zealand, Vicki returned to South Korea where she worked for four years in a hagwon. Typically, hagwons serve school-age children who require additional tutoring in any of the academic subjects after normal school hours. Hagwons have become an established part of the Korean educational system and are attended by an estimated 74% of school students. Hagwons in Korea are a major source of business revenue; but as private concerns with little regulatory compliance regarding teaching qualifications, the practised pedagogy tends to reflect wider societal trends towards a teacher-led, authoritarian style of teaching (West, 2014). In the ESOL sector, hagwons are frequently framed as “language mills” a derogatory term that attempts to capture the profit-driven focus at the expense of evidenced-based pedagogy (Kim, 2015).

Vicki taught English as a second language to Korean children across a range of ages from four years old upwards; however, whereas the other teachers would simply follow the text book, Vicki brought elements of her own personality and creativity to the role by modifying the materials so that the learners could connect to the subject area being discussed. This stimulated greater interest among both the children and Vicki, and also brought Vicki positive feedback from the management, other teachers, and the children and their parents. Prior to starting the graduate diploma programme, Vicki felt confident in her abilities as a teacher; she saw herself as being creative, intuitive and skilled at establishing positive, reciprocal

relationships with her learners. Vicki considered herself to be a good English-language teacher, who was prepared to think outside the box, and modify the teaching materials, and who worked hard to be successful. Vicki commented: “Yes, I think I’m a creative person compared to other Koreans, because when I teach something I create activities whereas the other teachers always use the text books” (Vicki: Third interview, p. 2). However, Vicki described the TESOL course which she was required to teach in the hagwon, as lacking a theoretical foundation, and more focused on activities and keeping the students busy; when asked whether her former occupation contributed to her present understanding as a teacher, Vicki replied:

Yeah, a lot. I feel confident as a teacher. The owner, the staff, the kids, and the parents tell me I am good at teaching. I’m used to talking with children and their parents, and typically get really good feedback. On my first day in the centre, I was a little bit nervous, not nervous exactly, but kind of worried about what if I don’t get along with the children, but I didn’t really worry about getting along with the staff.

SD: Oh really, why?

I think as long as I smile and do my best to be nice and helpful, then they will like me. (Vicki: First interview, pp. 2-3)

Reflecting on the differences in her approach to learning when doing the degree in hospitality in Waikato, compared to being a student of early childhood teaching, Vicki admitted that being an early childhood student was a lot more demanding in terms of time management. After a short time volunteering in her home centre to make up the 16 hours-per-week as field experience, Vicki impressed the centre manager and was offered a casual position as a reliever. In addition, Vicki also took on part-time job working in a friend’s coffee shop. Vicki admitted to being a crammer, which she explained as working to very tight deadlines in order to complete assessment tasks and preparation for the field-practice folder. Although Vicki admits to the limitations of her approach to studying, she views her trajectory into early childhood education as being a long-term career, and while she admits her understanding may be incomplete at present, this is because she does not see the relevance at the moment, since she sees herself very much on the periphery in her home centre.

It’s really helpful to read some theories and it takes time right, but if I cram, I just skim read and then forget really easily. So I need time to think about how this theory

affects my curriculum later or my teaching moment later but there is no time to think deeply at the moment.

SD: So, although you are reading all the material now and you can use this in your assessments, you are thinking later when you have more time you will return to the readings to read them at a deeper level?

Yes, I'll read them again later when I find a full-time position and become a responsible teacher, not now at the moment. You've visited the kindergarten you've seen the teachers, I'm not a teacher I'm a helper. They have their own curriculum, the system goes with their curriculum, so I can't teach children like in other centres.

(Vicki: First interview, p. 2)

Also significant here in terms of identity development is Vicki's recognition of the division of labour that exists in her home centre. She relates her designated role as a student teacher in the centre to being a teaching assistant. This suggests that she lacks sufficient agency to try a new teaching approach or way of planning suggested in the course work, rather she "completes" the work, thereby complying with the programme requirements, but does not seek to make a connection to her own ideas of teaching.

### **Others' learning and teaching experiences.**

While Vicki had quite a lot of experience but relatively little preparation for being an early childhood teacher, at the other end of the spectrum was Hong. Before coming to New Zealand, Hong had studied a four-year Bachelor in Education and had been a fully qualified and registered secondary-school teacher in China for two years. She had also studied as part of an exchange programme for six months in Canada.

Although Hong's mother was an early childhood teacher, Hong had not intended to be an early childhood teacher, but only committed to an education degree so she could gain entrance into the university she wanted. The university Hong attended in Southern China was regarded as being highly prestigious and had an international reputation. This university differed from other local universities in two respects. Firstly, the principal medium of instruction was English, and secondly the university was partnered with schools and universities in Canada with an active exchange programme in place for both students and faculty.

In the first interview, Hong admitted to particularly valuing the overseas lecturers since they made the content “more interesting,” while, in comparison, even the most respected Chinese professors were considered “boring” because their teaching style was considered old-fashioned.” Hong elaborates on her experience with the Chinese lecturers:

I quite enjoyed the lectures given by the overseas lecturers, they were very interesting and I learnt a lot. We also had a very famous Chinese education lecturer that spoke about all the theories about like Vygotsky and Piaget. The lecturer is very famous but the way he teaches is quite old-fashioned way, still giving lots of lectures. If you are able to stay focused, his lectures could be interesting but it is too easy to be distracted. (Hong: First interview, p. 3)

Hong’s narrative of teacher-directed teaching as boring and old-fashioned, from her university experience, was characteristic of her desire for change and excitement, this also being her principal motivation for immigrating to New Zealand. As part of her teacher education programme in China, Hong had engaged with learning and development theorists, had closely studied the discipline she was to teach, and had also learnt from her professors progressive-teaching techniques that sought to establish communicative English-language classrooms. As a newly graduated teacher, Hong was greatly influenced by her mentor teacher with whom she shared teaching in a classroom. Hong described her mentor teacher as being a much older lady who was untypically learner-centred in her pedagogical orientation.

Even before coming to New Zealand, Hong greatly valued the more dialogical teaching methods employed by her progressive university than those she had experienced in school. This was accentuated by the influence of her learner-centred mentor teacher to whom Hong felt very indebted. However, while there were pockets of “progressive pedagogies” in China, for many the traditional teacher-led instruction controlled the dominant discourse. In terms of cultural models, Hong had a much more liberal and progressive understanding of education than her peers. She saw value in the way the overseas teachers taught using the students’ own experiences to scaffold learning. Hong felt that this way of teaching was her preferred style.

Chen, a 25-year-old from Shanghai, also trained as a secondary-school teacher in China, choosing Chinese language and literature as her subject area. Chen’s major in university was education, a four-year qualification which allowed her to achieve her goal to be a qualified classroom teacher. Most memorable for Chen during her programme of study was her final eight-week placement in a secondary school where she had to take on full control of the class and its planning and implementation. During this time, Chen was partnered with a permanent

teacher, whom Chen respected for her traits of “patience and respect” (Chen: Preliminary interview, p. 4). However, upon graduation, Chen was pressured by her parents into taking a job with the local government in the planning department, which in China is a high-status job with excellent remuneration. Chen worked as a civil servant for five years before being able to resume her teaching career when she came to New Zealand. Chen explained:

In China I had to listen to my parents and do as they suggested so I did not have the opportunity to choose my own career, so I chose to quit my job and come to New Zealand to continue my studies. (Chen: Preliminary interview, p. 5)

When Chen resumed her teaching career in New Zealand, her experiences in China seemed very remote to her, and she found it difficult to see how her teaching in China was relevant to teaching ECE in New Zealand. When asked what motivated her to become an early childhood teacher, Chen replied:

I want to be an early childhood teacher so I can be with young children, they’re cute and ... I really want to be with them. And I think it is a good idea to be an early childhood teacher in the future for my professional career. (Chen: First interview, p. 2)

The above conceptualisation of young children as “cute,” suggests an image of the child at odds with the national curriculum’s aspirations of the child as “competent and confident” (MoE, 1996, p. 9). The way in which children are “imagined” or the cultural models that are referenced when considering them, will influence the relationship between the teacher and the child (Nimmo, 1998). The reference to the professional career also implies the vocational nature of the degree, namely that it leads to professional registration, and ultimately to a job.

The student with by far the most relevant and long-standing experience, with 18 years’ experience as a qualified early childhood teacher in China, was Anna. During those 18 years Anna had worked in just two early childhood settings. Anna’s first job, after graduating from a teaching college in Beijing, was in a bilingual preschool, teaching children in both Chinese and English; she spent the first eight years in this setting. The second setting was an international school, run as a subsidiary of a well-known private school in London, which was organised and overseen by ex-patriot, qualified, native English-speaking teachers. In this school, Anna and other non-native speakers were positioned as teaching assistants. The teaching assistants were expected to perform general care routines for the children, and provide support to the lead teachers. The teachers were all native English speakers, and the

teaching assistants were drawn from the local population. Anna commented about the arrangement in her preschool in China:

All the assistant teachers were Chinese, but we (the assistant teachers) organised the mat times, we organised lesson plans, assessments – we did everything, but we were just the assistant teachers... we were given training for all those sort of things. (Anna: Preliminary interview, p. 3)

As a teaching assistant, Anna had extremely limited formal input into the planning or management of student learning. However, as part of the auxiliary teaching team, when new pedagogies or practices were introduced to the centre, Anna and the other teaching assistants were included in the professional development. Over the years, Anna had earned additional accreditation as a Montessori-trained teacher, a certified music instructor and, most recently, she had received extensive professional development on the new early childhood curriculum in England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008). Anna really valued these experiences, and sought ways to add to her professional development whilst still a student.

Leo, the only male student of the group, moved from Hong Kong to Australia, initially, for tertiary studies, and then to New Zealand to seek employment. Having had some experience as a museum tour guide for children in Australia, Leo found that he enjoyed being with the younger children and saw them as “less of a challenge than the older children” (Preliminary interview). After failing to find permanent employment in Australia, Leo decided to study ECE in New Zealand. As with the other student teachers, one of the most attractive aspects of the programme was its vocational nature.

In the first interview, Leo spoke about his final year in the Australian university, studying a joint bachelor’s in Japanese and history, as being particularly stressful. He had struggled academically and found the work very challenging. Leo was able to succeed only through the attentions of an empathetic lecturer who provided him with support and guidance during his final year so that he was able to complete the degree. Leo described his lecturer as “patient and passionate [and] who went well beyond what was expected” (Leo: Preliminary interview, p. 2) with additional one-on-one tutorials. This partiality for interpersonal interaction and close support seemed to be Leo’s preferred way of learning. This was a theme that was evident in many of Leo’s discussions about his interactions with his associate teacher, centre staff, other students, and lecturers. However, this approach was not well-suited to the requirements of a blended learning environment, where being self-directed and motivated

were key characteristics. Leo's approach to learning to be a teacher was captured in the third interview:

You can't just learn from text books, no one is going to teach you. You just have to learn from the people around you, you just have to observe. I think you have to learn from the world, from everywhere, from society, the whole world, people. (Leo: Second interview, p. 4)

Throughout the four interviews with Leo, which stretched from August 2014 to April 2015, I noted not just this preference for experiential and social learning, but also a reluctance to engage with authoritative texts on early childhood education. Texts such as the ministry documents, or learning and development theories, are fundamental for students to understand properly the complex nature of the professional sector. Leo's reluctance to fully engage, seemed to stem from a lack of confidence and/or ability. Although Leo was gregarious and out-going, he often spoke of the complexity of the study material; when asked if he was given much feedback from marking lecturers for his written work, he replied:

It's all about my writing. I don't have a problem with the content, but I just have a problem expressing myself, even if you asked me in Chinese some of these questions, I would still have the same problem. The thing is I'm not the type of person to sit down and read a book, I prefer to be outside and express myself verbally or physically. (Leo: Fourth interview, p. 6)

What Leo lacked in academic endeavour he sought to compensate for in terms of personality. A familiar refrain in Leo's discourse during the interviews, was the close attachments he had with the children in the centres in which he was placed. Leo often commented on how easy it was for him to establish relationships with the children, because he treated them "like my own children, my own friends" (Leo: First interview, p. 1). This emphasis on relationships, which is a feature in early childhood teacher discourse, is often framed as a means to an end, in terms of the better the teacher knows the child, the better positioned the teacher is to plan and implement meaningful learning activities (Papatheodorou, 2009). However, while Leo was typically very engaging with the children and other staff, during the interviews his professional knowledge often seemed precariously incomplete, suggesting that while he recognised the value of establishing relationships with the children, the underpinning professional knowledge explicating the aim or value was not entirely clear.

While four of these students (Vikki, Hong, Chen and Anna) were graduates of teacher education programmes in China or Korea, they saw their previous studies and roles as having only limited application to their new roles as early childhood teachers, the exception being Anna. It can be considered that after almost two decades of being an early childhood educator, that Anna had established a clear notion of her teaching self, based on the beliefs and values that were an integral part of her teacher identity from her experiences in private, bilingual ex-patriot kindergartens in China. However, Anna was very open to learning new ideas and concepts, and her objective from the start of the course was to learn as much as she could from the new experiences in a different value system.

### **Motivations for studying early childhood education.**

An inextricable part of the student teachers' personal identities was related to their motivations for studying early childhood education. When enrolling in the graduate diploma programme, student teachers were eligible for a one-year student visa followed by a one-year visitor's visa, which gave students the time to look for a permanent position. All the student teachers in this study intended to stay in New Zealand after completion of their academic programme. Their immediate goal, after qualification, was to find a home centre, with an experienced teacher who could be their mentor and help them complete the two-year provisional teacher registration. The student teachers' intentions were then either to continue living in New Zealand or return to their countries of origin. The implication of these considerations was that the students felt significant pressure to secure employment whilst completing their programme of study. In many ways, their field experiences and placements were similar to internships, perceived by students as presenting them with opportunities to impress potential employers (Lundsteen & Edwards, 2013). This is evident in the following final interview with Leo, considering job prospects in his home centre:

I'm worried about the future of course, I've asked a lot of the other students, and it's really hard to find a job in a place like this [his home centre], especially if it's an old centre and the staff don't leave for years and years. Some of the staff here have been here forever, making it really hard to get a position, (Leo: Fourth interview, p. 8)

That all student teachers envisioned themselves as working towards professional registration in New Zealand implied a greater "buy-in" for their programmes of study. This was particularly true of the field-practice component which was framed by the college, not only as an internal assessment, but also as helping students compile an evidence-based portfolio which would indirectly help towards full registration. Many of the learning outcomes of the

field-practice appraisal document could be re-framed according to the criteria of the teacher registration process, so although the same folder could not be used, the completion of the field-practice folder would inform later attempts at compiling evidence for full teacher registration. The graduate diploma programme of study was enormously high-stakes for the student teachers, since if they were unable to find a full-time position at the end of the visitor's visa, they would have to return to their countries of origin. This pressure to find a position within the restricted time-frame had implications for the development of the student teacher identity.

That four of the six research participants had previous experience of teaching and wanted to continue in their same profession, except in quite a different context, seemed entirely reasonable. The decision to immigrate, however, is rarely taken lightly. In this section, we will look at the student teachers' motivations for immigrating to New Zealand and studying early childhood education. Monique and Anna presented the two most striking rationales for leaving friends, family, and an established support network they enjoyed at home to come to New Zealand.

### **Exchange and use value of the qualification.**

Monique, originally from Inner Mongolia, was married and had been living with her husband and his family on the Chinese South Eastern seaboard for a number of years. Although Monique's mother-in-law owned and operated her own small early childhood centre, Monique's principal motivation for leaving China to study early childhood in New Zealand was so her son could come to New Zealand. In the first interview, Monique admitted that her interest in early childhood was prompted by the birth of her son, and like many of her friends of a similar age and status, was considering options for her son's education:

I am a mother of a two-year old boy so I realise that early childhood education is important. As a mother, I want to improve myself and learn how to teach, to help my own child learn. And I want to be a professional and qualified ECE teacher so I can teach other young children and provide them with an education. (Monique:

Preliminary interview, p. 1)

This motivation to study, spurred by her own son, meant that for Monique, early childhood education had value both in terms of its use and exchange value. In terms of the use value, Monique understood the programme as informing her approach with her own child, as well as being able to contribute towards other children's learning. Monique also understood the qualification for its "exchange value," as potentially leading to a full-time position allowing

Monique to bring her own child to New Zealand on a visitor's visa. If Monique were to secure a job offer, she would then be able to apply for permanent residency which would allow her son to study in New Zealand and her husband to join them both.

Monique feared for her son growing up in China. She felt that children growing up in China lacked quality of life, and that their childhood was often driven by societal demands without regard for the personhood of the child. Although Monique's son was only two at the time of the study, it was obvious that his upbringing was her primary motivation for coming to New Zealand:

In China, maybe because of the culture, the parents or grandparents put a lot of pressure on young children. But here in New Zealand, the children are encouraged to play freely and to be empowered. I think the development of their creativity and their decision-making skills are far more important. For example, in China the parents always make decisions for their children, but actually in everyday life, it is important for children to make their own decisions. (Monique: Preliminary interview, p. 2)

A similar narrative revealed the same kind of motivations for Anna from Beijing. Anna and her husband emigrated from Beijing for the sole reason of their child's education. In the first interview, it was apparent that although Anna largely agreed with the move, the initiative was her husband's, even though her husband was a practising medical doctor in Beijing and would not be able to work in the same capacity in New Zealand, given his limited English. This amounted to a considerable sacrifice for both parents, with Anna giving up her friends and family in Beijing:

My husband wants to help my son *escape* compulsory education in China. It is very tough and frustrating for a little boy with his personality and intelligence, if I can say that. He is not really a good fit for that curriculum. (Preliminary interview, p. 1)

Anna's son was only eight years old, but already his parents had seen how hard he was being pushed in school, the long hours experienced by primary-aged students, and how this kind of pressure would only mount as the child progressed through the education system. Both parents were very anxious about their son's emotional and physical development, and felt that his experiences in schools had already caused developmental delays:

Yes, it's really tough for young children. I enrolled my son in the local school for the first two years. The homework kept him awake until 11 o'clock at night and then he would have to wake at 6.30 in the morning to go to school for 7 o'clock. For that little boy, only six years old, he never physically developed properly. During that time, he

didn't physically grow at all, he kept the same height and was very skinny. So my husband said: "let's move to New Zealand then and give him a really good environment and education." (Anna: Preliminary interview, p. 2)

The personal motivations for studying early childhood education in New Zealand for both Monique and Anna were quite transparent and had significant consequences for the development of their student teacher identity. As both mothers and student teachers they had significant buy-in to the graduate diploma programme both in terms of what it could do for them personally and professionally but also in terms of helping others. Moreover, the concerns both student teachers expressed in terms of the limitations of the Chinese educational system with regards to space for creativity, artistry, and simply being unhurried, are reflective of larger societal discourse about the ethics of education (Birkeland, 2013), which influenced all student teachers to varying degrees.

### **Summary**

This section considered the influence of the student teachers' past experiences, and was informed by a cultural-historical perspective that recognises the influence of context on the individual and how interaction and engagement within cultural structures will influence the development of individual subjectivity which mediates new experiences. The student teachers' own identities mediated their interpretation and actions in the field-practice placements. The more closely their own motives were to those of the centre, the more clearly the student teachers could see their way to align with what mattered in their practices, and the easier it was for them to develop the identities that mediated their successful engagement. As noted by Edwards (2010) one's identity comes from "what matters to us" (p. 10), and different things mattered for each of the student teachers.

### **Professional Identity**

Professionalism in early childhood education is often perceived as a double-edged sword bringing both benefits and risks to the student teacher (Grey, 2011). For many years, the early childhood sector has struggled to dispel gendered notions of the early childhood teacher as a "glorified baby-sitter," and the privileging of the role of affection over pedagogy (Langford, 2008; Moloney & Pope, 2012), a discourse that was challenged in New Zealand with the moves to greater professionalism.

In the construction of the graduate diploma programme, the two distinct but overlapping activity systems of the college and the early childhood centres were designed to complement one another and support students making connections between theory and practice. Such theory-practice connections were made possible through the use of boundary objects which sought to make explicit the connection of practice to theory. A prima facie example of this was the field-practice appraisal form, which had 22 specific learning outcomes, which had been developed from learning outcomes from the taught courses. When contemplating the field-practice-appraisal learning outcomes, students were encouraged to review their taught courses and consider how their course work could be leveraged and applied to their workplace settings.

As with all cultural artefacts, there are both material and ideational aspects with such boundary objects (Cole, 1998). For example, there is the national curriculum as a physical material resource which can be a tool used to organise children's learning; at the same time, the same curriculum supports a number of pedagogical concepts and approaches such as child-centred teaching, partnership with parents, and the validation of reciprocal and responsive relationships with the children. These social conceptions (Smagorinsky, 2013) can also be considered boundary objects since they are both supported in the college instructional material and expected to be developed in the actual early childhood centres. However, as noted by Smagorinsky (2013), such conceptions are much harder to define, particularly when considering the variation in ideology and purpose of the range of early childhood centres in which students were placed. In this next section, we examine the student teachers' appropriation of one of the primary cultural tools of early childhood teaching in New Zealand.

### **Academic courses.**

One of the guiding principles that informed the construction of the academic courses for the graduate diploma programme in the current ITE, was to introduce theoretical perspectives and constructs through the course materials and to encourage the student teacher, through journal tasks and assessment tasks, to develop reflective skills and make definite links to practice-based situations. In other words, the reification of practices as well as the actual participation was also a feature of this situated approach (Wenger, 1998) and was encouraged through the use of the field-practice appraisal document. This trajectory was also considered in reverse, so that on field-practice placements students were encouraged to draw on the materials from their academic courses to reflect on the underlying principles and values of

centre practices. This double-bind prompts a ZPD according to the learning outcomes prescribed by the ITE. Monique reflects on the way in which the programme attempted to bind the practice and theory components together:

I usually self-study the theory, since theory is the foundation to the practice. I need to know the theory so I know the reasons for the practice. I get this from the academic courses. If I don't get it, I'll ask the teaching team. For example, the learning outcomes on the appraisal document have many indicators, some of them I can't fully understand so I'll ask the team what does this look like in practice. (Monique: First interview, p. 5)

In terms of contributing credits towards the programme, the field-practice component, itself a course with specific learning outcomes and grades of pass and fail, represented one tenth of the complete programme. However, for the students, the field practice was a considerable focus both in terms of sheer quantity of work and time spent on placement. As part of the field-practice outcome, students were required to write nine reflections and/or learning documentation during the time on practice. Hong considered this to be a vital part of the programme:

I will write some reflection if the incident is important to me and I write reflections often just when I feel I need to and keep it documented because I might be able to use it at another time. I think about the situation subjectively and think about what it means to me, very personally. But when I'm doing the reflection, I will be critical and objective, and I will think of this as a type of problem I will face in the future and try to think of as many solutions as I can. (Hong: Third interview, p. 11)

The connection between the field-practice appraisal document and the taught courses was made apparent to the student teacher through the field-practice handbook, the initial field-practice telephone call and throughout the actual study guides. As illustrated in Table 10 below, the connection between the taught courses and field-practice outcomes was made explicit to the students both through the field-practice documentation, and also reinforced through dialogue with the visiting lecturer. This approach was summed up by one of the participants, Anna, as: "The course and the field practice are very close together, so like two birds with one stone" (Anna: Third interview, p. 3). The field-practice appraisal form gave students definite goals which could be achieved through either being sighted by the visiting lecturers whilst on site, discussed in collaboration with the associate teacher, or written about as part of the portfolio, or, more than likely, a combination of all three.

Table 10

*Relation of Taught Courses to Field-Practice Learning Outcomes*

| Name of course                            | Key outcomes                                   | Field-practice outcomes |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| Introduction to early childhood education | Overview and introduction to <i>Te Whāriki</i> | LO 1, 2, 3              |
| Play as a framework                       | Play as vehicle for learning                   | LO 3, 4                 |
| Sociocultural assessment                  | Learning stories                               | LO 5, 6                 |
| Bicultural development                    | Te Ao Māori                                    | LO 7, 8                 |
| Inclusive practice                        | Children with special needs                    | LO 9, 10                |
| Contemporary issues in ECE                | Disruptive pedagogies                          | LO 11, 12               |
| Leadership in ECE                         | Teacher as leader                              | LO 13, 14               |
| Research in ECE                           | Self-directed study                            | LO 15                   |

For the majority of settings, the completion of the learning outcomes from the field-practice-appraisal document was negotiated by the student teacher in collaboration with the visiting lecturer and the associate teacher. For the two preschool settings, which operated according to a prescribed pre-planned curriculum, the student teachers had less freedom to teach according to the demands of the appraisal. This was a matter of concern to both students, Chen and Vicki. Fortuitously for Vicki, her final placement of the programme was in her home centre during public school holidays. During this time although the centre remained open, the teachers were invited to introduce projects and activities outside of the set curriculum. In consultation with the other teachers in her room, and her associate teacher, Vicki undertook responsibility for the planning and implementation throughout the four weeks of placement; for this final placement Vicki had outstanding learning outcomes related to bicultural development:

So for the last three weeks of my field practice I was in charge of everything. I organised a lot of activities, we made some sushi, we planted some flower, we did some art and craft activities and I planned a music activity and a Māori activity and they don't care because it's just free play so I can grab some children and I can do the activity with them and the teachers support me, saying - you can do it, I can take a

photo of you and the children So I think it was good timing for me, if it happened during term time I wouldn't have been able to do that. (Vicki: Fourth interview, p. 2)

Chen also felt that some of the learning outcomes from the appraisal document were not suited to the Montessori classroom, given their focus on student choice and the open non-prescribed nature of the outcome. Although Chen had spoken to her visiting lecturer about her concerns for this final practice, she felt that the conversation did not help her to resolve this dilemma. In response, Chen conspired with her associate teacher to “break” from the regular routine and to set up an activity that would not normally be allowed in the centre. As indicated in the quote below, particular attention was given to this last field practice because the student teacher felt that the visiting lecturer did not like her centre:

Not so much, I know Mandy [not real name] is the tough one, so before she came we just thought what she wanted to see and me and Tracey just organised these activities which were not part of the regular routine, but for the other lecturers we just do the normal one. (Chen: Fourth interview, p. 6)

### **Play as a framework for learning.**

One of the most significant courses that students encountered early in the programme related to viewing play as a means for the teachers to connect with children, exploring their interests and strengths, and extending on those same areas to foster learning and development. For students who had limited previous experience with early childhood education, and who came from hierarchal teaching and learning environments, viewing play as a pedagogy, even for very young children, presented challenges.

However, in this study, there emerged for some of the students a very clear divide between what was said during the interviews and what was expressed in their student teaching portfolios for assessment purposes. For some of the students, the challenges of accepting, recognising and implementing a play-based curriculum were often not made explicit, with the student teachers sometimes wavering between what they considered they “ought” to say, in terms of how they expressed themselves in their written reflections which would go in their teaching portfolios, and what in fact they felt as individuals. This apparent contradiction between the social aspects of identity and their personal identity created an ongoing tension for some of the students to resolve.

Although Chen had limited opportunities to see free play in her home centre, during her second placement in a mainstream childcare centre in the Auckland CBD with under 2s,

Chen seemed to embrace the philosophy. Under the direction of her associate teacher, Chen took to designing a number of the children's learning experiences based on their play interests, and developed these further, including setting up the outdoors for a "tea-party-" themed intervention designed to facilitate the emergence of social skills. Chen's personal teaching philosophy, which was updated after each field-practice placement, took on a more mainstream approach:

As children learn through play, they learn to make sense of the world around them, and can pursue their interests, enhance their strengths and challenge their weaknesses holistically... Children should have time and opportunities to make their own discoveries, to explore new experiences and develop self-help skills ... Play is a child's way of engaging and making sense of the world. Pretend play may appear to be a very simple activity. Yet within it, young children learn practical skills .... and how to cooperate and share with others. Children can be anyone and do anything in the pretend world. (Chen: Field practice 2. Portfolio)

While Chen positioned herself as an advocate for free play in the field-practice portfolios, and in the assessments that were specific to play as a pedagogical technique, in the interviews Chen expressed her reservations:

I think I would prefer my home centre's approach. At first I didn't quite agree with it, I thought it was too, you know, restrictive. But now I think no, if I had a child I would send her to my home centre because the children learn more. In the free play centre the teacher has to constantly monitor the children or they behave inappropriately like lying down on the floor and refusing to move. But in the Montessori centre we train them to do what they should do and when they get up, to push their chair in. But in the free play centres, I have to tidy-up after them, and push in the chair, wipe the table and clean the floor. But in my centre no, the children do that. (Second interview: p. 7)

In the written course-based assessments, and in the field-practice documentation, Chen met the learning outcomes, she demonstrated her understanding of free play and discussed the teacher's role in planning for and facilitating for learning in a free-play framework. Although the role of play in children's learning is highly theoretical, at one level play can be understood instrumentally as a way of helping children develop associated developmental domains. Extending this understanding and adopting a sociocultural perspective, play can also be viewed as a means of fostering children's agency and identity (Carr & Lee, 2012).

During a successful third placement in an over 2s free-play centre, I noted that Chen's confidence was continuing to grow and her interactions with the children were more age-appropriate and engaging. She was listening to children and showing them respect by fostering their agency and presenting them with choice. While these aspects of her teaching practice showed dramatic improvement, the written reflections in her portfolio continued to show indications of a shift from a traditional to a more progressive position. Returning to her home centre, Chen reflects:

I think children just like free play because when I'm back to my centre from placement they will tell me I want to go outside and play, or I want to play with that or with this, but I just can say "put that away, you can just choose Montessori work," like that... sometimes I feel very sorry for them because I found that this week they have been really interested in the play corner... but we don't allow them to play in the family corner from Monday to Thursday, they just can play on Friday. (Chen: Third interview, p. 8)

Chen admitted that not only was she "bored" with the focus on the Montessori activities, but so were the children. Chen noted that sometimes when she gave a demonstration of how to engage with the Montessori specially designed resources, the children: "just turn around, or their friends come over and want to join in which is not allowed, since they have to work on the project by themselves" (Chen: Third interview, p. 9). Chen confessed that she sometimes turned a blind eye to such infractions.

The development of student teacher identity for Chen followed an interesting trajectory. As a new student in the preschool setting, Chen was able to relate that setting to her own experiences in China. For Chen, the teacher-directed way of teaching was how early childhood should be. However, when she was left in charge of supervising the children's activities, she found that she had to constantly remind them to keep their voices low, and could not allow them to play with the resources they would like or in the way they would like. She began to question the children's readiness for such instruction, implying that too many rules were unfair and, where she could, she would turn a "blind eye."

However, when it became clear to Chen that she was going to be offered a full-time position, her views become more firmly aligned with the particular philosophy of that centre. Towards the end of Chen's academic study, her associate teacher, who was also the centre manager, gave her additional hours and took the time to prepare her for a leadership position. In the final interview with Chen she revealed:

My associate teachers on placement were very responsible, during the under 2s placement she taught me a lot but Jackie is the biggest influence. Because she wanted me to take on a full-time position and she wanted me to be in a leadership position, she's kind of invested in me. (Chen: Fourth interview, pp. 1-2)

### **The early childhood curriculum.**

In the graduate diploma programme students are encouraged to engage with *Te Whāriki*, both in the written coursework assessments, and also when in field practice. Raising students' awareness of the centrality of *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum guideline, and also as a philosophical statement about the ethos of early childhood, was a significant feature of the initial teacher education programme. One constant in the field-practice placements was for the students to demonstrate their engagement with the centre philosophy and organisational goals of the early childhood setting, and reflect on how these influence the children's learning.

*Te Whāriki* was used in the graduate diploma programme as both a tool and an object. As a tool, it was hoped that the student teachers would internalise the values and principles of the document and appropriate them to their own teaching practices. As an object of study, it was anticipated students would further explore the early childhood curriculum and realise its pedagogical value in shaping the children's planning and implementation. This synchronicity of theory and practice was commented on by Anna, who compared her learning experience in New Zealand with that of China:

I think there are significant differences between New Zealand and China. In the university I studied in we never spoke about the curriculum. But in this college, all the course links with *Te Whāriki* very closely and with practice. The knowledge given to you is not wasted because you can use it in your centre. But in China, the academic side a lot of things you will learn that aren't useful at all. (Anna: Fourth interview, p. 7)

*Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) has been discussed as an aspirational document that requires teachers to utilise professional pedagogical knowledge to implement it, for children to be able to realise its full potential (Hedges, 2013). Monique, in particular, worked closely with *Te Whāriki* from the start of the programme. During the first interview, I was surprised by the range and accuracy with which Monique was able to discuss the features of *Te Whāriki*. With

little prompting, Monique was able to recite the principles of *Te Whāriki* and explain their significance.

I spent some time reading the range of online resources from the college, and also the centre's philosophy and the children's portfolios, which my team members encouraged me to read. And last Friday it was my team's turn to make the centre planning for the month, so we discussed the children's needs, urges, dispositions and strategies and we evaluated last month's centre planning. I joined them, and my team members invited me to contribute some ideas. Planning for each [of the] children in the room. It's like a room meeting and we planned for eight children. (Monique: First interview, p. 3)

Although this was Monique's first placement, as part of the field-practice placement, she was expected to attend any planning or professional development meetings that happened during that period. In the above explanation, we can see how Monique had a deliberate intention to expand her vocabulary and, as part of the process, she began to notice when particular words and phrases were used. The specialist vocabulary was first noted in the professional readings related to the academic course, but then also identified by Monique in the centre's philosophy and policies, and then discussed in a supportive, welcoming environment with the teachers in her room while, as a teaching team, evaluating the previous month's plan and working on the current plan. In the example, we can see how the process of acquiring the specialised discourse of early childhood teaching acted as a bootstrap for Monique's development as a teacher (Vygotsky as cited in Holland et al., 1998). The prompt, however, came from being considered as part of the teaching team with a contribution to make.

Not all student teachers felt the same level of inclusion in what they considered to be significant parts of the teaching programme. Leo, in particular, felt as though he had not been included in the planning process in his home centre. In the final interview, when asked how he was getting along with understanding and implementing the national curriculum, Leo indicated that he felt he lacked opportunity to apply his learning:

I think at a fundamental level I have been able to put some solid knowledge into put into practice, but to do it more thoroughly I think you have to be a permanent teacher. As a permanent teacher it is different, you have to be committed and show this to the centre, the parents. This will help to push you to a different level when you plan for the room and for the individual children. (Leo: Fourth interview, p. 9)

### **Specialised courses.**

As students progressed in the programme, the taught courses and associated learning outcomes, which were also reflected in the field-practice appraisal document, became increasingly specialised and complex. The layout of the document encouraged students to develop a specific focus for each placement. In the first placement, for example, there was a focus on health and safety, and understanding the role of play. In later courses, these specialised interests often involved ways of conceptualising education that was new to the students. One such learning outcome related to inclusive practice. Inclusive practice, as framed by the taught course, refers to the inclusion of children and whānau from all sections of society, including those children with special needs. On Anna's third placement there was a boy in her room with Down syndrome. This child was having difficulty following the routine of the room and during scheduled group time this prevented him from participating in the group activities with the other children.

Knowing that attention to inclusive practice was a learning outcome, Anna developed a relationship with the child and his mother. After observing him, Anna devised a system of symbols which were printed on cards, which the teachers could show him to convey their instructions. The idea for the approach came from one of the required readings from the course. The change in teaching strategy had an immediate impact on the child's behaviour. The associate teacher, with whom Anna had collaborated, was very impressed. For Anna, this first experience with a child with severe needs was a "light-bulb" moment. When I asked her if this experience had changed her way of thinking about children with special needs, Anna replied:

Oh yes, at the beginning I thought that a person with Down syndrome was mentally delayed. In China we believe that nothing can be done to help the child to live a normal life. People would rather put them in a special school and when they finish they are allocated special jobs, so it's hard for them to have a normal life. I feel that this way of learning in the mainstream can help them adapt to real society. (Anna: Third interview p. 3)

Leo had a similar meaningful experience, while on his out-of-home placement, when a young girl with cerebral palsy was one of the children in the class. The intended learning outcome related to implementing and reporting on a planning cycle relating to one child or a small group of children. Leo chose a young girl of Japanese descent, whom he was able to communicate with in her first language, and also with her mother when asking for permission

to photograph his learning story. Noticing the child's interest in taking care of her "baby," Leo's intention to meet the learning outcome was to modify the environment, to encourage her to use "grooming" tools with the baby, giving Leo the opportunity to interact with the child. However, the Japanese girl extended her "caring" to the wheelchair-bound child with cerebral palsy, which Leo captured on his phone camera and from which he constructed the learning story "Helping my Friend," based on the interaction of the two girls. In the learning story Leo wrote:

Sakura [not real name] loves playing both by herself and with other children. From my observation over the past few weeks, I realised that Sakura has a passion for caring for others... This project allowed her to extend her interest in caring... I learned [that] an informative and effective learning story should be child-centred.  
(Leo: Field practice 2. Portfolio)

For Leo, capturing this interaction was a pivotal moment in terms of meeting the learning outcome and making connections with the parents. Leo showed his photos to his associate teacher who encouraged him to speak to both sets of parents to get their permission to use the photo for his assessment, but also to share the experience. Continued exposure to the reality of early childhood in a diverse and heterogeneous society, and the focus of the field-practice-appraisal document, encouraged the student teachers to take a proactive approach with their teaching which allowed them to learn and develop as professionals.

All students engaged with Māori reo and practices as part of the graduate diploma programme. However, many felt very uncertain with this new area of study for them, and were not sure how to understand bicultural development in terms of early childhood education. Students were also informed about the recent colonial history of New Zealand, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and the implications for early childhood education. In response to this provocation, the students in the WeChat group organised a day-outing to one of the islands in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf to learn about sustainability from a Māori perspective. For Monique, this was one of the few courses she approached where she first had to engage with the study materials and then the field-practice component.

Actually, through that assessment I learned about the history, Māori and also what happened in New Zealand in the past. I got a resubmit for the assessment so I went back to the college spoke with the Kaiako (teacher) and got some understanding about the principles of the Treaty and how it is linked to this field practice. (Monique: Third interview, p. 2)

Monique was able to see the significance and relate it to her own experiences. She explained the significance of biculturalism in relation to multiculturalism:

Yes I think it's a multicultural society because in New Zealand all the children and their families bring their culture here. As ECE teachers we need to protect their rights, to encourage, respect their culture and we respect the nature and resources, we protect the flower and the river, and this is all part of the te reo Māori. The course I didn't really understand but the practices are very deep. (Monique: Third interview, p. 2)

Likewise, Anna also saw the true value of the bicultural course in its application to practice. Speaking about the visit of an important person to the centre that she worked for, she explained that a particular focus is given to how the children's bedding is organised, to make sure that the children's head and feet are kept separate. Here we see Anna questioning the position of one of the other teachers in her room.

The last time there was a high-level boss who came to visit the home centre, so my class teacher just moved the bedding because Māori people believe the feet and head should not touch each other when asleep. But my teacher said I know it is garbage, but I have to follow it, but if she learned this course and understood the Māori culture, she would not say that. (Anna: Fourth interview, p. 8)

### **Language.**

Satisfying the English language proficiency requirements prior to enrolling on the programme was a must for all students, other than those who had graduated from an Australian or New Zealand tertiary setting with a bachelor's or higher. Although all participants were successful in meeting this requirement, many still expressed concerns with fluency and pronunciation and identified it as a barrier to their relationship building with both children and teachers. Being able to communicate effectively is a crucial consideration in early childhood teaching, since not only are teachers modelling good language for the children, but also they need to document children's learning, often in narrative assessments that are viewed by parents and can be scrutinised by external reviewers. A lack of English-language proficiency has been found to be a considerable barrier for student teachers finding stable employment (Iyer & Reese, 2013). This view was also evident in the CALD teacher interviews in Kostogriz and Peeler's (2007) study in Australia. The authors report that a lack of English language proficiency often marginalised CALD student teachers, and was a key element in the politics of the workplace. One of the participants admitted that "grammatical

accuracy and felicity of speech is [sic] divisive for her as it fractures collegial relationships” (p. 112).

For both Monique and Anna, the language requirements for enrolling in the graduate diploma programme presented their first considerable obstacle on the path to teacher registration. Although Anna had been teaching in a bilingual setting for almost two decades, she required additional support with the writing and reading components of the IELTS test before gaining acceptance onto the programme. Monique had very limited experience of English as an additional language until arriving in New Zealand. She confided that when she first came to New Zealand, her English was so limited that she had difficulty understanding and answering the questions posed at immigration. Both Monique and Anna undertook English language as a taught subject once they were in New Zealand.

Both Monique and Anna came to New Zealand approximately one year prior to enrolling in the graduate diploma to study English in an English-speaking country, focusing on their academic language and developing writing skills, and also developing an understanding of New Zealand as a place and culture. For Monique, in particular, this gave her a first glimpse of teaching and learning according to the student’s interest rather than prompted by the lecturer’s design. She enrolled in a language school in the Auckland CBD that had students from a mixture of backgrounds, and was able to progress through the different levels of English instruction, until she was finally able to sit in the IELTS class. The lecturer’s style of teaching English, which was based on the students’ interests and using materials that they were able to relate to, was very effective for Monique. She established a close relationship with her teacher and the other students in the class. The class operated on collaboration and cooperation, and was established along the lines of inquiry. Monique’s engagement in these English classes not only allowed her to develop her language skills, but also provided her with general learning strategies, which she was able to transfer to the early childhood context.

Actually, after I graduated five years ago until now until one year ago I didn’t study English. So I just start from last year at the beginning and study step-by-step with the help of my teacher and classmates. I found it very important to get involved with the community to help me to understand the local culture. (Monique: Preliminary interview, p. 1)

Anna was in a similar situation when she first came to New Zealand. Although Anna had worked in a bicultural setting for a number of years, both reading and, to a larger extent,

writing were specific areas that she needed to improve upon so that she could begin studying. Unlike Monique, who had quite a “community” experience, Anna enrolled in a Chinese-owned language school in Auckland, where IELTS teaching consists of exam preparation and exam taking. Anna felt that much of this time was wasted because of inefficient teaching styles, but eventually she found a teacher she would relate to, and was able to finally get the grades required to start the teaching programme. Language was mentioned as an issue by all student teachers at one time or another. For Hong, her concern was not knowing the “right” kind of language to use with instructing children. Chen expressed the same reservations about language. Leo’s concern was just with language as assessed by the college, in both the written documentation produced for field practice, and the formal assessments that were submitted at the end of each course. While students expressed frustration at times with the IELTS requirement, all were able to see its value. In this instance, although there was tension between the rules and the subjects within the activity system, this actually helped the students in the end.

The rules regarding language in this instance provided the students with the kind of motivation to work on their language that is necessary to work in an English-speaking environment with young children. Studying English in New Zealand gave both Anna and Monique time to acclimatise and develop some familiarity with the New Zealand context. Studying English so close to studying early childhood education, also prompted the transfer of some learning skills from English to early childhood. This was particularly noticeable with Monique and the way she learned vocabulary.

In Hong’s first placement, her lack of confidence in her abilities to communicate effectively with the young children in the kindergarten inhibited her interactions with the children, and she seemed overwhelmed by the situation. Although Hong was a qualified English language teacher in China and regularly taught adolescents, Hong had a very hard time making what she felt to be meaningful relationships with the staff and children. Hong was highly self-conscious of her own English-language skills, both with written work and also with pronunciation. During my initial observation of Hong in the kindergarten, Hong was very focused on the “safety” aspect of her supervision and this anxiety and pre-occupation with safety led Hong to miss a number of opportunities to join in the children’s play more actively. This passivity, I learnt later, stemmed from Hong’s lack of confidence with spoken English, especially when supervising the older children who, to Hong, seemed independent and not really needing the teacher. This initial nervousness and uncertainty dissipated over the

months, with increased opportunities for continued exposure to the rich language environment of the early childhood centre. During the first interview Hong admitted:

Although I was an English-language teacher in China, I thought I would be much more confident in my language skills than I actually am. I don't always understand when the children speak to me, sometimes they mumble or I can't understand their accent, this makes me a bit nervous when I interact with them. (Hong: First interview, pp. 12-13)

Chen also admitted to feeling insecure about her language and listening:

I really want to improve my language skills, I got 7 in IELTS, but before I came I thought my speaking, listening, reading and writing were good. But when I arrived I found I couldn't pick up some words in the centres like very easy words I know, like "ball," but I can't pick it up because the accent is difficult. And the children will ask about what it is we are meant to be doing at this time, and I'll go uuuumpph and get them to repeat it before I can understand what they're saying. And my reading is slow, that's why I spent a lot of time doing the assignment. The writing thing is okay, I try not to make too many grammar errors in my assessment. (Chen: First interview, p. 13)

Although Leo, as a second language student, was accepted onto the programme due to his Bachelor of Arts qualification from a recognised Australian university, he was still required to achieve a band of 7 across all four-skill domains of the IELTS test prior to graduating. This proved to be an ongoing cause of concern for Leo who, although a confident communicator, admitted to finding the constraints of the timed-writing section of the IELTS test very challenging. Leo's written work, both for his field-practice portfolio and his written assessments, was often annotated by lecturers commenting on the need for great clarity of the language being used.

Beyond the simple decoding of language, a sociolinguistic perspective highlights the importance of the students negotiating their understanding of specific pedagogical terms and constructs as defined by the discourse communities in which they participated. During the initial interviews, Monique would often "break-out" of the interview to ask me direct questions about pedagogical concepts she was grappling with, this seemed to be part of her motivation for volunteering for the study. Students' understanding of *Te Whāriki* was also one of the learning outcomes of the field-practice appraisal document, which Monique would write about and which we would discuss in the interview. As Monique became more

orientated to the Reggio Emilia philosophy from her second placement onwards, her exploration of language revolved around concepts of co-construction, identity and belonging, ideas that had come to her attention in her out-of-home-centre documentation. However, Monique's engagement in the community of her centre and its philosophies extended beyond just the physical, to also include the WeChat community; here, Monique discusses her sense-making of the notion of co-construction:

Actually I know this is one of the teaching strategies of early childhood, but I didn't really understand in practice. Then one day I had a coffee with my friend who also studies here (in the same ITE) and we started to talk about Reggio and I mentioned this example, and she said that's a really good example of co-construction and also we shared this with the group of students via WeChat. (Monique: Third interview, p. 4)

This deliberate focus on language and the meaning of terms, was also recognised by Hong in her discussion of learning and developmental theories, and language that she was required to engage with as part of her academic course work. Both students' engagement with the formal language of early childhood teaching can be understood as providing the stimulus for semiotic mediation and learning in a ZPD. The following quote shows how simply translating the word meaning from Chinese to English was not sufficient, since the presentation and understanding of the concepts, as used in her teacher education programme in China, differed in quite dramatic ways to the way they were being used in the New Zealand early childhood context. "I've heard it in China but very different and I spend a lot of time to comprehend this and it's very difficult and abstract and I had to read it many times" (Hong: Second interview, p. 9).

The development of student teacher identity for the CALD students can be understood as an ongoing ontological process, shaped by their dialogism with self-reflection on the influence of past experiences, context and body of professional knowledge (Hermans, 2001). Through the year, all participants encountered significant challenges. For Leo, perhaps the most significant was his feeling of alienation after being advised that one of the parents considered his placement with under 2s to be inappropriate because of his gender. Being a male in such a heavily gendered environment brought its own complications; Leo had presumed his maleness would make him attractive to employers. He also identified areas of the curriculum which he felt that the other teachers did not enjoy, which prompted him to accentuate his sportiness. However, during the interviews with Leo, I was concerned, as an insider, with his apparent lack of professional knowledge and, more so, his lack of curiosity to know more.

Without doubt, Leo was very successful at forming relationships with the children, but his limited knowledge did allow him to extrapolate from the immediate practice to broader theoretical considerations. In contrast, Hong became a much more proficient and competent teacher than could have been foreseen during the first few encounters. While she was proficient in her language skills, she initially lacked confidence with interacting with the children.

### **Formal and informal virtual networks.**

As noted in the literature, one of the edifying calls of online learning is the students' opportunity to exchange information and learn from each other's experiences and range of settings (Akyol & Garrison, 2014). Although all students needed to logon to the online platform to access study materials, download readings, and submit and receive marked assessments, participation in the discussion forums remained low, and generally most of the types of posts that populated the site were directed at the lecturer and were quite specific to the assessment task. While the online platform served a very specific purpose for the students, there was very little sense of community, since although the student teachers sometimes recognised the names of the other posters, it was rare that they actually knew each other. Those students who did use the forums regularly regarded them as reliable sources for additional information about the breakdown of the course assessment task. Monique was scrupulous in her use of the discussion forums:

Every time I print them out and study them. I go over the different posts and emphasise the important information. I also contribute, but not much, because I usually focus on the practice of the writing reflections for my portfolio, because usually the field practice and the assessment together, and I always focus on the field practice and do the assessment in the last couple of days. (Monique: Fourth interview, p. 3)

Hong gave a similar response to the use of the discussion forums. She commented how, although she does read other students' and the lecturer's posts, she rarely posts, since often the questions she wants to be addressed, have already been asked. Hong also spoke about drawing on her network of friends and acquaintances she had met through the college face-to-face tutorials and block courses. She discussed how she would draw upon these more experienced colleagues, rather than students studying at the same level, to help her unpack assessment tasks or get a better grip on the subject matter:

I've got a lot of friends who I've met through block course, international tutorials and I can talk to them on WeChat, and I will always ask questions to those experienced staff, so when I am doing my course I ask them for their ideas. I feel sometimes asking these guys is more proficient than asking on the discussion forums. Sometimes it's just easier in my home language, I feel more comfortable and makes more sense if speaking to another Chinese person. (Hong: Third interview, p. 9)

The Chinese community's use of WeChat facilitated the grouping of like-minded students into an early childhood student teachers' and teachers' open forum. The WeChat forum was markedly different from the compulsory site. As Francis (2012) notes more generally about tertiary students use of the Internet, the WeChat forum allows students: "to intentionally break away from traditional modes of learning and instruction and seek out new opportunities to learn beyond the confines of the traditional university" (p. 17).

An initial unexpected finding that emerged from the data was the student teachers' engagement with social media as a way to discuss their current centre and college experiences, positioning themselves in relation to specific pedagogical stances, and exploring further identification possibilities that were prompted in the formal learning environment. Use of social media, in particular WeChat, the Chinese "Facebook", gave students access to a large group of fellow students and qualified teachers whose aim was to create a supportive pedagogical environment that encouraged exploration. Monique explained how a conversation with a friend on the WeChat board developed into a group of participants booking a room in the city library to discuss the role of the teacher in a mainstream centre and how that differed from a Reggio-inspired centre. Approximately 12 participants attended the meeting and represented a range of service backgrounds and teacher education providers, with Chinese students mostly from the home college but a number from elsewhere and representing a range of qualifications. It is worth noting here that I relied on the students' recount of WeChat, since the particular discussions they referred to would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for me to source after the fact since they were written in Mandarin/Chinese.

As the researcher, my first realisation of the significance of the WeChat site was when a number of the Chinese students began to show an interest in playing the ukulele. For many Chinese students, their image of the professional early childhood teacher included a teacher who could sing and play musical instruments, but this was also a strategy promoted by some

of the lecturers in the college as one way of getting the students engaged and motivated. The WeChat posts included discussions of where to buy a ukulele, links to YouTube clips on how to play, and links to videos with children's songs.

However, the students' use of the digital media varied. Vicki, the only non-Mandarin-speaking participant, did not use the WeChat forum, however she did use the very popular website Pinterest to get some ideas for her activities with the children. Anna, on the other hand, tended to play more of a leadership role in the WeChat forums, initiating posts on topics of interest and challenging students whom she considered were attempting to take "the easy route" (Anna: Fourth interview, p. 4). Anna was also instrumental in organising workshops and giving advice to other students whom she saw as being much younger and in need of support: "Many of these guys have no experience at all with early childhood, they come to New Zealand with little and no understanding, how are they meant to learn?" (Anna: Fourth interview, p. 4).

With her considerable experience in early childhood, Anna offered leadership and advice to those students who needed it. Whilst on placements, Anna commented how the associate teacher, after seeing her for just a short time with children, would realise her competence and allow her much freer rein than was common for student teachers. Her participation in the formal discussion forums, however, was much more restricted to discussions directly related to the assessment task, rather than engaging with the subject matter from a broader perspective.

## **Summary**

In this section, we considered the way in which the student teachers were able to make connections between their academic learning and their field-placed practices. Some students were not only able to make the connections, but their perception of the ethos and principles of early childhood education was extended by their placement in settings which deepened their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Other students, however, were resistant to mainstream practices as a result of their being embedded in centres which rejected the principles and strands of the curriculum as advocated by the ITE. A number of the students expressed initial unease with their use of English. This remained a considerable obstacle for Leo, whose reluctance to engage fully in discussion about contemporary early childhood approaches during the interviews was perhaps reflective of this linguistic handicap. In terms of developing professional identity, there were significant differences in the image of the

early childhood teacher as presented in the teacher education materials and what was being witnessed in some of the settings.

### **Contextual Identity**

This third section focuses on the contextual influences experienced by the student teachers in the different sites of practice and examines the influence of both the psychological and the physical environments. The most obvious and most discussed contextual influences on the development of identity were relationships. These relationships could be seen to have a direct influence on the development of student teacher identity over the duration of their engagement with the graduate diploma course. The relationships which were most frequently discussed, and which seemed to have the greatest influence on the emerging pedagogy of the student teachers, were their relationships with their associate teachers. Other significant relationships discussed were with other teachers, the children and the children's parents.

The relationship principle of *Te Whāriki* adds credence to the focus on relationships in this study, since intersubjectivity – a shared understanding of the situation between teachers and children and others in the early childhood setting – is considered fundamental for effective learning in early childhood education. This is briefly stated in the curriculum document as “Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things” (MoE, 1996, p. 14). Attention to the relational aspects of teachers' work is not new, and once we accept that cognition can be “stretched over” persons, activities and settings, or that as workers we enter communities whose “extended intelligence” we come to share, we recognise how our thinking and actions are shaped by our participation in systems of distributed expertise to which we also contribute (Gee, 2008; Wertsch, 1998). In Vygotskian literature, the relationships that exist at the heart of the pedagogical encounter are held to be extremely significant (Goldstein, 1999; González Rey, 2011).

#### **Relationships with associate teachers.**

In this study, the student teachers' relationships with their associate teachers and other members of centre staff had an enormous impact on their eventual teacher identity. These relationships were most often perceived as both personally and professionally rewarding for the student teachers. For the student teachers in this study, interactions with colleagues in the centre was their first and most obvious opportunity to make connections with practitioners with local knowledge. In addition, these relationships served a very practical function of helping those student teachers, situated on the peripheries of the community of practice, to

learn about and begin to engage in core community practices that evoke more central participation and promote a greater sense of identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through this process of legitimate peripheral participation, student teachers were given highly valued opportunities to contribute to increasingly teacher-specific tasks. Often these were tasks that were prompted by the field-practice appraisal document such as planning for individual or small group learning, documenting and assessing children's learning, and understanding and implementing positive child guidance.

The accomplishment of such tasks stipulated by the appraisal document helped student teachers to claim legitimacy to competence. Moving from the periphery to a more full participation role provided student teachers with rich opportunities to experience the complex nature of early childhood teaching and learning. Relationships with associate teachers directly influenced the positioning of the student teacher in regards to the division of labour within the setting. In general, across the student teachers' placements, the more trusting and the less structured the learning environment, the more opportunities the student teachers were afforded to exercise agency in their teaching. Table 11 below shows the order of the student teacher field-practice placements, with the student teachers starting and ending their year-long programme in their home centre.

*Table 11*

*Student Teacher Placements*

|         | Home centre  | Out of home   | Out of home   | Home centre |
|---------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Leo     | Mainstream   | Mainstream    | Under 2s      | Mainstream  |
| Hong    | Kindergarten | Under 2s      |               |             |
| Chen    | Preschool    | Under 2s      | Mainstream    | Montessori  |
| Monique | Under 2s     | Reggio Emilia | Reggio Emilia | Under 2s    |
| Vicki   | Preschool    | Mainstream    | Under 2s      | Preschool   |
| Anna    | Mainstream   | Under 2s RIE  | Reggio        | Mainstream  |

Feelings of belonging and inclusion were prominent in the student teachers' discussions of their relationships with their associate teachers and other members of staff. Leo, who saw

himself as quite an out-going and social person, commented during his final home-centre placement:

Oh, it's like a family, we have great relationships... Yes, my home centre, Martha [name changed] is like the mother, she is very caring for all of us, even if you are a student she tries to make sure you are alright. And Kirsty [the room supervisor] as well, whenever you need help she will help you comprehensively. Like today, you saw me talking with Kirsty about the child with challenging behaviour. She gave me a lot of suggestions. (Leo: Fourth interview, p. 5)

All the student teachers in their home centres said categorically that they felt welcomed and at ease with the other teachers. In all settings, other than the private preschool (Vicki's home centre), the other teachers in the centre represented a broad cultural mix. In Chen's home setting, for example, there were three other teachers in her room, one from Venezuela, one from India and the other from China. In Monique's home setting, of the three teachers, one was from Brazil, one from India and the other a local. A similar distribution of cultural diversity was also visible in all the out-of-home centres as well. For Anna, one of the most significant differences she found when comparing her previous early childhood experience, as a teacher in China, to Auckland, was the obvious multiculturalism of not just the children in the centres but also the staff.

Monique also spoke with genuine warmth about her colleagues in her home centre and commented that they had become "like a family" (Monique: First interview, p. 1). She also discussed the sense of cooperation and collaboration that existed among the teaching team, the way they would support each other, share information about the children, and even the ways in which they greeted one another at the start of the day. During the researcher's observations of Monique in her home centre in the under room, the collaborative nature of the teachers' work was particularly noticeable in the way that the many care tasks were monitored and distributed among the teaching team. These tasks, such as nappy changing, feeding and sleeping, all had to be noted on a shared whiteboard in the centre of the room by the different teachers so that the team could track the children's well-being throughout the day (First observation). Monique perceived these tasks as opportunities to develop her practical teaching skills and knowledge, and felt appreciative of the opportunity and support. She commented on the other members of staff, saying:

They are very supportive, they give me lots of opportunities to practise. For example, at first I didn't know how to put the baby in the sleep room, but after they saw I was

having difficulties, they supported me and showed me to settle the baby so he is ready to sleep. This kind of help is very important. (Monique: First interview, p. 1)

Relationships with associate teachers also gave students the opportunity to observe closely the more experienced teachers in their centres. Hong's first home centre, a public kindergarten, was located on the North Shore, in a relatively affluent area. It was a well-resourced centre with a free-play philosophy. Hong felt very much in awe of the other teachers. She was most impressed by the way the teachers were able to relate to the children, both in the way they taught and how they managed the children's behaviour. These were all practices that Hong considered as defining characteristics of an early childhood teacher's professional identity. When talking about her admiration for the other teachers in her home centre, and their relationships with the children, Hong suggested that her associate teacher had "some magic among the children" (Hong: First interview, p. 7).

This reflection was prompted after observing the associate teacher explain the plant cycle of seed to flower to the children. In the explanation, the associate teacher had encouraged the children to imagine being a small seed in the ground and then emerge from the ground into the sunlight, and then blooming into a sunflower. Through this demonstration, the children become engaged and active participants in this shared social activity. Through the associate teacher's instruction, Hong was able to see how the children were being introduced to the underlying scientific principles related to plant growth. Commenting on her impression of teaching in the kindergarten, Hong noted, of her associate teacher and the teaching team:

I have seen the teachers teach in a lot of different ways, through stories, through drama and music. I see that they teach the children, but they teach in a way you don't even think it is teaching. But all the children are learning - I think it is fantastic.

(Hong: First interview, p. 6)

Hong's realisation of the pedagogical strategies used by the teachers in her home centre, in what initially looked like episodes of play, was supported by her simultaneous engagement in the academic course *Play as a Framework*, and also through regular conversations with her associate teacher which typically occurred at the end of the teaching day.

I loved the thoughts (in the course *Play as a Framework*), and it's really ideas and strategies I need to know about... I never thought that by playing, the children could learn so much different things relating to maths, and science and language. (Hong: First interview, p. 4)

Hong was also supported in her understanding of the curriculum as being enacted in the kindergarten through daily discussions with her associate teacher and other members of staff, after the centre closed for the day and the teachers were busy preparing for the next day. As noted in the literature by Nuttall (2013, p. 182), in child-care centres, typically there are fewer opportunities to meet together outside of teaching times to discuss pedagogical issues relevant to their setting.

In centres where teaching practices were supported by the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, this kind of apprenticeship had a high value, since, through observations and subsequent conversations, student teachers were able to engage their associate teachers in conversations relating to important pedagogical concepts which supported centre practices and which were the object of studies in the academic courses. For Hong, it was the teacher's use of language to communicate with the children, and her ability to concretise the stages of the plant cycle so that children not only understood, but holistically engaged in the activity through drama and play, that was most impressive.

However, in centres where practices were more teacher-directed and greater emphasis was given to following a prescribed routine, there was the potential for tension between the progressive values and practices of the college and the more conservative approach taken in the centre. This was perhaps most obvious with Chen in the Montessori preschool, which professed an overt focus on transfer of discrete knowledge and teacher presentation.

Like so many of the associate teachers discussed in this study, Chen's associate teacher, Jackie (pseudonym), showed a genuine interest in and commitment to her student teacher. In turn, Chen described Jackie as being: "supportive, experienced, passionate about early childhood education and approachable" (Fourth interview, p. 4). Jackie was not only Chen's associate teacher, but also the centre owner and manager, and had held the same position for more than ten years. For Chen, being a professional in this setting entailed being able to appropriate the cultural tools of the Montessori setting in which she was located. This meant being able to replicate the unique practices of a Montessori setting according to accepted standards. This included being able to introduce children to the resources of the setting, many of which had fixed outcomes for the children and quite a prescribed method to complete. However, at times, the teachers' implementation of Montessori methods and ways of being, which require the child to be observant and obedient, to learn the procedures, can be stressful

for the teachers, since the many rules which frame the teacher/child engagement need to be constantly reinforced.

At the end of a long and challenging day, when all the children and parents had left and the teachers were feeling emotionally spent, the centre manager/Chen's associate teacher, in passing, asked how their day had gone. This prompted an outburst of crying and expressions of frustration among the four teachers in the teaching team, including Chen, who had been challenged throughout the day by the behaviour of three children in particular. All three children were new entrants into this room and, like the majority of the children in that room, were of Chinese descent.

Reflecting on the possible reasons for the children's refusal or inability to comply with the room's policies and processes regarding how they should engage with each other, the resources, and the teacher, the ensuing discussion among the team focused on the individual personalities and characteristics of the children and their families, Chen remarked about the children:

They won't listen to you, maybe it's not their fault, and maybe it's the parents fault because I know Chinese parents spoil their child very much. The children don't listen to their parents or to the teachers, yes because one child in my centre, a Chinese child, she is very quiet when she first started but now she is very, very naughty and we saw her hit her mother but mother didn't say anything. (Chen; First interview, p. 6)

Chen reflected on this incident later in her field-practice portfolio and also as part of an assessment on leadership and management. Explaining the situation, Chen wrote:

Last month, several new Chinese children joined my room, they had no Montessori experience and their behaviour was not good. They made a lot of noise and were not able to follow the Montessori work. All the teachers in the room felt very stressful helping them settle in. The classroom became very noisy and these children's behaviours influenced the other children. Sometimes the teachers felt too busy to give every new child a one-on-one presentation to demonstrate the use of the Montessori resources which is required in a Montessori centre. (Chen: Field practice 4, Portfolio)

This focus on the individual children in terms of compliance and obedience to the centre's policies and teaching approach was typical of many such conversations with Chen. This way of framing the problem was shared among the teaching team in the centre, suggesting a lack of critical reflection on their own policies and procedures. The highly idiosyncratic practices of the Montessori centre offered a particularly challenging learning environment both for the

student teacher and for the new children, the examples threw into relief how cultural practices of a centre shape activities and permissible actions.

### **Associate teacher in out-of-home settings.**

Securing a firm attachment with the home-centre associate teacher, staff, children, parents and the overall setting was considered vital for the optimal development of the student teacher identity. The students' first out-of-home placements all occurred approximately two months after the first placement, and approximately four months into the graduate diploma programme. For many of these students, the out-of-home placement was the first realisation of the diversity of early childhood centres. How what was regarded right and good practice in one centre may be deliberately countered in another centre, citing the same reason. For all students, the second placement made a great impression and furthered identification possibilities as they were able to view alternative practices other than those from their home centres.

Vicki's first out-of-home placement saw her connect with Tracey (pseudonym), her associate teacher, in a free-play centre on the North Shore, in a room with children of the same age as those in her own room in her home centre. Vicki found her associate teacher very welcoming and summarised her approach to children as: "An amazing person in the way she talks to the children, Tracey uses "mate" to talk to children and is friendly" (Vicki: Third interview, p. 6). This contrasted with the sense of formality that was characteristic of her home centre. Seeing her associate teacher and the other staff working with the children in this environment led Vicki to declare, on the issue of a more emergent curriculum and free-play philosophy:

Oh yes, I changed my mind working here. Before, you know, I worked in my home centre which is different to this centre, and of course there is free play in this centre. But in my home centre there are a lot of rules, so the teachers say no, no, no, no balls inside, no climbing up high. The teachers are more concerned with health and safety, but in the free-play centre as long as the kids don't get hurt, it's fine. (Vicki: Third interview, p. 13)

This change in mind regarding free-play seemed to be prompted by the more intimate relationship that the teachers were able to develop with the children since they engaged with them in their play activities and were disposed to being child-orientated. The use of humour by Vicki's associate teacher to make connections with the children and others was regarded with admiration and pleasure by Vicki. The way in which humour can be used in the early

childhood setting among teachers and with children, to encourage compliance and as a teaching strategy, is commented upon by Brennan (2007).

In the final interview, reflecting on the influence of different associate teachers in the three different centres, Vicki acknowledged the influence of her associate teacher in her first out-of-home placement.

I think I learnt a lot from my associate teacher in ..... how she replies to the children, how she uses the words, friendly words, and always very positive, very bubbly. I think I just learnt that attitude as a teacher, by watching her, observing her and using the same things. So, for example, in my home centre when someone is not listening in ....., they'll just say listen, but my associate teacher in the out-of-home placement, she'll say something like "Have you left your ears at home? Where are your ears?" And the children will say "here, here, here" and she'll say "I thought you forgot to bring them today" like you know in a friendly way. (Vicki: Fourth interview, p. 1)

This was an important turning point for Vicki, since up until this first out-of-home placement, she confided that she was not enjoying early childhood education. Being placed in a formal, structured setting had limited her interactions with the children compared to being in a free-play centre. Being able to watch and enjoy Tracey's interactions with the children during her first out-of-home placement, assured her that there was another possible way of interacting with children, other than those she witnessed in her home centre.

Perhaps the strongest and most meaningful relations with associate teachers and other centre staff happened for Monique. For both out-of-home centres, Monique was placed in early childhood centres that professed an alignment to Reggio Emilia philosophy. Both centres were in a similar location in Auckland and drew on the same middle-class demographic. Both centres had staff who were influential and active in the New Zealand Reggio Emilia professional network, and who were sponsors and advocates of ongoing teacher professional development. In these centres, Monique enjoyed the buzz of intellectual pursuit compared to the quite functionary perspective of the infants' room in her home centre. Monique reflected on the physical environment and the curriculum of her first out-of-home centre:

It's not like a big scale playground in this centre, but everything is meaningful and has a purpose. That's what I feel and reflected in their image of the "unhurried" child. This is very important since after I discussed and observed their programme and curriculum, it is noticeable how the teachers follow the children's interests and stands

back to observe, to supervise, and to continue to support and extend their interests further. (Monique: Second interview, p. 1)

During the interviews, Monique spoke at length about the new perspective she was being exposed to. She spoke about the meaning of the Reggio philosophy and the kinds of teaching and learning practices it promoted. Monique was particularly impressed by the “responsive” and “unhurried” nature of the teaching that occurred, and spoke specifically about the visual diary that the centre promoted, where children would be encouraged to do still drawings of plants and other natural resources. This presented a very different image of the early childhood teacher to the one dominant in her home centre.

In Monique’s second out-of-home centre, she was introduced to a website that promoted Reggio Emilia philosophy in New Zealand which was maintained by one of the centre owners. Seeing that Monique was genuinely interested in learning more about the centre philosophy, the associate teacher and other established members of staff were more than happy to share their knowledge and resources and encouraged Monique in her exploration of Reggio practices. Through the Reggio Emilia website, Monique enrolled in professional development courses that she attended. Monique promoted this professional development course in her WeChat group, and she attended the course with other early childhood student teachers from the same ITE.

Anna recognised the importance of establishing a good relationship with the associate teacher as having the potential to make or break the practicum. To this end, prior to the start of an out-of-home placement, Anna would visit the centre, connect with the associate teacher and, in the case of the under 2s placement, review the RIE philosophy. For Anna, this prior visit was about establishing a good relationship with her associate teacher and showing how she valued her opinion by asking her for ideas about what she may need to organise. Although students on out-of-home centres are prompted to do this in the official documentation, Anna was spurred on by stories from:

Some other students and they say that in some kindergartens, they have had irresponsible associate teachers and as a result have had a really bad experience in the out-of-home placement, so I try to establish a good relationship before I go to kindergarten. (Anna: Second interview, p. 5)

### **Relationships with infants and toddlers (under 2s).**

The developmental levels and needs and wants of the under 2s means that teaching and caring for them requires quite a different pedagogy and teaching approach than with the older children (MoE, 1996; Recchia & Shin, 2010). Rockell (2009) notes that caregiving is the curriculum in ECE, especially for infants and toddlers. At this very young age, the children are so much more dependent on the adults in the environment to provide for their emotional, physical and psychological needs. Children from birth to three-years-old are in positions of maximum dependence on adults with all of their behaviours and actions completely interwoven and intertwined within the adult world, as they have either no or limited capacity in human speech (Recchia & Shin, 2010). Being a teacher to the under 2s also requires quite specialised teaching skills and dispositions. The teacher must be able to read the children's pre-verbal signs and to accept that, in general, the routines and rhythms of the child will shape the teaching day. The student teachers who worked with this age group for the first time, were struck by the strength and the immediacy of the emotional bond that was established between child and teacher, once they got over the fear of unintentionally harming the child. This bond can and often does have a significant impact on the student teacher and their conceptualisation of early childhood education.

For Hong, working with the under 2s was a real revelation. With the under 2s, Hong expressed that she felt needed, wanted and acknowledged by the children. Hong had requested this particular centre as her out-of-home centre on the recommendation of her associate teacher who had worked with the head teacher previously. Hong's new associate teacher was Chinese and had been an early childhood teacher in New Zealand for 6 years. At first, Hong was a little surprised by the head teacher's tone and authoritative voice when reminding toddlers of the room's rules and boundaries. After reflecting, though, she acknowledged that her associate teacher's methods worked and still positioned the children as empowered. A camaraderie developed between Hong and her associate teacher, which can be explained by their shared ethnicity. Hong felt that being able to communicate with her associate teacher in Mandarin brought the two closer together: "It is much easier speaking to the associate teacher in my home language, I feel more comfortable and it makes more sense if speaking to another Chinese person" (Hong: Second interview: p. 4).

Compared to the well-resourced kindergarten, this setting was a small family-run operation that had uncut lawns, cheap plastic toys and worn carpet in a small basement room for the children. Hong seemed unconcerned with the appearance of the centre, but was much more

focused on developing strong emotional connections to the infants and toddlers, much more so than with the older children in the kindergarten. In this setting, Hong was listened to and the children showed their appreciation in spontaneous outpourings of kissing and cuddling for the student teacher. Hong experienced a very emotional connection with the children that proved to be a significant turning point in her early career. This was in contrast to her home-centre setting. Although only a few years apart in age, the under 2s are, for the most part, totally reliant on the teacher for feeding and care routines. The enactment of such routines helps to establish a dependent relationship which fosters a caring, loving relationship between carer and cared for, based on principles of engrossment and motivational displacement (Noddings, 2013; White, 2016). Reflecting on this, Hong comments:

I really adore the interaction with the children, because I think children at this age, toddlers and infants, are very different to older children. They can sense your affection to them and they will reciprocate without hesitation. The time I spend here, I really love the kids and they reciprocate that affection and show how much they really love me too. (Hong: Second interview, p. 1)

Hong felt a deep emotional connection to the young children in particular. After moving to Wellington with her partner, who had secured employment, Hong also found a home centre, and within a short time was asked to be a reliever. Hong worked primarily with the under 2s where she was able to freely express her compassionate, caring manner, which was readily reciprocated by the young children. In her portfolio, towards the end of her studies Hong reflects:

I enjoy this career. I see my many strengths and confidence in doing my job. I really love these children so much and throw myself into building heartfelt, reciprocal relationships with the children. In my opinion, education is not about talking, but education takes place in the relationship between the teacher and the child; when we are playing together, asking questions together, and exploring the outside world together. Only after establishing the mutual, trusting relationship with the children can an educator recognise what children need to know and learn. (Hong portfolio: Fourth field practice)

In contrast, Chen's experience with the under 2s was successful but unfulfilling. Set in a mainstream setting, in a busy childcare centre in the Auckland CBD, Chen was involved in all parts of the teachers' routines. Observing Chen in this setting, she showed she was able to engage with the children both as they played outdoors and also as she led a musical mat time

before helping the children to wash their hands, eat their lunch and prepare them for their nap. Outdoors, Chen positioned herself next to a miniature trampoline which the children would stand up on, and Chen would hold the hands of those a little unsteady, whilst singing a popular numbers song *Monkeys in the Bed*, where the end of the song was punctuated by the child jumping off the tramp and landing on his/her feet, on the ground.

Chen had difficulties engaging with the notion of child-directed play and had a number of conversations with her associate teacher about this, such as when to interrupt children's play. In the observation of this placement, I noted Chen engaging in play activities initiated by the children, making connections with the children and engaging them in simple conversation. I also saw Chen deliver a structured mat time to a room full of tired and hungry toddlers whom she kept engaged with a number of interactive games and songs. When I commented to her in the interview how impressed I was by her confidence and poise, she was dismissive, as though her interactions with the children were unimportant.

For Leo, working with the under 2s had particular significance in the development of his student teacher identity. As the only male participant in the study, in one of the most gendered professions on the planet, Leo frequently expressed feelings of marginalisation. This happened in his home centre, where one month prior to his under 2s placement in an out-of-home-centre, Leo asked his home-centre manager if he could complete his weekly volunteer hours in the infants' room to get some hands-on practical experience with this age group, prior to the start of his field placement. After just a couple of weeks in the room, learning the routines and procedures, the management received a complaint from one of the parents that they considered having a male in the infants' room was not acceptable and not something she/he felt comfortable with as a parent. The manager spoke to Leo about this, so that he was aware of the concern, but kept Leo in the room. Concerned that this complaint was as a result of the much closer physical intimacy teachers show towards infants, Leo asked a number of his colleagues at the time for their perspectives, and was told overwhelmingly by other teachers in the centre how they supported the notion of male ECE teachers. But Leo was not so easily consoled, believing that the complaint came from a father who may have seen him comforting his daughter.

For Leo, this confirmed his suspicion that he was not suitable for the under 2s age group. For the upcoming placement, Leo still engaged with the infants and toddlers with the kind of natural ease that was obvious with many of his interactions with the children. However, he

felt discouraged by the experience of his home centre and distanced himself from the “ladies” who looked after the infants. Leo indicated in the interviews that he was categorically not suited to this age group, not just because of the concerns of some of the parents, but more to do with their regular documentation of feeding times, nap times, and medicine books which makes looking after the under 2s more onerous for some. Leo’s marginalisation was caused not by his immigrant or foreign status, but by his casual disposition and his status as a male in a society where males in ECE make up a very small percentage. The role of emotions for early childhood teachers has been the focus of a number of studies. In this example, we can see how Leo has been made to reconsider his role as a professional teacher in terms of his relationships with the younger children who have specific needs around their nurturing and care that is not so obvious with the older children.

The discussion about the appropriateness of his relationships had far-reaching implications for his image of a male early childhood teacher, leading him to concentrate on working with the older children and adopting a narrative of a “sporty male teacher.” Initially, Leo had seen his maleness as a potential positive in terms of securing future employment, but difficulty in securing a position in his home centre led to serious doubts about his choice of career. Here we see tension within the activity system between Leo and the community of early childhood education, which includes parents. This is reinforced by his own parents’ warnings about being an early childhood teacher and the perceived difficulties of being a male teacher.

After a parent questioned his inclusion as a student teacher in an infants’ room, Leo perceived this as confirmation that caring for under 2s was not a job for a male. It requires too much physical intimacy and a level of care and comfort that Leo felt he was not able to provide. Leo commented jocularly after his fourth placement that:

I mean, I’m a guy, I’m a bit clumsy, for being an infant teacher you need that sixth sense, you have to care for the baby... they need a really detailed schedule for the milk formula, no offense to other male teachers, but I’m not really caring enough for those sort of things. (Leo: Fourth interview, p. 3)

He distanced himself from the practices and routines of the under 2s’ room, he reflected that he lacked the kind of diligence to note feeding and changing times, felt unsure about effectively communicating with the other members of the team, and dis-identified as an ECE teacher (Hodges, 1998).

For Anna, working with infants was a new experience, since in China the preschools she worked in had never catered for infants. This was because, as explained by Anna, the patrons of her centre were relatively affluent and the mothers did not need to work and so often hired nannies while the children were still infants. Working in a very multicultural centre in central Auckland, Anna's third placement was with the under 2s in a centre that promoted a RIE-influenced philosophy. This approach emphasises respect for the infant, meaning that the child should always be given a choice. This extends to their physical positioning, meaning that they should not be placed into positions which they are not able to get into by themselves. In addition, the teacher should be highly aware of not encroaching on the child's space.

This was Anna's first encounter with the RIE philosophy, and her associate teacher, an experienced early childhood teacher from the Pacific Islands, encouraged Anna to engage with recommended literature. Anna says about her associate teacher:

She is really passionate about the RIE philosophy and has been a practitioner for about five years, so she has a personal belief in RIE which she practises every day and she says that this is her bible, this Toni Christie book. (Anna: Second interview, p. 5)

After Anna's initial visit to the new centre, she was also invited to her home centre's professional development workshop, which coincidentally happened to be on the RIE philosophy.

Discussing the RIE practice of not putting children into positions which they cannot get into themselves, encouraging the children to crawl on the floor and to exercise what movement they have, Anna reflected on the first few months of her own child's life when he was looked after by his grandmother. Because of cramped living conditions and concern for the child's safety, the grandmother allowed the young child very limited opportunities to crawl. He seemingly spent a great deal of his first few months being cared for on a soft bed, since the grandmother thought the environment was too unsafe. Anna reflected how this may have delayed his development and maybe this was the reason her child found it so difficult to focus on his studies. Even though Anna may have had almost two decades of experience, her perception of the environment seems heavily filtered by her own personal experiences as a mother.

Speaking about the field-practice experience, Anna reflected on RIE's emphasis on relationship building during regular care routines such as nappy changing. Anna was able to

reconcile this approach with *Te Whāriki*, but was very disturbed by her associate teacher's behaviour of leaving one of her "key" children uncomfortable whilst he cried himself to sleep. Although Anna was still disturbed by this practice of ignoring the child's discomfort, even after it had been explained by the associate teacher, is reflective of Anna's personal beliefs around the care of the child, which fostered a highly critical perspective of the new teaching philosophy. Anna's attitude towards being a student teacher was to be open to new experiences and to cherry-pick the best aspects of the different pedagogies she was being exposed to. The capacity to evaluate so concisely is a reflection of Anna's considerable experience, resulting in what seemed to be an obvious hybrid of identities (Lemke, 2008):

They all have good aspects, but sometimes the teacher uses a particular theory to the extreme, like attachment theory where they believe they must hold the child the whole time, or RIE philosophy where they leave the child to cry for 20 minutes and not take care of them, it's so strange. (Anna: Third interview, p. 4)

Vicki's under 2s placement also saw her working in a centre that had incorporated elements of the RIE philosophy for the infants and toddlers. Vicki was surprised by the teachers' interactions with the children because the teachers spoke to the infants and toddlers as though they were much older. Vicki reflected that these interactions were founded on notions of respect, so the children were asked if they would like to have their nappy changed, or if they needed their nose wiping. Vicki said this was "fantastic... because, in Korea – whoosh – and if there is something wrong the teachers or mothers just – whoosh – rather than 'you've got a runny nose'...if they see it they just do it" (Vicki: Third interview, p. 3).

As with the other student teachers and placement, the associate teacher gave the student teacher additional resources to explain the centre philosophy and policies. In her field-practice portfolio, Vicki wrote:

The concepts of respect and freedom of movement in RIE philosophy have hugely affected my teacher identity. During my practicum at XXXXXX, the word "respect" has changed my entire thoughts and perspectives. I have experienced some amazing moments and realised a huge difference between respect and no respect. (Vicki: Field practice 3: Portfolio)

Identity is not just about who we are, but how others see us. Thus identity is a highly relational and dynamic concept that is negotiated in communities of practice between different individuals. Identity, as framed by Holland et al. (1998), is understood from both a

culturalist and a situated perspective. The cultural perspective places emphasis on the “role” that is suggested to actors through their engagement in socially organised activities. A situated perspective is more concerned with the level of negotiation as it occurs at the time. Through students’ interactions with others, with their associate teachers, other members of staff and also the children, identity is both constitutive and performative.

### **Culture as a resource.**

All student teachers in this current study worked in multicultural settings to varying degrees. This refers either to the demographic make-up of the children in the student teachers’ rooms, or the other teachers in the settings, or both. At one time or another, all the students in this current study were called upon by their colleagues, associate teachers and others, to use their Chinese/Asian ethnicity as a cultural resource for children’s learning. The most common request was to help settle in children from a Chinese family to the early childhood centres.

Often such transitions, from home to centre, for young children, particularly those who have had very little previous exposure to English language, can be very traumatic. With very few language skills and often coming from very secure relationships with their primary caregivers, such children may be inconsolable as early childhood teachers seek to establish reciprocal, responsive relationships with the child and his/her whānau (MoE, 1996). The way in which overseas teachers can help meet this need was apparent during an observation of Monique in her second out-of-home centre and third placement. Throughout the time of the observation (approximately 1.5 hours), Monique was followed by a tearful three-year-old girl of Chinese descent. The distraught child refused to explore the play area by herself, and, remaining at Monique’s side, drew courage from Monique’s soothing words in Mandarin. Speaking about the same girl in her journal task, Monique reflected on her experience with the young girl:

Niuniu [name has been changed] was calm and comfortable with me. Since we are from the same cultural background we can communicate in Mandarin and understand each other. I am very happy to share my knowledge and understanding of my culture and practices with my associate teacher in the centre. Niuniu’s parents have also approached me, and I have been able to explain something about the routines of the centre and about what we do here – I think they felt reassured. In a word, my role is more like a facilitator. (Monique: Third field practice: Portfolio)

Parents new to the country often have a difficult time understanding the aims and purpose of early childhood education in New Zealand. Coming from more traditional backgrounds, they have difficulty appreciating the learning that can happen from child-initiated inquiries.

Immigrant teachers, such as Monique, play an intrinsic role as a “broker,” helping the child and the parents in their transition to the education setting. Likewise, Hong commented, in her second out-of-home placement in Wellington, about one child of Chinese descent:

In his time in our kindergarten, I play quite an important role. His mum told me that he always believes that my showing up in the kindergarten is a miracle! How is it possible that he has a Chinese teacher in a Kiwi kindergarten? Therefore, he firstly says good morning to me in Chinese every day and I will reply to him both in Chinese and English. This is very sweet and I realised how significant it can be when a child with a different cultural background is supported by someone who can understand him. (Hong: Third field practice: Portfolio)

Given the increase in Asian immigration to Auckland in particular, immigrant teachers become key personnel, since they have an insight into some of the cultural barriers that have to be addressed before parents feel comfortable leaving their children behind in childcare. Such cultural differences may relate to notions of hygiene and cleanliness, health and safety, or food. To help bridge these cultural gaps, often centres reach out to the local community through cultural celebrations. The student teachers were often called upon to help plan for and implement Chinese cultural days such as the Chinese New Year or Lantern Festival. During Anna’s third out-of-home placement in the Reggio/Christian centre, she was asked to contribute to the cultural day:

The centre manager said she would love it if I could bring Chinese culture to the setting because there are no Chinese teachers here, just the one from Korea. Actually, the Moon Festival is next week, but she asked me to make moon cakes with the children this week before I leave, and she said it would be great to introduce something special. (Anna: Third interview, p. 3)

Being able to relate to feeling a sense of difference and alienation themselves, the student teachers showed a lot of sensitivity to the notion of cultural inclusion and also a pride in talking about their own culture. The student teachers’ Asian identity was considered a resource by many of the centres where they taught. For the teaching team, having someone who could speak Mandarin meant they were better able to settle in new Asian children. The student teacher could act as an intermediary between the centre and the family, and could also

help local teachers arrive at a better understanding of the influence of culture. Leo, in his first placement, was approached by one of the children's parents from a mixed Asian and European background to help teach the four-year-old girl, Nicole, some simple phrases in Mandarin, so that she could communicate more easily with her grandfather. When I noticed Leo singing with the girl in Mandarin during one observation, Leo informed me of the situation, and how he arrived at the teaching approach he was employing after finding she enjoyed singing:

Suddenly, I was thinking that I should make a counting song in Mandarin in a rhythm that she likes. And it turned out she seemed to enjoy playing and singing the song in Mandarin. This is a great way for Nell [name changed] to pick up the vocabulary and sentences in a much more fun way than just reading. (Leo: First field practice: Portfolio)

Although this was Leo's first placement, time spent in the centre during periods of field experience meant he had already formed a relationship with the child Nell, and from that basis had noticed her interest in music and singing, and devised a teaching plan that would act to both introduce the target vocabulary and also cultivate the interest of the child. This intervention by Leo showed good alignment with the ethos of the national curriculum, in that it was child-centred, it was considerate of the child's interests, and promoted the child's connections with the wider world.

However, in the literature, relationships with immigrant parents or grandparents are often framed as being problematic, not just because of language issues but also due to different cultural expectations on the part of the parents about what they should expect from the early childhood centre. Many of these parents were primarily concerned about making sure their child was linguistically ready for primary school. This meant that often the bilingual student teacher was responsible for not only informing parents and grandparents about ECE in New Zealand, but also explaining the pedagogical approach that fostered holistic development, rather than, say, a discrete focus on just reading and writing.

During the interviews around the planned curriculum where the centres celebrated domestic cultural events such as Anzac Day or Easter, it became apparent that, while some of the student teachers were able to take part, they did not always understand the significance. One example of this was the celebration of Easter. When asked to consider whether being an immigrant teacher put her at a disadvantage, in terms of her teaching, Monique replied:

Yes, I can imagine a person who is not Chinese and comes to China and doesn't really understand what is happening in our culture, it is like this I think. Even though the person participates in the activity, I don't think they really understand the background knowledge. For people like me, who grow up in that context from a very young age, everything is really clear. Not knowing puts you at a real disadvantage. (Monique: Third interview, p. 6)

In the two preschool-home-centre settings, there was a disproportionate number of Chinese children compared to other settings. The supposed reason for this was that the preschool setting and formal structure attracted parents concerned about their children's language development and general transition to compulsory education. This gave both participants greater confidence that the philosophical and pedagogical approach of their centres matched the parents' aspirations. When asked to comment on the large numbers of Asian children in her centre, Chen replied:

This centre focus a lot on discipline, behaviour, and knowledge passing. It is very similar to centres in China so Asian parents you know like this centre, and we have many Koreans too. The other day I heard one child's parent tell us her child did very well in the primary school interview because she was able to answer all the questions. She knew everything, they were very proud of this so they will recommend this centre to many Chinese parents. (Chen: First interview, p. 2)

Vicki, on the other hand, felt that her ethnicity may count against her, even though a large percentage of the children in her room were of Asian descent. In the first interview, we spoke about Vicki's choice of home centre, and asked whether she thought she might eventually find a permanent position there; Vicki responded:

No, because it is a very formal and very expensive private school and I didn't really expect I could actually teach there. The Chinese parents are sometimes very picky, they don't like Asian second language teacher teaching their kids ... I know because Korean parents are the same. (Vicki: Preliminary interview, p. 6)

For many of the students, for most of the time, their ethnicity and cultural knowledge were significant resources that the centres could draw upon to help establish partnership with parents, and also to help explain the curriculum approach. However, I feel that this supposed familiarity with the children and their parents was also a hindrance, in that both teachers seemed to want to continue with ways of teaching with which they were already familiar.

Chen's narrow understanding of teaching and learning was confirmed by the practices of the centre, and the attitudes of the teachers and parents.

### **Embodied Practice**

The notion of embodied practice makes a significant contribution to understanding the development of teacher identity, an area which has often been overlooked in favour of individualist and cognitivist views of development (Alcock, 2016). Considering the engagement of the body when participating in the socially organised activities of the early childhood centre, emphasises the way in which language and thinking are tied to a person's experiences of the situation. Such experiences, according to Gee (2008) are not stored in the mind in terms of languages, but through dynamic images reflecting the person's internal states and feelings, as well as perceptions of their bodies. Embodiment allows for a more situated and less abstract way of thinking (Gee, 2008). That is, "because the human body is open, and therefore exposed to the social and material world, it is also susceptible to being fashioned by the sociocultural and material conditions at the current historical moment" (Roth et al., 2016, p. 16).

In CHAT, embodied practices take on particular significance, since it is through the repetition of organisational sociocultural practices that the connection between thought, practice and theory is fostered (Roth et al., 2016). This notion of embodied practice also helps to explain Leontiev's notion of activity as being divided into operations, actions and activity, with operations referring to mechanical and overtime, internalised actions. Embodied practice is being used in two ways in this current study; one refers to the students' use of their bodies as pedagogical tools: how they use their gaze, touch, posture and location in the classroom. The second approach refers to aspects of professional practice that result from "muscle memory," tacit knowledge, and intuitive action rather than conscious intentions (Gee, 2008; Hayashi & Tobin, 2015). The physical layout and design of the centre not only influences the children's movement and capacity to engage fully with the environment, but can also be constraining or empowering for the teacher and will influence with the development of identity.

Cultural-historical activity theory allows for a focus on the prominence of practice and emphasises the ways in which the implicit aspects of daily centre life constitute the centre's taken-for-granted routines, which mould teachers' affordances and constraints within the early childhood setting, often without the teachers' conscious awareness (Gorodetsky & Barak, 2009). This discussion of affordances and constraints of the settings refers to the

practices, and to the philosophical ideas that provide the setting with a sense of purpose, and to the actual physical setting. This extends to considerations of the size and layout of the room and the physical resources available to the student teachers whilst on placement. Embodiment also refers to the student teachers' intercorporeity as they interact with the children, reading their body-language cues, Alcock (2016) suggests, as such "intercorporeity may be understood as the bodily variant of intersubjectivity" (p. 115).

A cultural-historical activity-theory perspective allows for a holistic consideration of the study participants, including not just a focus on cognition but also on the bodily and physical aspects of their engagement in workplace practices (Lemke, 2008). Although the observations allowed just a snapshot of the student teachers at the time of the visit, over the course of the scheduled visits, these observations of the student teachers' physical responses to the environment was revealing of particular practices. The way in which the student teachers used their bodies to teach and make connections with the children showed how the physical environment shaped both the activities that were available and the associated practices. In addition, these observations were conducted in the students' home centres, so the practices described were likely to be reoccurring patterns of behaviour that would be enacted over time. Repetition of embodied practices by the centre staff provided both the eidos and prolepsis of the setting. This means it is likely that certain people, places and things will become significant to one's sense of identity. As Lemke (2008) comments:

Keep us long enough outside all links to our native culture and engaged with another culture and we will in many respects "go native" or at least diverge from who we are. Take away our children and our identity as fathers or mothers will eventually fade. Suspend us in a sensory deprivation tank and eventually core aspects of identity with long histories from infancy may fail to maintain themselves for us. (p. 25)

Monique's home centre was set in a converted church on the North Shore of Auckland, in a largely residential area. While the centre did have an outdoor area, the under 2s' room was positioned in such a way that teachers and their children rarely ventured outside. Everything that happened, occurred in a very small room with barely enough space for the three adults and approximately six children. Monique, when I observed her, was sitting on the floor with her back to the wall, holding her arms out-stretched, helping a toddler to balance on her feet. As the toddler attempted to stand on her own feet, Monique warmly cheered and applauded the toddler's efforts. One other teacher was in the small room, also sitting on the floor, with two infants on the floor near her. In the kitchen area, which was adjacent to the room, another

teacher was busy preparing bottles and conversing with both other teachers about the children's routines and short interactions about what was happening at the time.

Monique's first out-of-home placement was in a bucolic setting in a less densely populated part of Auckland, where the outdoors area had been cultivated over a number of years to present a highly functional aesthetic that the children engaged with. Monique's second out-of-home centre, very close to the second placement, had a large sculptured area that included a "castle," a series of sand pits and a gardening area. Both these settings held a Reggio focus that encouraged activities that fostered children's exploration of nature and the outdoors. This third placement also coincided with a learning outcome related to bicultural development, which Monique framed according to "guardianship" of the land, writing about the children watering and caring for the vegetables. After completing the two out-of-home placements, Monique viewed the home setting as restrictive and limiting for the children's learning because of its constraints on outdoors experiences.

Leo, during his first placement, was with the younger preschool children, most of them approximately three years old. Leo was observed sitting on the mat with the children as one of the permanent teachers read a shared story. Leo sat between two children, one Chinese, the other Pākehā. As the teacher read the stories, Leo talked softly with the children around him to encourage their interest in the story and keep them focused. The children, numbering approximately 12, were in the centre of the room, with Leo sitting near the back, resting against the wall with the two children either side. When the mat time finished, the teachers moved the children to another room where they sat and shared morning tea. During this time, a teacher was placed at the head of each of the tables, making sure the children were able to help themselves to the food and generally ensuring that they were eating and sharing. The Chinese girl stayed close to Leo, who was now interacting with all the children on the table.

My first observation of Chen also occurred during one of the centre mat times. While the age of the children was similar, here the mat time was more formal and longer. The subject of the mat time was a continuation of the theme "the solar system," which Chen informed me was chosen by the teachers and was quite a regular feature of the curriculum. In this mat time, the children were encouraged to sit on the floor, with their legs and arms crossed, facing forwards to the centre, looking at the teacher. The teacher then presented some general facts about the solar system with many of the children looking on absently. As the mat time continued, some of the children become increasingly restless. At this point, Chen, who up

until now had been standing on the periphery watching the presentation, circled the children, prompting those whose posture had slipped, to sit-up straight and pay attention, while physically “correcting” the posture of those children that had escaped notice. During break time, Chen was responsible for supervising the children in the small play area. Interaction with the children was minimal and for the most part Chen walked around the play area looking uncomfortable and not sure what to do. Speaking to Chen afterwards, she informed me that the correcting of the children’s posture is a practice that is shared in this room and that when outside, during recess time, her duty is to supervise rather than “intervene” since she had been told by her associate teacher that “this was their time for play rather than learning.”

Anna was in her home centre on the day of my observation, all the children were in costumes as animals, this being the theme at that particular time. The children came dressed as dragons, crocodiles, and mermaids, for the girls. During this free-play time the children were free to roam inside or outside, and the teachers were positioned to ensure the environment was safe and to facilitate interaction with the children. Anna positioned herself at a small table, near the kitchen area, complete with plastic food, toy stove and toy pots, pans and other utensils. During this time, Anna was interacting with a 2.5-year-old mermaid who was busy presenting Anna with various dishes that she had “prepared” in the kitchen. While I observed Anna, we discussed, in general terms, her current placement, with Anna dividing her time between talking to me and continuing playing with the young girl. The child made Anna tea, and bread, and produced a plastic banana, which Anna imitated eating, making sounds of glee; the child, satisfied, went back to the kitchen area to prepare more food. Anna began to introduce numbers and colours into the conversation, with a series of closed and open questions which the child was happy to respond to, although it was obvious that she was focused on the game of “cooking” and serving the teacher food.

My first observation of Hong in the kindergarten revealed her unease and discomfort with the setting and the children. The kindergarten was very large and the teachers were very spread out, with two other teachers and Hong outside and two teachers inside. Hong had positioned herself next to a popular run-and-crash-onto-a-soft-mat game that the children seemed to really enjoy. The expectation was that they would line up and take turns to take a 5 metre run-up, before crashing into a wall of soft blocks; when each child had finished, they “rebuilt” the wall so the next child could crash into it. Hong’s task was to make sure only one child went at a time. Although there were only three or four children interested in this

activity, Hong had great difficulty in getting them to follow the rules. When she spoke to the children they seemed to ignore her, she was hesitant and her voice was soft and uncertain. In the following interview, Hong admitted to being challenged by the children's independence and the way they organised themselves. Hong, at that time, seemed very isolated and out of her comfort zone.

My observation of Vicki during her first home centre placement occurred in the morning, just before morning tea. At this time, the children, approximately eight of them, were seated around two tables with paper and pencil drawing pictures of their favourite animals to fit in with the theme of "Who I am." Vicki was seated at one of the tables, speaking softly to a child, asking her questions about the animal being drawn, and suggesting ways to draw. Vicki helped the children with unpacking their morning tea from their school bags, whilst the two full-time teachers were busy organising resources for later activities. After morning tea, there was a mat time led by one of the full-time teachers, who read the children a story, whilst Vicki sat with the children and encouraged them to remain focused. Because of the prescribed nature of the applied curriculum, Vicki had very limited opportunities to actually interact with the children whilst in her home setting. Vicki described her role as:

Mostly helping teachers to clean up or organise things, or I just sit behind in the classroom and watch the children, if they listen to the teachers then I don't have to do anything, but if they lie down or scream sometimes then I have to get them calm, so that's my main role (Vicki: Preliminary interview, p. 3)

The institutional emphasis on providing a structured and planned environment in Vicki's home centre, resulted in restricted agency for the student teacher (Nuttall, Coxon, & Read, 2009). Moreover, the structured and planned environment serves to repress teachers' subjectivity, quoting from Britzman (2003), "they are subsumed by predictability and hence immune to changing circumstances and incapable of interventions" (p. 30). This became immediately apparent to Vicki after the first out-of-home placement which she described as great fun because of her interactions with the children and the staff. Vicki revelled in the agency she was allowed to exercise. In meetings with her out-of-home associate teacher, the associate teacher emphasised that Vicki was able to do and try out anything she wanted. In response, Vicki, who had a long-standing interest in arts and crafts, spoke with the children about what they would like to make, and decided upon an arts activity where the children made paper crowns.

For Vicki, these craft-type activities are regarded as commonplace in early childhood settings in Asian countries and are valued for fostering patience and attention to task. In a specifically dedicated room, for two days, the children were allowed in the art room in small groups, to make the crowns. This was Vicki's first opportunity at planning and she realised by the end of the second day that the activity was becoming more of a chore for her as a teacher, as the children were insistent upon producing identical crowns which entailed considerable intervention by Vicki. Following this activity, Vicki and her associate teacher spoke about the teacher-directed nature of the activity, how the activity was restrictive, and how this activity had, for the most part, taken Vicki away from the children.

When asked about the value of free play, in the first interview, Vicki was very dismissive, but after her experience in the out-of-home centre, where she had seen the way a loosening of structure fostered children's agency, she was more positive. This shift brought about a change in relationships with the children, since Vicki understood from her associate teacher that the relationship between the teacher and child, contrary to her perception in her home centre, were allowed to be more "friendly," Vicki commented:

Oh yes, I've changed my mind, before you know I worked in the structured environment, which is different and of course there are a lot of rules, so the teacher says no, no, no, no, no balls inside, no climbing high in the apparatus, they are more concerned with health and safety, but as long as the kids don't get hurt, it's fine.

(Vicki: Second interview, p. 3)

Discussing the differences between the home and out-of-home centre, Vicki drew attention to the nature of the teacher's relationships with the children, which were less hierarchical and allowed for greater intimacy with the child. Vicki also remarked upon this intimacy with the children in the free play environments where the relational pedagogies facilitated a more balanced power perspective between teacher and child:

In [name of the centre] the relationship is one between teacher and student but also we don't really play with the children we just encourage them to play together and sometimes I play like the other teachers but it's more supervising and making sure everything is okay, but in the free-play centre, the teachers play together with the children and share the laughs and silly things with the children, so I think children more think they can be my friends but also, I can be a teacher so I still have authority.

(Vicki: Second interview, p. 3)

During Chen's first placement in her home centre during the observation, Chen was, to a large degree, an observer, whilst one of the other classroom teachers began what seemed quite a well-rehearsed presentation introducing children to a model of the solar system and the order of the planets within it. The style of teaching promoted during this session would have more in common with a lecture rather than a class, with the teacher breezing through the planets, infrequently checking on the children's comprehension as they sat in a circle listening. This "session" lasted for approximately 20 minutes and, as the children's attention began to wane, Chen circled behind the children, quietly and as unobtrusively as possible reminding children not to fidget, distract one another, or do anything other than silently and passively listen to the teacher. When asked what this represented in the following interview, she explained it as: "Just helping to support the other teachers, to discipline the children to get them to cross their legs, not talk to one another" (Chen: Second interview, p. 4).

This scene contrasted with the observation of Leo in his first home-centre visit. Again, as a recently enrolled student teacher, during the mat times Leo was encouraged to be an active participant in the room activities, and to sit with the children. This enabled Leo to help keep the children on task and to focus their attention onto the teacher leading the activity. In this scene, Leo was sitting near the back of the room with two 3-year-old children snuggled next to him, one a young boy, the other a rather pensive looking girl of Chinese descent, with Leo at times providing an explanation of what was going on using both Mandarin and English. Leo is proud of the ease with which he establishes relationships with the children and comments that: "I treat them like my own children, my own friends, talk at their level, to discover their interests" (Leo: First interview, p. 1).

### **Appropriating Cultural Tools of the Setting**

The appropriation of cultural tools refers to the students' internalisation of ways of thinking about teaching and their use of the pedagogical tools of the different settings. Reflecting on the transcript from the second interview with Hong, it was obvious she was still making sense of early childhood education. She had engaged with the mediating tools of the centre, including *Te Whāriki*, the centre policies, and the centre's free-play philosophy. Although Hong could see the teaching and learning that happened, she felt removed from being able to imitate that herself. The tension that existed was between Hong and the tools. One of the principles of *Te Whāriki* is "relationships." This speaks to the importance in early childhood of creating responsive and reciprocal relationships with the children. However, at first, Hong

felt that her language skills were not at a sufficient level to be able to interact with the older children confidently. While supervising the children, Hong was preoccupied with the potential risks she saw in the environment, such as the children pushing into each other playfully. But because she felt the children would not understand her accent, she was reluctant to raise her voice.

Although there is a need to have high levels of professional knowledge regarding *Te Whāriki*, Leo's discussion of *Te Whāriki* seldom moved beyond popularly cited themes and interpretations based on following children's interests, the importance of the child's cultural background, and the consideration of the child's learning disposition. Leo seldom spoke about his academic studies or engaged in the formal online discussion forums; and he gave increased importance to the practice aspect of being a student teacher. His interest was in connecting with the other staff, sharing observations and monitoring their interactions with children to inform his own practice. Much of his discussion revealed a relationship focus on his teaching, with little mention of the introduction of subject knowledge or scientific principles.

The development of student teachers' conceptual knowledge has been the focus of a number of studies from Smagorinsky. One such study suggested a taxonomy of different levels of appropriation by student teachers of the theoretical concepts of the semantic field (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). In this regard, it seemed that Leo had largely stagnated at the pseudo level and this was supported by the inclusion of a short passage in his personal teaching philosophy saying how he admired the Montessori method. The following confused paragraph appeared in Leo's teaching portfolio as his personal teaching philosophy:

I believe in Montessori's theory on teaching children because this teaching method can help to educate and raise children to develop their fullest potential. I will apply Montessori's theory which focuses on children's play with the goal to increase the level of socialisation, concentration and attention which can benefit their real-life experience. (Leo: First field practice: Portfolio)

Leo shared that he included this homage to Montessori after the first academic course where the students were introduced to a number of different early childhood education teaching and learning philosophies. Although Leo was situated in a free-play mainstream setting, and he was questioned both by his associate teacher, and the visiting lecturer, about this inclusion, he was reluctant to remove it from his teaching philosophy. The same paragraph was evident in

later iterations of the philosophy, slightly modified and including the sentences:

“Montessori’s teaching methods can also foster children’s motivation and self-discipline. Towards achieving my goal of teaching children, I will commit myself as a teacher to take care of them with love, care and patience” (Leo: Field-practice portfolio: Personal philosophy – third placement). This addition of dispositions of love, care and patience could reflect Leo’s under 2s placement. Leo spoke about Montessori as being an international brand which is very popular in Asia; in this context, the inclusion of Montessori seems to be an “affiliation move” (Warford, 2011, p. 255), perhaps considering the potential for such “capital” with future employers. When discussing his plans for the future, Leo discussed looking for work in Singapore with his Japanese girlfriend, if unable to find an ECE position in New Zealand, since Singapore offered a cultural compromise for them both.

The influence of the students’ previous experiences on the development of identity was also evident with Vicki. Having previously studied hospitality and management at bachelor’s level at Waikato University, Vicki revealed that she was already applying her understanding of “empowerment,” as learnt during the previous course. This related to giving members of staff responsibility in a hypothetical case study, but along with the empowerment to assist in decision-making processes, also came the responsibility of following through. Vicki was quite dismissive of *Te Whāriki* and she thought empowerment seemed to be little more than a slogan, since when discussing the role of art in children’s learning, she seemed to regard art as simply a platform for the development of “listening skills” and following instructions. Empowerment was not a concept that was regularly engaged with in her home centre.

However, in Vicki’s final personal teaching-philosophy statement at the end of the four placements, she cited *empowerment, partnership, respect* and *inclusion* as the principles that have particular meaning, prefacing the statement with the acknowledgement that: “What I, as a teacher, believe makes a huge change in children’s development and learning outcomes” (Vicki, Portfolio). Vicki described empowerment along the lines presented by *Te Whāriki*, as the teacher empowering the student to be a self-sufficient, independent learner, which Vicki would achieve through promoting “trusting and positive relationships with children, family/whānau and the community.” She also defined partnership according to the popular early childhood education discourse of working with parents, and communicating openly to lead to improved outcomes. Vicki linked respect to her experience with the under 2s and the practices common in the RIE centre:

During my practicum, the word “respect” has changed my entire thoughts and perspectives. I have experienced some amazing moments and realised a huge difference between respect and no respect. (Vicki: Third interview, p. 3)

Vicki’s discussion of inclusion referred specifically to the inclusion into mainstream practices of children with special needs, a specific focus of one of the academic courses studied by Vicki. She elaborated on how Vygotsky’s notion of ZPD can be used with: “children with special needs .... to improve the social and academic developments as well as it helps when they become an adult in society.” (Vicki; Interview four, p. 2)

In the initial and subsequent interviews with Monique, she made a conscious effort to frame her responses carefully in the language of early childhood education, gleaned through both the academic courses and the national curriculum. The practice and use of academic register was obvious not only in Monique’s written work, but increasingly in the face-to-face interviews. This can be viewed as the appropriation of key concepts. As noted by Gee (2000) and others, discourse communities have their own use of language and syntax, and part of the process of being a successful learner is the appropriation of language with a view to self-authoring. In her study of early childhood education, Monique employed many of the same strategies with a view to vocabulary development that she had just learned from the English language course with the construction and memorisation of key terms which were then practised in oral and written forms. This was expressed in the first interview when she noted: “Now my concerns are with learning some specific terms, for example disposition, so I want to know more about these terms.” (Monique: First Interview, p. 2).

Each early childhood physical setting is unique and offers students both affordances and restrictions for the development of their student teacher identity. In the preschool settings, there were very limited opportunities for both Chen and Vicki in terms of interacting, engaging and playing with the children. There were also restrictions on the formal teaching opportunities. Centres with a free-play philosophy generally were more accepting of student teachers’ own initiatives and ideas for teaching since the structure allows such flexibility.

### **Finding a Full-Time Position**

Amongst all the student teachers, as noted by Kostogriz and Peeler (2007), there was a yearning for the comfort of a permanent job. Perhaps, the student teacher who was under the greatest pressure was Leo. Leo had gained admittance onto the teacher education programme on the basis of his double major bachelor’s awarded in Australia. However, a change in the

rulings regarding teacher registration, meant that prior to graduating Leo had to pass the IELTS test. Leo saw this as a considerable obstacle, and he was far from confident that he would be able to pass the test. However, shortly after graduation, Leo passed the IELTS test and found a home centre that was able to support his registration process. Another student who was quite troubled during this time was Chen. Over the year-long programme, Chen had identified being a professional early childhood teacher according to the image of the Montessori centre which had been her home centre. During that time, Chen had developed a close relationship with her associate teacher, who in turn had been preparing her for a leadership role in the centre; unfortunately, and unforeseen, though, the centre was at risk of having to close. Chen had invested both emotionally and professionally in the Montessori method, and her experiences in the mainstream centres seemed only to confirm her worst suspicions. Chen was left looking to apply to the limited number of Montessori centres, since this was the teaching methodology that she felt best suited her interests.

Over the year-long programme, Hong had shown herself to be very adaptable, viewing each placement at the time as providing her with opportunities to expand her understanding, and as the chance to work more closely with other experienced teachers and the children. Hong's first placement, as noted, created a distinct impression on her of how to connect with young children in fun and friendly ways. However, it was only during her under 2s placement that Hong began to feel a real connection to the children, and was able to speak about how the academic courses were beginning to influence the development of her student teacher identity. Having moved to Wellington, Hong immediately found a secure position, and long before completing her year-long programme, Hong knew she had a full-time job, thus enabling her to stay in New Zealand with her Chinese partner who had encouraged Hong to move to Wellington after finding a full-time job.

Driven by her interest in Reggio Emilia, Monique used the WeChat forums to hear about a job being advertised close to where she was staying in North Shore. Just before completion of her programme, Monique had arranged an interview and a half-day's trial in a new centre. Prior to the interview, Monique sought ideas about what might be asked through the WeChat forum and also consulted with others for ideas about what she might do as an activity with the children in the new centre. By this time, Monique was committed to finding a position with a centre following the Reggio Emilia approach, since she regarded the Reggio philosophy as being most closely aligned to her own personal and professional values. Monique was successful in applying for the position.

Vicki also was offered a full-time teacher position by her home centre. Vicki was perhaps most surprised by this offer, not because she felt she had not done well, but because the centre where she worked attracted a lot of expensive fee-paying Asian parents who preferred the formality of the preschool environment. Vicki felt that she would not be offered a position because the Asian parents would prefer to see their child being taught by a European Pākehā whose native language was English, rather than an immigrant Asian. However, this was not the case, and, for the first time in many years, the school, so impressed with Vicki's knowledge, skills and attitude, employed a student teacher.

Anna was probably the most confident about finding a full-time position on completion of her qualification. Anna had already been awarded teacher registration in recognition of her years of teaching practice and ongoing professional development. Also, her confidence and professional knowledge had been fostered and nurtured in her home centre where, after a relatively short time, the management had recognised the skills, knowledge and attitude that Anna brought with her and were already involving her in more formal teacher activities. Prior to completing the graduate diploma qualification, Anna was offered a full-time contract by her home centre.

### **Summary.**

Early childhood teaching is recognised as being highly relational and ethical; this applies to the teacher's connection to the child, the parents and to other members of staff. Dalli and Cherrington (2009) capture this when they comment in relation to ethics, that "early childhood professional practice is troubling, complex, and embedded in relationships" (p. 76). Student teachers are seen to depend a great deal on the cooperation of and collaboration with associate teachers, both in home, and particularly in out-of-home, placements where students are expected to learn the philosophies, policies and practices of the new community in a very short time-frame. Student teachers who develop relational agency, and demonstrate enthusiasm and passion to the associate teachers, are given access to the tools of the community. This was not the case with all associate teachers and, where the associate teacher was largely absent from the practice, the student had a limited understanding of the implications of the practice. The role of the associate teacher is integral to the development of student teacher identity.

Identity development also rests on the feedback from others, and the opportunities that one creates for oneself through innovative practices. In the WeChat forum, Anna played a

leadership role; she confided in me that many of the other students have very little experience and need more support than they are being given. She used WeChat for her own professional development, but increasingly, towards the end of the study, as a way of exchanging views and opinions and sharing the benefit of her experience. Her concern was not so much with the other student teachers, but with the children in their charge.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, we have looked at the role of contextual influences in shaping the early childhood student teacher identity. Context and setting have a profound influence. Through both highly visible means of mediation and much more subtle means, student teachers are enculturated into the culturally very rich and symbolic “figured world” of early childhood teaching. Each setting proposes its own unique understanding and application of early childhood philosophy and policies, which are highly reflective of the activity system’s overall objective. In Monique, the shift in setting prompted a significant shift in teacher identity; the opportunity to engage with new pedagogical practices underpinned by notions of the sanctity of the inner child, and to foster relationships with others through intentional teaching, allowed Monique an image of the professional teacher that would not have been available otherwise. Likewise, the change in the children’s ages seemed to bring about a response in Hong to the emotional, physical and psychological needs of the children, which allowed for a much closer connection than permitted with the independent kindergarten children.

One of the stated intentions of this study was to include in the analysis consideration of the student teachers’ subjectivity as influencing the way in which they engage with learning to be an early childhood teacher. One of the most noticeable turn-arounds in terms of subjectivity was with Hong. Initially, her observations of the children in the kindergarten portrayed them as being quite independent, and boisterous. But in her second placement with the under 2s her language revealed a completely different mind-set, with the children now considered “cute,” “adorable,” “loving,” and “warm.” These we can consider as subjectivity markers and are linked to her professional experience with young children.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION PART 1**

### **Introductory Comments**

This chapter examines identity formation, taking into account the influence of individual agency within the cultural context of preparing to be an ECE teacher. As noted by Roth and Lee (2007), “whichever identities are salient for an individual during a particular context exist in a complex dance with one’s sense of agency and position within the social world” (p. 215). This chapter focuses on the development of identity for the individual students while taking into account their participation and contribution within the mediated activity systems of the ITE and the field-practice placements. The discussion chapter has been organised into two parts. This first part will elaborate on the themed findings examined in the previous chapter, utilising identical headings of personal, professional and contextual identities. This will be done with reference to key literature and concepts, particularly those from the Vygotskian project previously outlined in Chapter 2 and 3. These are concepts of perezhivanie, zone of proximal development and leading activity. Through a consideration of these interrelated developmental concepts, this chapter highlights the cognitive and emotional influences that contribute to the formation of teacher identity.

### **Personal Identity and Perezhivanie**

As discussed in Chapter 2, perezhivanie holds that individuals’ psychological understanding of their immediate contexts are directly related to their emotional experiences (Blunden, 2016). Implicit with this understanding is the role of sense making and the social situation of development since it is the individual’s sense making of the situation that determines their understanding of the context, which constitutes the social situation of development (Gonzalez Rey, 2016). This highly psychological approach helps to explain the obvious variations that exist among student teachers who may share a common cultural background, but who develop quite distinctive teaching identities on the completion of their teaching qualifications, as evident in this study. As noted by Gonzalez Rey (2016), “the concept of perezhivanie broke down the immediate social determinism that ruled Soviet psychology at that time ... this is one of the strong points in Vygotsky’s definition of the concept” (p. 148). Perezhivanie has been understood both as a process and a concept (Veresov, 2016b). As a process, the focus is on the actual experience of the situation; as a concept, we are encouraged to see perezhivanie as it relates within the system of other concepts of cultural-historical theory. Perezhivanie as a concept relates to the processes of development, the role of the social

environment on development, and the laws of development. Veresov (2016b) sums up this relationship as: “Perezhivanie as a phenomenon refracts social influences; perezhivanie as a concept in relation to the process of sociocultural genesis of human mind, shows a dialectical unity of social within the individual and individual within the social” (p. 131).

In Chapter 2, the literature strongly suggested that the process of developing a teacher identity begins long before students enter the initial teacher education programme and, in fact, their apprenticeship starts with their own experiences as learners (Buchanan, 2015; Lortie, 1975). This principle is key to understanding the significance of using CHAT to trace identity development in a longitudinal study, since it assumes a dialectical and dynamic relationship between previous, current and future understandings of self, intertwined with notions of continuity and change (Roth, 2006). As noted student teachers construct their own identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) through the active process of reflecting and narrating the circumstances of their own development as teachers.

As active participants in cultural and historical settings in their home countries, the student teachers as learners were positioned in the collective activity of schooling where they had to work out how to relate to the “people, places and things” (MoE, 1996, p. 9) of their own settings (Holland & Cole, 1995; Holland & Lachiotte, 2007; Urrieta, 2007). The six study participants came to New Zealand with cultural models of teaching that were developed in contexts and settings that were very different to the experiences of local learners. As school students in their home countries, the study participants were implicated in the daily practices of being learners in educational systems which focused on the transmission of knowledge to passive, obedient students (Sit, 2013). Embedded in a teaching and learning cycle of rote learning, memorisation, and testing, the student teachers developed knowledge of a cultural educational model that reflected pathologies of alienated teaching and learning, and reified social relations between teachers and students (Kostogriz, 2012). This perspective of educational experiences being damaging to the psyche captures the idea of perezhivanie as a process which the individual must endure and eventually overcome (Blunden, 2016).

A consideration of learner subjectivity framed according to the notion of perezhivanie implies that identity, as framed by activity theory, is not a deterministic stance, since the way in which the cultural model of teaching and learning is refracted by the individual depends on the individual’s experiences, his/her sense of agency, and his/her capacity to exercise agency. For example, Hong rejected the traditional transmission-based methods of China by

deliberately choosing a university in her hometown that was known for its progressive pedagogy, and for the input of overseas lecturers. This was a programme that sought to highlight critical thinking rather than more traditional methods of knowledge transmission. Likewise, although Vikki's description of her own school days, and the use of corporal punishment for seemingly minor offences, was told in a light-hearted way, it was still a significant memory for Vikki. In contrast to the teachers of her school days, Vikki was seen as very approachable, friendly and personable, all characteristics she valued in her out of home centre associate teacher. Similarly, both Anna and Monique were strong advocates against the kind of teacher-directed learning that they had experienced themselves as learners, and which was to be applied to their own children. In addition, while Chen and Leo admitted to having significant reservations around the value of child-led learning, neither expressed an explicit desire to return to more transmissive pedagogies of their homeland. So, while we can say that the student teachers' own experiences as learners influenced their subjectivity and the development of their teaching identity, the relationship was not one of determinism, but one which marked a strong resistance by the student teachers to traditional methods.

In this study, we have considered *perezhivanie* as a process, but also as an intrinsic element to Vygotskian theory and its contribution to a cultural-historical perspective. According to this understanding, the notion of *perezhivanie* and its attention to subjectivity and emotions, provided student teachers with the ontological freedom to largely free themselves from the remnants of oppressive teaching pedagogies (Kostogriz, 2012). *Perezhivanie* is a particularly significant concept when considering early childhood teachers, because of the focus in ECE on constructing responsive and reciprocal relationships with the children. The process of constructing such relationships draws teachers into intersubjective connections with young children, for whom they develop feelings and emotions (Goldstein, 1989; Noddings, 2013). This was noticeable in Hong's attachment to the under 2s during her second placement. While current literature emphasises the active nature of the infants' learning and development (Dalli et al., 2011), for Hong, it was this same responsiveness of the children to her practice of care routines and the intimacy which these practices fostered, which drew her to working with this age group. In the second interview, Hong revealed that when she was with the under 2s, she felt needed, and she observed how dependent the children were on her as the teacher.

Another student teacher who formed a strong attraction to teaching the under 2s was Anna. Although an early childhood teacher for almost two decades, Anna had never previously worked with infants. Anna also found that the care routines, such as nappy changing or

feeding, provided her with the opportunities to engage fully with the children, to develop strong relationships, and to learn more about them as individuals. This accentuates the positive force of emotions for the experiences of an early childhood teacher, and suggests that when there is a favourable teacher to child ratio, the teacher will have the time to learn about the child and develop those strong bonds, which are at the heart of effective relationships.

In contrast, Chen's response to working with the under 2s during the interviews was to observe the additional labour that this meant for the early childhood teacher. Previous to this placement, Chen had noted the way in which her home centre methods promoted children's independence and self-regulation. Overlooking the immediate developmental concerns of this age group, Chen's reaction was to see the age group as potentially more demanding than the older children, which she viewed as a negative. Leo also had a negative experience whilst looking after the under 2s, with the parent's comments questioning the suitability of a male ECE teacher with the infants. Although Leo was supported by his work colleagues who assured him such views were not representative, this altered his future perception of self as an ECE teacher. As discussed in the findings, Leo aligned himself to the view of the sporty, male teacher who was regularly situated as the outdoors teacher.

For all student teachers, each new placement brought different demands and expectations. How these demands were made sense of by the learner related to their previous emotional and corporal experiences. Their *perezhivanie* shaped their understanding of the contexts, meaning that while two teachers may experience the same contexts, their perceptions of those contexts will differ radically depending on their emotional responses. Although Leo's associate teacher tried to soften the parent's comments regarding his suitability as an under 2s teacher, Leo was clearly perturbed. While Hong and Anna also felt strong emotional connections to the under 2s because of their dependency, it was exactly this dependency which deterred Chen from this group. Such relationships, based on emotional attachment and incorporating an ethic of care emphasising the dynamic relationship between carer and cared for, goes to the heart of being an early childhood teacher (Goldstein, 1999). According to Kostogriz (2012), allowing the teacher to make this interpersonal connection frees the student from purely sociotechnical concerns and provides the student with ontological freedom. However, not all students were ready or willing to make this transition.

## **Professional Identity and Zone of Proximal Development**

According to a CHAT perspective, teachers must be understood as not only being shaped by, but also themselves shaping, the context in which they are embedded since, through the process of being placed in early childhood centres, student teachers are encouraged to be active adaptors to the sociocultural activities of the centre (Wenger, 2008). Striving towards professional identity reflects adherence to the social and policy expectations of what a good teacher should be (Day & Kington, 2008). In other words, professional identity constitutes the student teachers' identification with a unique body of occupational knowledge, observance of desirable standards of behaviour, alignment to processes to hold members to account, and a commitment to what the teaching profession regards as morally right or good (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). This section focuses primarily on the influence of the ITE programme on the development of student teacher identity for the six participants in this study, and the development of the student teachers' identities within zones of proximal development.

To be a professional teacher, the student must meet basic criteria regarding mastering a body of professional knowledge that includes theories relating to children's learning and development (MoE, 2008). Student teachers must also learn the significance given to forming partnerships with parents and as well as practical strategies to plan effectively for, and document, children's learning (ERO, 2013). These theories, skills, and practices are taught in the course materials provided to the students, but are most effective when seen modelled by teachers in their centres. When there is alignment between what is taught and what is experienced in the centre, then the student teacher's trajectory to a more central participation in the centre activity system should be less problematic than if the alignment is absent (Wenger, 1998).

The teacher education programme sought to establish connections between the taught aspects of the programme, which were delivered to students via the online platform, and both the field experience and field practice. This was attempted through the use of boundary objects such as the course specific online discussion forums which encouraged learners to make explicit the connection between the literature and the practice. Another key boundary object in this context was the field-practice appraisal document. All students, when asked, were adamant that they recognised the connections between the theory and practice work, and at various points spoke about the benefits of this kind of immediacy, where what was being studied could immediately be the focus of learning outcomes in the field-practice component.

In most cases, there was complementarity between the goals of the ITE programme and those of the early childhood centre, both aligning in general terms with the progressive ethos of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996).

As noted in Chapter 3, the ZPD can happen on multiple levels and can be understood to occur for the individual through their engagement with instructional materials, through interpersonal collaboration with peers and mentors, and through the influences of the telos and prolepsis of the environment (Smagorinsky, 2013). Students' engagement with core early childhood concepts and theories added to their understanding of what it meant to be a professional teacher. Some students, however, felt that their positioning in the centres as student teachers meant they had limited capacity to perform what they considered to be central activities of a qualified teacher, which was perceived as an obstacle to their development. Although Leo had been encouraged to engage with planning and documenting children's learning through the field-practice placement, he felt that this was an area he wanted to develop more. Where he felt he did excel, however, was in the personal relationships he was able to construct with the children, in particular, but also with the majority of parents and other members of staff.

However, it was Leo's confusion with Montessori in his teaching-philosophy statement, his reluctance to engage with academic texts, and his stated preference for individual interactions as a preferred learning approach, that suggested that his capacity to conceptualise his role was limited. I would suggest that, at a fundamental level, Leo was uncertain about the goals of early childhood education. However, there were a number of occasions where Leo's interactions with the children in his placements reflected his engagement with the ethos of the national curriculum. This was captured through his introduction of Mandarin to Nicole in the first placement, through songs and rhymes (see Findings, p. 163), having correctly identified one of her key interests, music. This was also captured in Leo's learning story of the encounter between the girl with special needs and her peer, Sakura. This revealed an understanding of the practices, but without necessarily extrapolating the values and beliefs which underlie them. These examples underline a key methodological perspective from Vygotsky, and discussed in Smagorinsky et al.'s (2013) study that learning should be understood to be iterative rather than simply accumulative. In terms of ZPD, learning is viewed as an ontological imperative.

For Monique, however, the telos of the field-practice placement settings and the explicit philosophies and principles which shaped the activity within the setting, provoked a fascination with the Reggio Emilia curriculum approach, which she was able to relate to *Te Whāriki*. For Monique, as with the other student teachers, the ongoing object of both activity systems in which she was embedded, was the development of a professional teaching identity. The learning materials and required readings, delivered to Monique through the online platform, provided the framework from which she began her own project of discovering her professional self. This was borne from her experiences and needs as a mother, and also by the needs of a new immigrant student teacher. Through a series of interpersonal connections, made through both out-of-home placements with the associate teachers and others, Monique was able to extend her understanding of both the national curriculum and Reggio Emilia philosophy. This, Monique explored further through her connections on the Chinese WeChat online site. Monique's previous experience as a language learner in New Zealand, informed her of study strategies, and skills, and gave her an awareness of the importance of learning as part of a stable community, all of which she utilised when she became a student of early childhood education.

Throughout the student teachers' engagement with the field-practice appraisal form, they were encouraged to reflect on what they had learnt from the academic courses and begin to apply to their field-practice centres. The practice of engaging with the learning outcomes, and negotiating with the associate teacher and the visiting lecturers how to meet those outcomes, prompted self-reflection, and guided both participation and moments of cultural appropriation (Rogoff, 1995). Through the series of interviews, Anna demonstrated many of the characteristics of a conscientious learner. Although Anna had many years' experience, she was meticulous in her approach to her academic studies. This extended to her field practice, where she regularly engaged her associate teachers in discussions of pedagogy and philosophy. In the field-practice placement with the child with special needs, Anna was able to appropriate some of the key strategies discussed in the course readings and apply them to the care and education of a young boy with Down syndrome. The use of the course materials to inform her teaching practices illustrated the way in which a ZPD can be prompted by the affordances of professional practice. Moreover, Anna spoke knowledgeably about the national curriculum, and was able to use some of her understanding of the English ECE curriculum and apply it to *Te Whāriki*. As described by Lave and Wenger (1991), the ZPD was implemented through personal appropriation, and guided participation, and guided

through institutional apprenticeship. However, attention to the interpsychological, through a more affective understanding of ZPD and ethics of care, also demonstrates the influence of the student teachers' relationships with the children.

### **Contextual Identity and Leading Activity**

The notion of the student teachers' field practices as being the sites of their leading activity for identity development is implicit through much of the collected data. For the student teachers, the field practices were sites of embodied practice, the sites for establishing meaningful relationships, and the places where student teachers began to identify alternative cultural models of education. The affordances for learning in these highly emotive and complex situations were multiple. As noted in Chapter 2, in contrast to the compulsory sector, where teachers often work alone in the classrooms and are susceptible to "stressful isolation" (Edwards, 2009, p. 155), in early childhood education, in New Zealand, teachers mostly work in small, very interactive teams which collaborate to complete any number of disparate tasks to achieve a common outcome (Dalli, 2012).

Achieving collective outcomes involves early childhood teachers interacting constantly and exchanging information and perspectives throughout the day (Dalli, 2012; Grey, 2012). It also relies on the objective or organisational goal being apparent to the teachers. This object relatedness, which is a fundamental aspect of Leontiev's activity system, was described in Chapter 3. Key to the effectiveness of this system is the capacity of the individual teachers to work effectively with one another. Discussing this kind of collaboration and cooperation in situ in early childhood centres, Dalli (2012) suggests the development of "team consciousness" (p. 96) whereby all teachers are aware of each other's presence so they are able to assist one another, and also learn from one another. This degree of collaboration and cooperation requires that teachers are able to perceive the object of the activity from each other's perspective (Edwards, 2011). For example, in an infants' room where ECE regulations are adhered to, a child's feeding, sleeping, and consumption of any medicine is carefully recorded, and any disruptions in normal practice would be shared among the team and the child's parents. While this is discussed in the academic courses, such is the sector dependence on maintaining teacher child ratios to prescribed levels, that teamwork and collaboration are aspects of the profession that are highly valued in practice.

Contrary to much of the literature that has come out of Australia concerning the trajectory of CALD student teachers, literature that projects a hostile and racist host environment

(McCluskey et al., 2011), such a conclusion has not been borne out by this study. On the contrary, the student teachers found themselves warmly welcomed and received by their home centres and out of home centres. In contrast to more recent literature on the experience of immigrant student teachers in New Zealand in early childhood education (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012), the centres in which the student teachers were placed were reflective of the demographic trends of Auckland over the last two decades. All of the students in this study, other than Vikki, were working in highly multicultural settings, composed of teachers, children and families from a range of cultural backgrounds.

It was this attention to cultural diversity that for Anna, was one of the most noticeable differences working with the New Zealand curriculum in a local setting, compared to working with the English ECE curriculum in Beijing. Working with a curriculum and teaching methodology based on a sociocultural approach that recognises the influence of children's home environments, was recognised as being equitable and fair. In fact, over the course of the programme, all the participating student teachers in this study were, at one time or another, invited to contribute their knowledge of their own culture to the centre's teaching and learning. This was achieved through their leadership of cultural events such as Chinese New Year and lantern festival or, as in the cases of Monique and Hong, helping to settle children from Chinese heritage backgrounds into New Zealand ECE settings. The associate teachers and other members of staff recognised the significance of having a member of staff who could communicate directly to the child's family, and advocate for the mainstream approach of learning through play to newly arrived immigrant parents and grandparents, that was evident in the majority of settings. The participating student teachers welcomed the inclusion of their culture into the early childhood settings, but this was largely initiated by senior teachers within the early childhood centres.

From a CHAT perspective, the relationships between the student teacher and the associate teacher is central, since the associate teacher influences the students' engagement with the centre by drawing their attention to the mediating cultural tools integral to the teaching and learning community, also affording student teachers the opportunities to practice in authentic settings. In this current study, the development of the student teacher identity crucially depended on the intervention of the associate teacher, fulfilling the role of the more knowledgeable other to provide the kind of guided participation, discussed by Rogoff (1995), in the landscape of the early childhood setting. The role of the home-centre associate teacher was particularly significant given the amount of time students spent there, both during the

field-practice placement and field-practice experience. Also, the home-centre field practices bookended the students' experience, with both their first and final placements scheduled in their home centres.

Considering the influence of leading identity, all the student teachers were heavily invested in the field-practice and field-experience component of the programme of study. Many of the students expressed a preference for the hands-on practical activity of being in the classroom and learning through observations and discussions with the other teachers. This apprenticeship model, however, can foster and promote compliance and the fossilisation of practices, rather than the valuing of innovative and creative practices that are needed in such dynamic settings. In this way, it can be noted that the context exerted tremendous influence on the development of student teacher identity. This was probably most noticeable in the trajectory of Chen and her relationship with her associate teacher, and being prepared for a leadership position within the centre, and also the way in which Monique was able to take ownership of key Reggio practices.

The two students in the preschool settings had a much more difficult time making sense of the national curriculum and how it related to their experiences. As reported in the findings, the teacher-directed pedagogy evident in both settings meant that the student teachers had little opportunity to directly engage the children in a "teacher and learner" capacity. In both settings, the structured environment meant that interactions between the student teachers and the children were limited. One of the more surprising episodes, revealed by Chen during the second interview, was the emotional outburst of all four teachers after a hectic day settling in new children to the relatively strict routines of the Montessori centre (see p. 151). The teachers' collective response, rather than look at their own setting, instead sought to detach themselves and evoked the image of the spoilt child who requires guidance. This narrow interpretation of events by the teachers constrained the potential for greater learning opportunities for Chen, and rather reaffirmed an individualistic and deficit account of early childhood.

During the interviews, it was obvious that many of the students felt that their experiences in the field, in both field practice and field experience, were defining for them in terms of developing their professional identity. Evoking Trayner-Wenger's (2014) work on knowledgeability in landscapes of practice, discussed in Chapter 2, Fenton-O'Creevy, Brigham et al. (2014) remark, if students perceive their time in the academic community of

practice as being temporary, while they perceive their placement in the actual early childhood centre as having more permanence, then it is expected that the centres would be their primary site of identity development. The exception to this rule was, perhaps, Anna who, throughout the study, was meticulous in keeping a balanced perspective regarding both the importance of the setting, and the importance of the formal expert input from the study materials.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined a number of the findings evident from data collected from students regarding the development of their teacher identity from the perspective of three prominent concepts taken from the Vygotskian project and incorporated into an expanded understanding of CHAT. Discussed under the heading of personal identity was the notion of *perezhivanie* and how individuals may experience similar contexts but each will perceive that situation according to their own personal frames of reference and meaning making. The category of professional identity lends itself to a discussion of ZPD and includes consideration of the influence of the ITE programme, the course lecturers and key early childhood documents. The extent to which the student teachers understood and accepted these concepts depended on a number of factors. As noted in much of the literature on student teaching, student teachers and their understanding of the context co-evolve over time to meet the needs of the activity system. Although in this chapter we have looked individually at how the three prominent concepts taken from the Vygotskian project have been able to add understanding to the development of identity, we have shown how these concepts overlap and together contribute to a more subjective and person-orientated version of CHAT, than previously afforded. In the next chapter, support for this shift is provided through an examination of third-generation activity theory and transformative activist stance.

## **CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSIONS - Part II**

### **Introductory Comments**

The previous chapter analysed the experiences of student teachers undergoing identity shift within the context of field-practice placements, through the sensitising lens of concepts developed as part of the Vygotskian project (Fleer, 2016; Grimmett, 2014; Stetsenko, 2008; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). This second discussion chapter draws on the activity systems model (Engeström, 1987) to explore implications for expansive learning through a consideration of the tensions and contradictions experienced by CALD student teachers, both as individuals and as a collective, through the duration of their programme of study. As noted by Roth and Lee (2007), because of CHAT's dialectical core "collective identity is always a structural feature of organisational life" and "the dialectical relation of individual subject and collective ... is asserted simultaneously with every action that concretely realizes the current activity" (p. 216). As discussed at the start of Chapter 2, this position finds resonance with narrative, dialogical and postmodern perspectives on identity that together conceptualise the constitution of identity as the result of both personal and social influences (Gee, 2000; Martin, 2014; Wenger, 1998). This chapter also considers the role of boundary crossing and questions the implications of the study in terms of Stetsenko's TAS.

### **Expansive Learning**

A key component to Engeström's activity theory is the importance of the tensions and contradictions which give way to expansive learning. It is recognised that the expansive cycle of the activity system begins with an almost exclusive emphasis on internalisation, with the focus on the socialisation and education of novices to become competent members of the activity system (Engeström, 1999). However, it is the contradictions of the activity system that encourage creative externalisation. Expansive learning, as discussed by Engeström (1999), refers to the capacity of participants in an activity to interpret and expand the definition of the object of activity and respond to it in increasingly enriched ways. Within the two activity systems, we have identified that one of the objects of the ITE activity system was to promote critical and reflective practitioners, and the object of the field-practice setting was largely dependent on the actual context in which the student was placed. Expansive learning occurred when the students sought to go beyond the immediate objects, and through working through tensions and contradictions, developing different goals to help transform the activity system.

This process of internalisations can be seen through Monique’s appropriation of the language and concepts of *Te Whāriki*, her noticing of similarities in the discussion of principles and strands, and children’s dispositions, in her home-centre philosophy (as discussed in Chapter 7). This was also the case for Anna and Hong, both of whom worked in mainstream centres that privileged the ethos of the national curriculum. Illustrated in Figure 5 below, expansive learning has several discrete steps, including the subjects questioning their present activity by analysing problematic situations, reconceptualising the object and the motive of the activity, and embracing a radically wider horizon of possibilities (Engeström, 2003).

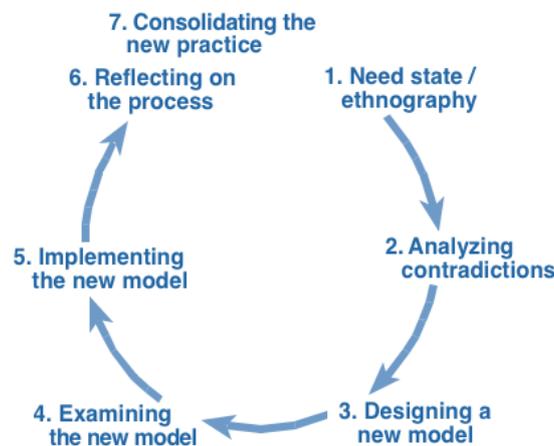


Figure 5. Stages of expansive learning based on Engeström (1999, p. 384).

The emergence and significance of the students’ presence on the Chinese social media site, WeChat, can be understood as embracing a wider horizon of possibilities. The formal online discussion forums promoted by the ITE were not able to meet the needs of the new students. Although the forums were used by students to explore aspects of course assessment tasks, there was a noticeable lack of social presence, given the arbitrary structure of the discussion forums which reflected the college’s continuous enrolment processes. Through claiming membership to the WeChat ECE group, students were able to make meaningful connections with other Chinese student teachers and qualified teachers in the familiarity of their own language, not just to discuss academic matters relating to the courses, but also to exchange information about different centres, compare different experiences and support each other in practical ways through discussions of job opportunities, and alternative curriculum approaches. In the next section, there is a focus on the contradictions and tensions that the student teachers met whilst embedded in multiple activity systems.

## Contradictions and Tensions in the Activity System

Fundamental to an understanding of identity development, as viewed through activity theory, are the contradictions and resulting tensions that exist within and across the activity systems (Engeström, 1987; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). These contradictions are held to be essential for the constant development of the activity system, and, according to Sawchuk and Stetsenko (2008), they engender “changes at the core of human development” (p. 341). In Figure 6 below, all the theoretical terms that have been introduced previously are labelled in the activity triangle. When they interact with one another, they bring about changes in the object, which impacts on the trajectory of the subject. Such contradictions generated in the activity system, are experienced at personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels by the student teachers and are considered instrumental to promoting further learning and development (Roth & Lee, 2007).

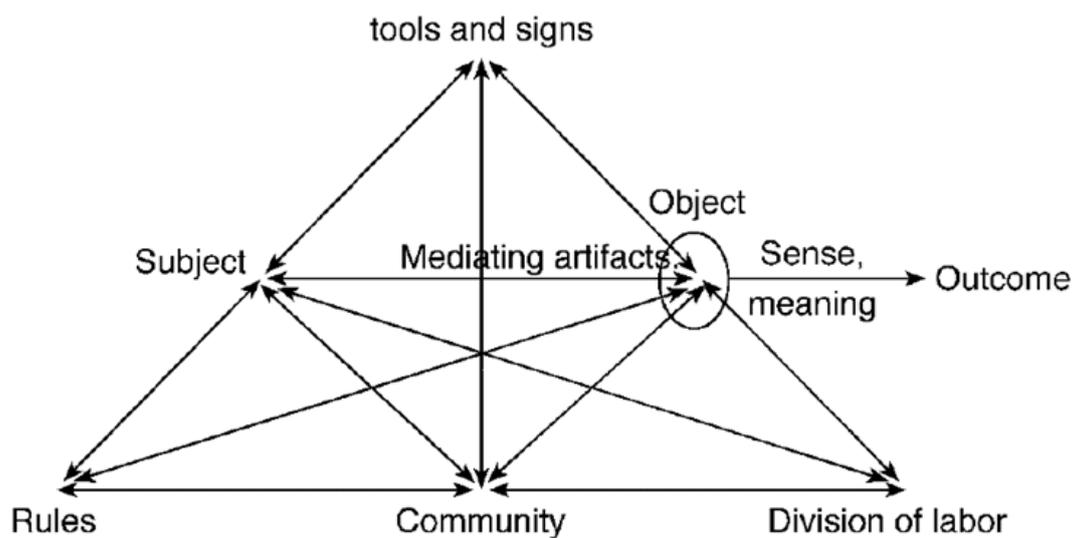


Figure 6. Components of an activity system (Engeström, 1999).

### Contradictions and tensions in the initial teacher education activity system.

Engeström (1987) identifies four levels of contradictions. The first level contradiction occurs within the modules of the activity system, for example within the module of tool, or object (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The second is concerned with tension and contradictions across modules, for example between the community and the subjects. Third level contradictions emerge when activity subjects face situations where they have to use an advanced method to achieve the object, and fourth level contradictions occur between the central activity system and outside activity systems.

Previous discussion has noted that for all student teachers in this study, of the two activity systems, it was clearly their engagement with the field-practice activity system which became the site of their negotiations in reconciling their sense of student teacher identity. This is supported by Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham et al. (2014) in their discussion of sojourner and visiting identities, reviewed in Chapter 2. However, when there were significant contradictions in the ITE activity, students were prompted to go beyond the boundaries of the closed system and utilise social media as a medium of exploration and connectivity with other Chinese students.

In this section, the first and most condensed area of contradictions to be considered is the use of tools in the activity system of the initial teacher education. As noted by Roth and Lee (2007), it is the tools and signs which mediate the relationship between the subject and the object or, in this case, the student teacher’s understanding of how to become a professional teacher. Key among these are the discussion forums.

The discussion forums were promoted by the ITE as places for the exploration of individual course key themes and concepts. Through developing a pedagogy based on dialogue and peer collaboration, the intention of the discussion forums was for the course lecturer to deepen students’ engagement with core course concepts and to encourage students to personalise and resituate pedagogical concepts via field-practice experience and field practice (Akyol & Garrison, 2014). Through this personalisation of the learning materials, and application to their places of practice, it was hoped the forums would provide students with the opportunity to develop and expand their understanding of practical teaching techniques, and also gain an appreciation of the range of services. However, for the most part, the discussion forums became places for the student teachers to ask for clarification of the assessment task, reflecting the task-focused nature of being a networked learner (Hughes, 2010; Mackey & Evans, 2011). This tendency was exacerbated by the ITE policy of facilitating continuous enrolment, resulting in loose and flexible cohorts, rather than steady and fixed cohorts which might foster a greater social presence among the learners. As noted in the findings (see p. 142), the students utilising the forum did not know each other, and so the lack of social presence precluded notions of reciprocity or obligation to contribute to a collective discussion (Dohn, 2009; Mackey & Evans, 2011).

While four of the students admitted to very low levels of engagement with the discussion forums, both Anna and Monica were frequent visitors; however, they developed quite

distinctive approaches. From the first course, Monica was very attentive to the discussion on the boards, but was reluctant to post herself. Her practice of printing off the forums for individual study allowed her to study at her own pace and, through her peripheral engagement, develop her understanding and language. In contrast, Anna understood the discussion forums as places of collaborative learning and was a regular poster, seeing the act of posting as providing support to other students, especially other Chinese student teachers whom she considered required additional support because of the unique challenges they faced. In one way, the student teachers took the online discussion forums at face value. They met the course requirements regarding posting by asking questions that helped them in their objective to pass the course, by simply using the forums as the opportunity to unpack the assessment task.

Still at the apex of the triangle, another tool designed by the ITE that was meant to prompt critical reflection, was the student teacher portfolio. The student teachers' written reflections were the major component of the field-practice portfolios. As noted by Yamagata-Lynch (2010), oftentimes in activity theory, the elements of the activity system can change in meaning. So, while the portfolios can be understood as a tool, they could also be understood as part of the object of the activity system. The first contradiction was the role of reflective writing and the composition of the student teachers' teaching portfolios. Understood as one of the principal tools of teacher education (Smith, Geng, & Black, 2017), reflective writing has been much lauded for helping novice teachers reflect on their own practice, and consider it in relation to expert or target practice. However, as discussed in the findings, one of the unexpected revelations of the study was the way that student teachers crafted their reflections to help them meet the objectives of the placement, rather than as a prompt for authentic self-reflection.

The students' perception of the reflections as the object can be seen with Vikki's and Chen's avowal of free play as a pedagogical tool when, in reality, they were neutral, or believed it to be an ineffectual practice. In this situation, while the ITE regarded the written reflections as a tool, the student teachers perceived them as part of the object, to be measured and evaluated. Student teachers, cautious of their lecturers' attitudes, tended to hide their real thinking. Although lecturers generally sought to bridge the power gap by being friendly and personable, the nature of the high-stakes assessment, and the cost of possibly repeating field practice, helped to shape a compliant and obedient learner who developed a pragmatic position with regard to the ITE. This contradiction in the promotion of the folder as a tool,

rather than acknowledging the significance of the power relations, and also viewing it as the object, encouraged a duplicity in the students' approach. This notion of seeming to accept rules, but deliberately undermining them has a particular cultural significance in China, whose citizens had to cope for decades with the reality of duplicitous and corrupt officials (Dikötter, 2010).

Reflecting on the components of the ITE activity system, listed in Figure 6, the rules relate to college rules, regulations and policies, as set out in the quality-management system. These have an enormous influence on the students' activities. The rules prescribe the duration of the programme and courses, provide explicit guidance on the completion and submission of assessments, and determine the value of each different component of the students' work. These rules were highly visible and were a source of tension for the students. One of the rules that had the most impact on the development of student teacher identity relates to the language requirements for new students. Language was mentioned as an issue by all student teachers at one time or another, an observation supported in much of the literature on CALD students (Iyer & Reese, 2013). For Hong, her concern was she lacked confidence in speaking to children; she was unsure not only of the tone and the manner, but also the words to use with the children. Chen expressed the same reservations when she observed her fellow teachers' interactions with the children. Leo's concern was with language, as assessed by the college, in both the written documentation produced for field practice, and the formal assessments that were submitted at the end of each course. Students expressed frustration at times with the language requirements, both with regards to the IELTS test but also in relation to presentation criteria of written work. Leo, who entered the programme on the strength of his studies in Australia, found that taking the IELTS test near the end of this qualification added a lot of pressure to his work load and, at one stage, was almost at the point of giving up. Although all learners admitted difficulties with language, particularly during the first few months, these issues were addressed and confidence was gained.

### **Contradictions and tensions in field practice.**

The activity systems of the student teachers' field-practice placements are more complex, and arguably more compelling for the student teacher than those of the ITE provider, given the emphasis on active physical participation. While at one level the students' engagement in field-placed practice as an activity system can be viewed on its own merits, further consideration of the specific contexts of each particular placement can also apply, meaning that instead of using third-generation activity theory to conceptualise the differences between

the ITE and the field-practice activity, each field practice could be understood to represent its own activity system, since the components of each would differ quite dramatically. This is illustrated in Figure 7, below, that graphically shows the range of settings in which the student is placed. This aligns with the notion of multiple identities being developed in constellations of practice (Wenger, 1998), and is a major consideration of situated theories of learning which recognise the complexity of the globalised environment and influence of technological advancements (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

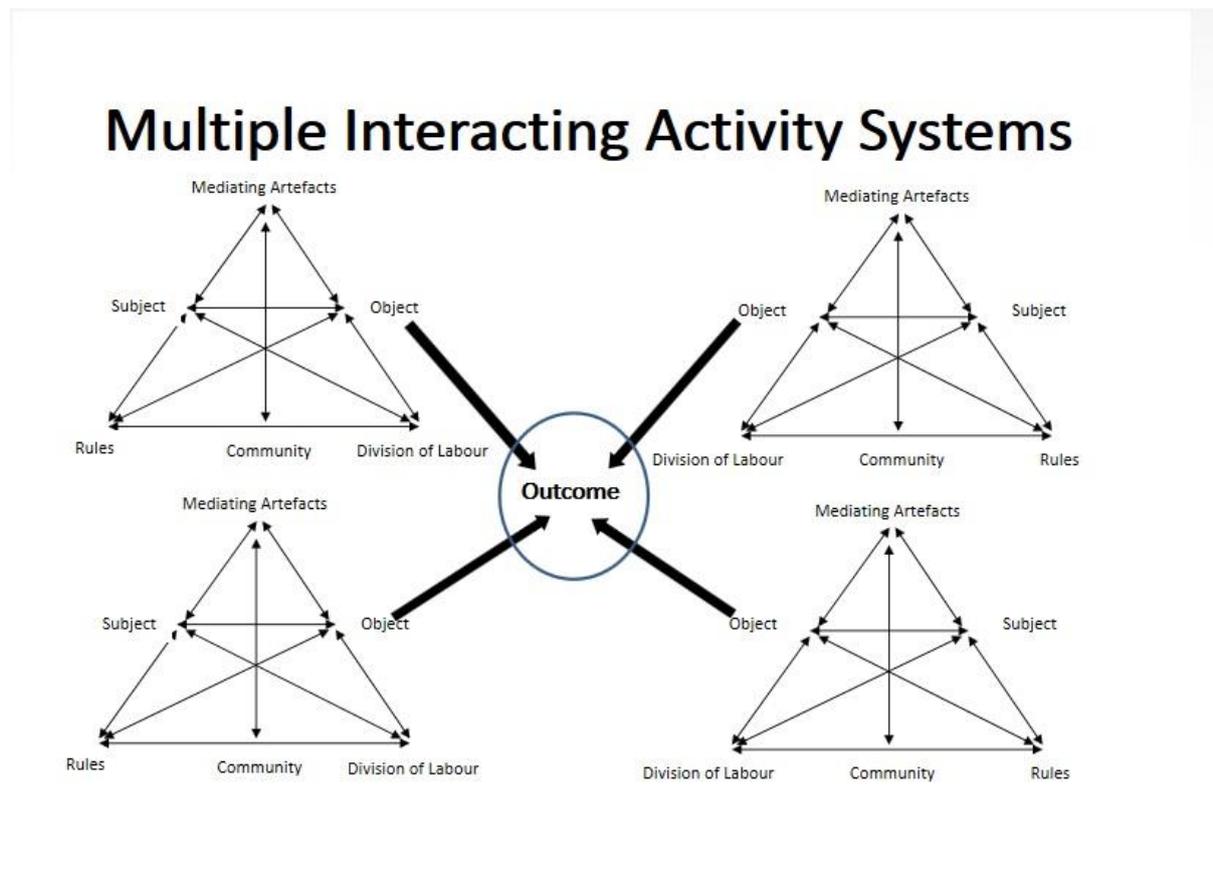


Figure 7. Multiple interacting activity systems (adapted from Smagorinsky et al., 2013).

While the subject of the various potential activity systems is the student or group of student teachers, the object, reflects the goals or telos of the particular context of the centre in which the student is placed. For example, the goal of Chen’s home centre, as understood by Chen and as promoted in centre documentation, was to help shape young learners into independent, self-reliant thinkers. In her second placement in a mainstream setting, however, the goal of the centre was related to uncovering the emerging learning dispositions and interests of the children. This, I suggest, has a fundamental implication with respect to the subjectivity of the teacher. For example, after Chen’s first out-of-home placement, she returned to her home

setting and expressed sympathy with the observation that the children in her home setting were regularly denied the freedom and agency granted to other children.

### **Contradictions and tensions across activity systems.**

The most obvious tension across the major activity systems of the initial teacher education and the multiple field-practice activity systems was between the objects of the teacher education and the objects of the early childhood centre. With regard to the student teacher, both activity systems want the teacher to succeed, and both have an interest in supporting the student teacher to meet the requirements of the programme, and to graduate. For the most part, the objects of the programme in this study were compatible with the objects of the centre.

For the centres whose pedagogies were based on play, following the child's interests and creating curriculum as inquiry, there was a great deal of overlap between the college, the academic courses, the field-practice appraisal document and the practice-based activities evident in the early childhood centres. Where this happened, students were able to develop their own agency and expand their learning. The cumulative effect of so many different settings with different philosophies, for some students, resulted in being buffeted from one setting to another. However, through critical reflection, and through discussions with the associate teacher and with the visiting lecturers, the expectation was not simply that the students would comply with the rules of the different settings, but that they would engage from a critical perspective so they would be able to evaluate their experiences.

One of the fundamental tensions occurred in the object of the ITE and field-practice activity system. A number of the students did not specifically view the field-practice experiences as learning opportunities to develop their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes. Rather, they were perceived by learners more as auditions for job placements. The implication of this tension/contradiction was that the concern of the student was to impress potential employers, rather than to engage in critically reflective discussions and to express themselves authentically. For the ITE activity system, however, the purpose of the field-practice placements included developing a critical perspective, an aim which was hindered by the student teachers' pragmatic search for employment. This helps to explain the defensiveness noted in the responses of both students who were in preschool settings.

## **Boundary Crossing**

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, a third-generation activity theory perspective brings a focus to the use of boundary objects intended to connect the academic and the field-placed practice. The student teachers' use of boundary tools to mediate their understanding of the interrelated activity systems was also instrumental in the development of their teacher identity. Among the boundary tools were the field-practice assessment document, the national curriculum, and the psychological concept of play-based and interest-based teaching. When there was clear alignment between the two activity systems' interpretation of the boundary documents, then students were able to develop a good understanding. One such mediating artefact was *Te Whāriki*, the national curriculum.

The curriculum, and its strands, principles, and goals, was the focus of discussion and interpretation in the first few courses of the graduate diploma programme. A number of key principles, including the ethical orientation of the curriculum and its image of the child as being a competent and confident learner, were voiced in the study materials. In the ITE programme, this was understood as a tool which would initially be studied, and then internalised to inform the student teacher's engagement with learners. For the two teachers who had home centres in preschools, their understanding of *Te Whāriki*, and their appropriation of key concepts such as the image of the child as competent and confident, was largely at odds with the image of the child that dominated the centres' philosophy and pedagogies.

In both the preschool settings, the observance of routines and discipline, and the teacher-led teaching and structure, were fully embraced by both Chen and Vikki. In their field-practice folders, and during their final placements in their home centres, both student teachers were able to "stage" the placement to be seen by the visiting lecturers as creating activities specifically to help meet their learning outcomes (see pp. 130-131). One finding of the study was the very obvious tension between the pedagogy of the preschool settings and that advocated by the ITE provider. Students in the preschools, accordingly, manufactured an "identity" to comply with what they understood as being demanded by the college. For these students, this ECE teacher identity was not evident in their home centres, but was noted over their placements.

The field-practice appraisal document was another influential boundary document. This was designed to help students resituate the learning outcomes from the taught courses to their

experiences in authentic settings. Meeting the appraisal outcomes was the primary concern for the students, and for their associate teachers, during field practice. This gave the students a very definite direction and series of goals to achieve, which should have acted to consolidate their academic learning, and provided ideas for further exploration. Since the outcomes were met, for the most part, chronologically, students tended to focus on developing their interactive and communicative skills as a professional with the children. This required that they take an ethical position of employing a pedagogy of listening. While this as a practice may seem simple, it is the values and the ethics behind such practice that would allow students to extrapolate their understanding to different parts of the curriculum. This evokes the tourist/sojourner dichotomy, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, et al., 2014).

The students naturally saw the field-practice settings as being core to teaching identities. This fits with the cultural model of the early childhood teacher as a doer. However, by adopting an apprenticeship model and not fully engaging with the taught courses, some students’ engagement with the academic activity system was partial and temporary and did not contribute significantly to their identity development (Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham et al., 2014). For other students, including Anna, Monique and Hong, their engagement with the taught courses, and the formal body of knowledge pertaining to early childhood learning and development, allowed for a critical understanding of early childhood education which they were able to apply to their own settings. In the cases of Monique and Hong, while both enjoyed feeling part of the teaching team in their first home centres, they were both able to see the limitations. For Monique, the limitation was the physical environment which meant children’s engagement with the outdoor environment was restricted. Hong found difficulties with her confidence in speaking with the more independent and largely self-sufficient children in the local kindergarten. These students’ engagement with the taught courses and formal bodies of knowledge allowed them to transcend the situatedness of the one setting. The student teacher who was best able to cast a critical perspective on the actions and operations in the centres in which she was placed, was Anna. This is a reflection of the way in which she was able to use her teacher identity to mediate her experiences in the centres.

### **Transformative Activist Stance**

Stetsenko (2008) adds to CHAT, extrapolating the transformative perspective from Vygotsky, through her emphasis on TAS, with a pronounced focus, from an ethical stance, on

collaboration with others as integral to being human. Stetsenko (2008) suggests if we accept the relational ontological position explicit in Leontiev's contribution, namely, that everyone is connected to everyone else, then the step to TAS is a relatively short one, since the latter presumes people are active agents in their own world. This supports the notion of the learner as being actively engaged in the world, and, through relationality, connected with others in their active pursuits. According to Stetsenko (2008), this then becomes the grounding for understanding development and learning, which has been given direction by Vygotsky and his concern for social justice:

Human development, from this perspective, can be conceptualized as a sociohistorical project and a collaborative achievement – that is, a continuously evolving process that represents a “work-in-progress” by people as agents who together change their world and, in and through this process, come to know themselves, while ultimately becoming human. (p. 483)

One of the central tenets of Stetsenko and Arieviditch's (2004) understanding of the activity theory and the TAS, is the externalisation of learning and the development of expansive learning opportunities. I would suggest that, in this study, we can see the student teachers not only adapt and, for the most part, become participating members of their early childhood settings, but, in the case of the emergence of the Chinese WeChat community of early childhood teachers, also provide an example of how the nature of the activity is also transformed.

Marked by appearance and language as culturally and linguistically diverse, many of these young students sought each other out as support, both with the immediate practical realities of living in a new and strange environment, but also to help each other make sense of the early childhood environment, the settings, the ITE and their concerns with ECE pedagogy. As participating members in a dynamic community, they also helped each other, not just with the formal written assessment tasks, but also with advice on how to address specific learning outcomes from the field-practice appraisal document, and how to establish an effective relationship with the associate teacher. Anna, in particular, was seen to take a leadership role in this group, prompted by her desire to help mediate Chinese students' understanding of the demands of early childhood education, both as an academic pursuit but also at a very practical level in their engagement with others in the field.

In this current study, we can see, through the students' use of WeChat, this notion of TAS. In this voluntary social-media network, Chinese students of early childhood education in New Zealand collaborate to facilitate their transition into New Zealand society and into the early childhood sector. The topics of their discussions and investigations in this study were motivated by their personal needs, and were also those considered necessary by the leaders of the group. Anna indicated that her involvement in this group was prompted by what she considered gaps in knowledge or understanding, or simply areas of mutual interest, and that her input would be useful for other students. Many of the prompts for activities were from the ground up, but much of the discourse fitted a deficit perspective. For example, Anna found it incredible that early childhood teachers in New Zealand did not have to learn a musical instrument. There were also field visits organised which were hosted by paid professionals, such as the trip to Tiritiri Matangi or the discussion on the Reggio approach. Otherwise, the students themselves organised their meetings. This very agentic stance recognises the opportunities available to students through social media.

Through the use of WeChat, we can see how these students were positioning themselves in relation to the other students, their study or pedagogical materials, and the early childhood sector. As suggested by Stetsenko (2008, 2009), the students define who they are as student teachers through collaboration with others. This underlines the dialectical perspective inherent in CHAT (Roth, 2004; Roth & Lee, 2007), that identity formation depends upon the way in which the students negotiate their understandings with others in the established communities of practice, but also in the virtual, less established communities where the objectives are not so clearly defined (Hughes, 2010). In this online model, there is arguably less direction or compulsion. In this model, dialogicality is promoted, whereas the centres' practice and the telos of the environment are seen to have a determining influence on the construct of the student teacher identity. The collective nature of the WeChat community afforded participants the agency to develop their own understandings of what it meant to be an early childhood teacher in New Zealand. In terms of power relationships, student teachers spoke more freely and with less vulnerability or risk of being judged when exploring new ideas with other student teachers.

TAS works to draw attention away from a passive model of learning and development, where the focus is on the way in which the individual's experience of the external environment influences their internal cognition. Rather, TAS allows for consideration of how the individual, as a complete person with feelings, emotions and drive, impresses his/her own

subjectivity on the material conditions in which he/she is embedded, through his/her engagement in collaborative socially organised activities, such as early childhood education Stetsenko's (2008) contribution to CHAT emphasises the way in which participants can contribute to society, rather than adapt or conform, as is implied through a communities of practice framework and through the canonical version of CHAT (Lave, 1996; Stetsenko & Arievidtch, 2004).

Utilising the heuristic tools of Engeström's third-generation activity theory, in addition to utilising the three key principles of the Vygotskian project and its concern with the both the cognitive and affective domains, has allowed for an examination of identity development. Through an examination of the material production, intersubjective exchanges, and human subjectivity, both the individual and the collective are taken into consideration. In Anna's example, the shift in object that occurred as a result of gaining teaching registration also, according to the perspective considered, resulted in changes in the activity system which then influenced the nature of the subject being developed.

The position of TAS was not open to all students, however. At the core of this position is the notion of introducing change and making a difference to the status quo. In direct contrast are those students whose objective remained the same. Both teachers in the preschool settings, although at times expressing reservations about the more teacher-led way of teaching evident in both settings, saw their respective centres as being highly desirable from an employee's perspective. Both preschool settings followed school hours and school holidays, whereas the day-care settings remained open until the early evening, and, for the most part, only closed on statutory holidays. Both student teachers considered that the top-down transmission of knowledge was a more effective way of teaching, and saw value in the structure that encouraged greater self-reliance and independence.

The development of a student teacher identity happened, as suggested by the literature, through a dialectical process of the student teacher reflecting on themselves as individuals with their own histories, own experiences, and now subjectivities, projecting on their future teaching selves.

## **Chapter Summary**

A consideration of the contradictions and tensions experienced by the student teachers fosters a view of the student teachers as a collective. An examination, at a systems level, draws

attention to areas of common concern. At the first level of contradiction, the way in which the field-practice folder, could be both regarded as a tool by the ITE, and as the object of the field practice by the students, encouraged compliance rather than authenticity for those students in the preschools in particular. There were also tensions concerning the subject and the role of the ITE concerning the use of English language, with students expressing a lot of uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of their communication with the children and others in the setting, particularly at the start of the study. Perhaps the greatest contradictions, however, was between the different goals of each of the early childhood settings. This impacted on all aspects of teacher identity as it developed, from the pedagogical approach, to the relationships with significant others, and even the application and implementation of the national curriculum. One area where students were able to express complete agency, with regard to the development of their teacher identity, was through the Chinese social-media website, WeChat. As discussed, the WeChat early childhood community, mostly made up of students from Chinese backgrounds, regularly ran professional development workshops on areas which the students themselves were enthused to learn more about.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

### Introductory Comments

This chapter concludes the thesis by presenting several interrelated theoretical, methodological and practical insights that together answer the two research questions that framed the study. This chapter also considers communities of practice as a rival theoretical perspective to inform notions of identity development in both ITE and field-practice settings. Following this, the chapter ends with consideration of further avenues of inquiry which have been prompted by this current study. Concluding comments bring the thesis to a close.

### Research questions revisited.

The two research questions that framed this study were:

How can cultural-historical activity theory contribute to discussions about identity development for student teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in early childhood education?

How do these identities develop over time with reference to the changing contexts of practice?

In addressing the research questions, this study has presented a description, explanation and application of CHAT, covering the three generations from Vygotsky, to Leontiev and to Engeström, with a particular focus on Engeström's third-generation CHAT. Moreover, I have complemented the traditional CHAT perspective by incorporating three sensitising concepts from the Vygotskian project (Fleer, 2016; Grimmer, 2014; Stetsenko, 2008; Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2004). These sensitising concepts have allowed for consideration of the student teachers' comprehension and their responses to changes in the early childhood settings.

These more individualised and psychological responses from the student teachers were the focus of Chapter 7. In addition, I have also drawn upon Stetsenko's (2008) construct of transformative activist stance. The inclusion of this construct has fostered a collectivist lens to examine the way that the student teachers joined together to effect change, which was the focus of Chapter 8. The conceptual framework, as explicated in Chapter 3, has allowed for a consideration of how both individual and collective dimensions influence identity formation. In addition, throughout the study, development of identity has been understood as an ontological process of becoming, rather than being regarded as an eventual goal or

destination (Stetsenko, 2013). This following section presents several interrelated, theoretical, methodological and practical insights that answer the two research questions.

### **Drawing the arguments together.**

The use of the CHAT theoretical framework highlighted that the students' conceptualisations of what it meant to be a professional teacher became increasingly fixed as they began to seriously consider finding a full-time teaching position. Both students in the preschool settings committed, in the final interviews of the study, to a particular institutional perspective of early childhood education that incorporated specific curriculum approaches, for example the inclusion of the International Baccalaureate programme in Vikki's home centre, or the edicts of the Montessori-inspired centre in Chen's home centre. In both instances, the pedagogical orientations of these centre approaches suggested a more teacher-led model of instruction, which in part contradicted the child-centred focus of the national curriculum. However, realising this apparent contradiction led both student teachers to manipulate the conditions of their last home-centre placement to allow them to meet the learning outcomes of the initial teacher education programme (see pages 130-131).

As might be anticipated in a study grounded in cultural-historical activity theory, culture in all its manifestations has been a central focus. Through discussions of the students' backgrounds and consideration of the social and historical factors which have influenced their development as learners and teachers, as well as consideration of the social and historical factors of the early childhood settings, this study has highlighted issues of national culture, institutional culture and culture as an ongoing process that both shapes and is shaped by the student teachers. This study has also focused on the kinds of cultural tools that prompt collective representations in early childhood education (Nuttall, 2013). In the ITE activity systems, these cultural tools were evident not just in the national curriculum itself, but also in the teaching methodology, and the study materials which supported a free-play approach to children's learning. Complementary, or at times contradictory, cultural tools were also to be found in the field-practice settings, in the forms of competing curricula discussed above.

When there was alignment between the cultural tools of the ITE and field-practice settings, the student teachers were able to realise the affordances of boundary crossing, as discussed in Chapter 8. In these situations, identity development was less problematic. The student teachers negotiated the cultural tools through their embodiment in the physical settings of the early childhood settings, and in relation to the established teachers and associate teachers. For

example, in the section “Embodied Practice,” we saw Anna supporting a young child’s imaginative dramatic play of preparing breakfast, a pedagogical position supported by the resources of the centre, the centre philosophy, the physical environment, Anna’s observance of the other teachers, and the guidance of the ITE study materials. All these factors contributed to the implementation of a pedagogical approach, supported both in the ideal curriculum, the enacted curriculum, and the values of the student teacher herself (Nuttall, 2013). Ratner (2015) claims such cultural tools and practices “are the ultimate zones of proximal development” (p. 55), which aligns with Vygotsky’s classic version of sociocultural theory and the social construction of cultural artefacts (Ratner, 2015).

By examining contemporary understandings of CHAT, and particularly the contributions made by researchers interested in expanding the Vygotskian project, this study has highlighted the transformative nature of learning and teaching. Through consideration of the activity system, we are reminded of Vygotsky’s focus on dialectical materialism and the significance of the relationships between learner and more knowledgeable others in the process of appropriation. From Leontiev, there was a noticeable emphasis on the generative capacity of the activity to produce changes in both the object and the subject. These perspectives were critical in understanding the way in which the activity of learning to be an early childhood teacher influenced identity formation. Finally, from Engeström’s third-generation activity theory, we were encouraged to consider the multiple sites in which identity development occurred.

In answering the question of how CHAT can contribute to discussions of identity development, the most conspicuous response would be through the consideration of context, and, as suggested in the discussion chapter, the most influential context for the student teachers was that of the early childhood setting. It was in the early childhood settings where the student teachers forged relationships with meaningful others, where they felt moments of achievement, and where they felt most challenged. For the student teachers, their leading activity, whilst on placement, was negotiating their sense of professional identity in the social world of the early childhood centre. The inclusion of *perezhivanie* and consideration of the significance of the student teachers’ subjectivity have provided insight into the subjects’ inner spaces and psychological realms. Moreover, inclusion of the TAS perspective brings a collective, and highly ethical and socially active, dimension to the discussion.

The development of teacher identity was understood to be an ontological process that began long before the student teachers enrolled in their teacher education programmes. Among the six participants, four had previous experience as teachers. For three of the four, this meant four years of studying at Bachelor level, and placements in authentic settings in China. All student teachers, as previously stated, had experienced being learners as well. All student teachers came to the programme with well-developed cultural models of education and being a learner. However, as previously suggested, these cultural models were not deterministic, but definitely influenced the emerging teacher identity. In the previous chapter, it was noted that the institutional context also had a considerable influence, in that it provided the student teachers with the opportunity to contribute to the sociocultural practices of the early childhood centre.

As previously noted in the literature on second language teaching, “performance precedes competence” (Cazden, 1981, p. 303). This notion of performance preceding competence captures the understanding that, as the new student teachers were welcomed into their early childhood settings, they were required to actively participate in the sociocultural activities of the centre, which included being a physical presence in the rooms. The student teachers’ movements and actions, constrained or liberated by the telos of the activity system, fostered the student teachers’ subjectivities that reflected their ongoing conceptualisation of the image of the early childhood teacher. In terms of Leontiev’s activity theory, the almost unconscious bodily actions involved in ‘operations’ can be understood as developing from very conscious actions to facilitate the early childhood teaching team approach. This was the focus of the section in Chapter 6 on embodied practice. The formation of student teacher identity was strongly influenced by their physical situated sense of being in communities of early childhood practice.

In early childhood education in New Zealand, relationships between the teacher and the child are recognised as being integral to the child’s effective learning. As discussed by Flear (2010), it is important for early childhood teachers to develop their knowledge of children, and their dispositions and interests, so that they are able to engage with the children both intersubjectively and intercontextually. However, until relatively recently, the nature of the relationship has been perceived not from the teacher’s but from the child’s perspective. In sociocultural theory, Brennan’s (2016) contribution illustrating the role of *perezhivanie*, as well as work by others (e.g., Kostogriz, 2012), is subtly changing the landscape. As previously noted, the associate teachers were fundamental to the success or failure of the

student's field practice. In the student teachers' home centre, over the year-long duration of the course, they developed close relationships with their associate teachers and other teachers in the setting. These expert practitioners, to use a Vygotskian phrase, were semiotic mediators. These relationships not only made the students feel more welcomed and accepted, but were also sites of provocation and expansive learning.

Through discussion and analysis of the kinds of everyday interactions teachers and children engaged in, the student teachers in this study developed the practices of those other teachers in their centre. Across their three different placements, two in the home centre, and two in out-of-home centres, the student teachers consciously imitated the practices of their new colleagues. In doing so, however, they did not always realise the significance of those practices nor necessarily really understand the concepts and theories that support such practices. These daily, micro-exchanges reflected small changes in activity and thinking. However, the extent to which such practices were internalised and appropriated by the student teacher was dependent on their sense of alignment to the pedagogical approach. While the field-practice appraisal document expected the students to be able to adapt to differing sites of practice, the emphasis was still on the capacity of the student to critically reflect and consider new teaching pedagogies and practices in terms of their own values and beliefs.

Viewing identity development using third-generation activity theory with an emphasis on both the cognitive and the affective, has allowed for consideration of the congruity between the ITE activity system, as experienced by the student teacher, and the field-practice activity system. In the cases of the student teachers in mainstream home centres that supported the child centred orientation of the national curriculum, they were able to put into effect many of the practices and strategies supported in the learning materials from the ITE. They were able to see the value of courses which championed play as pedagogy; they were able to plan for child initiated or child-led teaching activities. For those student teachers in the pre-school setting, they felt they were only able to meet the field-practice learning outcomes by significantly changing their regular teaching activities. This undoubtedly put a considerable strain on both teachers, who at times seemed sensitive and conflicted when discussing teaching practices in their home centres.

The student teachers use of the WeChat social website fostered the Chinese student teachers exploration of potential identifications in a safe, cultural space. While the ITE discussion

forums were monitored by lecturers and had a fairly specific objective in terms of the particular courses they represented, WeChat, on the other hand, had no such formal observers, and was away from the gaze of the ITE. The range of perspectives covered in many of these study groups promoted on WeChat, reflected what has been referred to as “dual discursive competence” (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007, p. 115), meaning that in the process of the student teachers’ professional appropriation they drew selectively on the past, such as learning the ukulele (musical instruments being a staple of ECE in China), in reconfiguring the present. The student teachers’ use of WeChat promoted their collective agency in defining what they considered to be important. As noted by Bullock (2013), the students’ use of social networking site WeChat provided a useful loci for the negotiation and construction of their professional identity.

A significant component of this study has been the discussion of the ethical dimension of being an early childhood teacher. Although the notion of ethics was not mentioned explicitly as a concern during the interviews or in the documentary data, recourse to the theoretical implications of becoming a teacher clearly identify this as a significant concern. As noted in the literature, the practices of being a teacher implicate the learner in the chaotic world of early childhood teaching, where decisions are often made as the issues surface (Dalli, 2012). A point supported by Roth (2007b) who suggests that embodied engagement in the actions and operations of the activity, maps morality and ethics onto the CHAT framework maps.

### **Rival theories.**

The success of student teachers in making claim to a more central participation could also be viewed with reference to other social learning theories such as communities of practice. As described previously, one of the key concepts of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) community of practice is the role of legitimate peripheral participation. A number of studies reviewed in Chapter 2, noted that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students often felt excluded and marginalised from teaching and learning communities in Australia. There are also studies that suggested that such marginalisation resulted from a combination of cultural obstacles and racism from the hosting community (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). A communities of practice approach has been cited in numerous studies, both educational and workplace, and have allowed for a conceptualisation of the interactions between those already established in the communities and those who seek to claim membership (e.g. Iyer & Reese, 2009). However, a communities of practice approach fails to provide an explanation of the individual’s internal mechanisms, unlike activity theory, with the additional concerns

of the three concepts drawn from the Vygotskian project. This latter work provides explanation for both individual and group dynamics; it helps to explain the individual's social situation of development, and the collective forces of the professional identity. Also, the significance of the historical perspective of CHAT, in helping to explain the influence of material settings, is overlooked in communities of practice.

Central to this study was the consideration of the transformation of the student teacher as a result of his/her participation in the dual activity systems of the ITE and field practice. The focus on the student teachers' subjectivities, emotions and feelings, as well as their cognitive gains, is reflective of a more general shift in psychology (Kirschner & Martin, 2010). In light of this, actor network theory also allows for consideration of the influence of material objects on the development of subjectivity in individuals, however, whereas cultural psychologists such as Ratner (2011) acknowledge the influence of both bottom-up and top-down perspectives, actor network theory, much like communities of practice, tends to focus on bottom-up perspectives (Latour, 2005).

### **Implications of the study.**

The findings from this study demonstrate that the way that teacher education is being delivered, needs to be reconsidered, by policymakers and ITEs, in light of whose knowledge and expertise is considered significant for early childhood teachers. The study has shown how the constitution of the professional identity can be restrictive, but can also foster and promote further inquiry. How the student teachers experienced their programme of study, how they interpreted their positions in the field-practice centres, what they understood about being an early childhood teacher, what they knew, or did not know, and did not try to know – all of these were neither simply individual choices nor simply the result of belonging to the social category “student teacher.” Instead, they were negotiated in the course of the field-practice placements and through interactions with significant others. Their identities were shaped by belonging to and identifying with particular communities that had unique characteristics. The formation of their identities can be understood as a dialectic process, with the student teacher negotiating what Sfard and Prusak (2005) termed actual and designated identities. To realise the student teachers' potential in moving beyond simply adapting to and conforming to centre practices, students in the ITE activity were encouraged to adopt critical perspectives on their field-practice experiences. However, for some students, pragmatic concerns subsumed other concerns relating to their authenticity as a teacher.

Student teachers who sought to make a real difference to the lives of children, who sought to make meaningful connections and who sought to develop their understanding of core early childhood pedagogical principles, did so from an ethical and transformative perspective. In particular, the trajectory of Monique, Anna and Hong reflected their subjective experiences and trajectories in both personal and ultimately authentic ways. Monique and Anna, spurred by notions of social justice, fairness and being ethical, sought pedagogies which they felt respected the child. For Leo, Chen and Vicki, pragmatic responses to the reality of securing a job offer led them to make pragmatic choices regarding their understanding and implementation of early childhood pedagogy.

### **New directions.**

As an early childhood teacher educator, my passion and interests are in exploring the development of student teachers. In this current study, what has impressed me most were the changes experienced by the student teachers in reaction to their relationships with their learners, the children. The relationships between student teachers and associate teachers is well covered in a number of situated learning theories, including those of both communities of practice and activity system. However, the inclusion of the three concepts from the Vygotskian project have allowed for consideration of the influence of the affective dimensions, as well as the cognitive dimensions. I would like to explore this area of relationships between teacher and child further, with a particular focus on humour as a tool for socialisation, belonging, and well-being. I am particularly interested in the student teacher interactions and relationships between student teachers and students, and the changes this brings to the student teacher. Recognition of the role of affect in the development of higher order executive functioning, such as identity, is the focus of much recent literature on teaching in early childhood. Consideration of how this is done will inform the way that teacher education discusses professional self-development and learning.

Research is a challenging undertaking and, much like the students in my study, I, too, was developing my own professional identity as a doctoral student. Like the students in this study, I was on a journey, facing the demands of the academic community, negotiating the rules of the university, and being a confidant to the student teachers in my study. To achieve my objective, the activity system demanded I acquire and develop new skills of interviewing, transcribing, analysing documents, and deepen my knowledge and understanding of complex psychological theories related to learning and identity development. Through my experiences of being a doctoral student conducting this study, my own subjectivity has been changed.

After hearing the stories of the student teachers, I realise the vulnerabilities in their role as student teachers, answerable to both the early childhood setting, and to the ITE. For some, this journey was a much more complicated and problematic process than I had previously imagined, and one in which the ITE could provide even more support and guidance, with the construction of a teacher identity journey.

### **Concluding comments.**

Through consideration of the use of case study as the principal research methodology, which aligned well with the characteristics of third-generation activity theory, each of the six student teachers were considered as both individuals and as part of the teaching collective. By the end of their year-long teaching programme, all six student teachers survived, completed their qualifications and all found permanent jobs prior to, or very soon after, qualification. Their apparent successful engagement in the field-practice placements occurred primarily through individual efforts to contribute to the collaborative outcomes of the centres. Those student teachers who recognised opportunities for gaining support, through building relationships and networks with associate teachers and significant others such as centre managers, owners, parents of the children and lecturers, were able to realise greater and more diverse identification possibilities beyond their initial home-centre practices.

Through establishing relationships with others, student teachers were able to realise the potential of social networks, to work on and consolidate emerging teaching identities. This point emphasises that relationships were key in many respects. Through their active participation in the centres, the student teachers were compelled to take both a pedagogical and ethical stance. The ways in which the student teachers approached the field-practice placements gave an indication of their engagement with the motives of the early childhood centre, whatever their engagement with the academic courses and their capacity to develop critical thinking.

The student teachers' identities were not fixed attributes, but were partly negotiated anew in each community in which they participated. As practitioners crossing boundaries, moving between different regimes of competence, and enacting their multi-membership of different communities, their identities were shaped in each new context. As noted in the methodology section, the researcher recognises the way in which theoretical considerations have helped to shape this research design, the focus, the interview questions and the interpretation of data, an

abductionist position which recognises the value of theory but still acknowledges the significance of exploring and analysing data.

A transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2008) is not simply concerned with the reproduction of the status quo, but is focused on the individual making meaningful change as a member of a larger body, in this case the body of professional early childhood teachers. This change must be understood both in terms of an individual and social process, individual in so much that each person brings their own dispositions and subjectivities to the context, their emotional and cognitive experiences or *perezhivanie* shaping their position towards early childhood teaching. This study has strived to show how an ethical and transformative approach to early childhood teacher education can prompt greater authenticity.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

(Student)

**Project Title:** Negotiating identity within and without online learning: An exploration of student teacher professional-identity formation

**Name of Researcher:** *Sean Dolan*

Kia ora,

My name is Sean Dolan and I am the programme leader of the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education). I am currently enrolled as a PhD student in the University of Auckland and would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting. This information sheet explains the aims and requirements of the project to help you make an informed decision about whether you wish to be involved.

### **Aims of this study**

The aim of this study is to explore the formation of student teacher identity both in the workplace and in online learning. I am interested in how student teachers negotiate their understanding of professional identity in the workplace and how online learning may influence this process. It is hoped that this study will heighten your awareness of the transition from being a student teacher to being an early childhood teacher.

### **The Participants**

Students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) and practising in the Auckland region will be the key participants of this study. All newly enrolled Graduate Diploma students have been contacted through a New Zealand Tertiary College Online news items. The study will include observations in each early childhood setting, therefore if you express an interest, I will need to make contact with the supervisor of your setting and gain their support for the study.

### **The Procedures**

This research is scheduled to last the full year of your Graduate Diploma studies and will involve four field-based observations immediately followed by four face-to-face interviews. These will be timed to coincide with your field-practice visits. The observation

will last approximately one hour and the interview also one hour. I will also require access to copies of your written work completed as part of your field-practice folder. I will request that these are emailed to me only after your field practice visit is complete. I will also request permission to view your online discussion forums, which I will be able to access directly from the site. These data will inform my understanding of your development as a student teacher and how online learning has influenced that trajectory.

### **Reporting the data**

Pseudonyms will be used for you and your early childhood setting and identifying features will not be included in the final report. Other staff within your early childhood setting may have some knowledge of your involvement in the study. Care will be taken in the final report to ensure that nothing is included that harms your relationship with your work colleagues. You will have the opportunity to review and discuss the data that is collected about you and withdraw anything you would not wish to have reported.

The student/programme leader relationship you and I have within New Zealand Tertiary College is acknowledged. Steps will be taken to ensure that participation in this study does not compromise your position as a student in New Zealand Tertiary College. Information you and I share about your work and study will not be shared with other lecturers at New Zealand Tertiary College and I will not assess your work or practice during this study.

Data from the study will be stored securely. Only my research supervisors and I will have access to it. When the study is completed, findings will be submitted as a PhD's thesis to the University of Auckland and a summary may also be presented at conferences or in education journals.

### **Your rights**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate if you do not wish to. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the data-collection period. You also have the right to:

- decline to answer any question during interview times or request the recorder be turned off;
- review and comment on data about you that forms part of the study and withdraw any information up until the end of the data-collection period;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;

- receive a summary of the research findings in written form. Face-to-face feedback will also be arranged.

Please note that this research study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Auckland and the Research Ethics Committee of New Zealand Tertiary College.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign the attached consent form with this information sheet. Please return the consent form via email to [sean.dolan@nztertiarycollege.ac.nz](mailto:sean.dolan@nztertiarycollege.ac.nz). If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email for further discussion.

Thank you very much for your interest and support.

### **Contact Details**

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may 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. Telephone 64 + 9 373 7599 extn. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 21/03/2014 for a period of 3 years until 21/03/17

**Reference Number 010676**

## **Appendix B: Consent Form (Student)**

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

**Title:** Negotiating identity within and without online learning: An exploration of student teacher professional identity formation

**Researcher:** Sean Dolan

My participation for this research project, of which I am informed, is voluntary.

I understand that:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I also understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participation Information Sheet.
- I agree to participate in four observations of approximately one hour whilst working in an early childhood centre
- I agree to participate in four interviews of approximately one hour each
- I give permission for the researcher to observe my activities in discussion forums
- I agree to email the researcher my field practice folder on completion of each four field practice visits.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE ON 21/03/2014 for a period of 3 years until 21/03/17

Reference Number 010676

## Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

(Centre Manager)

**Project Title:** Negotiating identity within and without online learning: An exploration of student teacher professional identity formation

Name of Researcher: *Sean Dolan*

Kia ora,

My name is Sean Dolan and I am the programme leader of the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) in New Zealand Tertiary College. I am currently enrolled as a PhD student in the University of Auckland. A student teacher in your centre had expressed an interest in a research project I am conducting and I would like to invite you to support this project. This information sheet explains the aims and requirements of the project to help you make an informed decision about whether you wish to be involved.

### **Aims of this study**

Studying for a professional qualification while working within an early childhood setting is a popular teacher education option available to students in New Zealand. There is a growing interest in developing a research base around the particular impact of our unique distance and centre-based approaches to teacher education.

The aim of this study is to explore the formation of student teacher identity both in the workplace and in online learning. I am interested in how student teachers negotiate their understanding of professional identity in the workplace and how online learning may influence this process. It is hoped that this study will provide personal insights for participants.

Guiding questions for the study include:

- How does student teacher participation in the workplace change over the course of their academic study?
- What is the influence of online learning to student participation in the workplace and vice versa?

- Do shifts in identity occur as a result of changing participation in the workplace?

### **The Participants**

Expressions of interest to participate in this study have been received from eight students studying the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) with New Zealand Tertiary College. Part of the study will take place in each student's centre. Teaching staff, children and families could be present during observations but are not participants in the study. These groups will not be specifically observed or individually described within observations. The student/employees decision to participate in the study will in no way impact upon their employment or relationship with the Centre.

### **The Procedures**

The study would involve two visits to your early childhood setting: One near the start of the student's academic course, the other towards the end. During these visits I would like to observe the activities of your centre to understand the context the student teacher is working within. A key interest would be how the student teacher participates in different activities and how her participation might change over time. Information from these observations will be recorded as field notes. Observation times would be negotiated with you and the student teacher but I would hope to conduct around one hour of observations at each period. This would be followed by an interview with the student teacher which would take approximately an hour at a time and place convenient to her.

### **Ethics**

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and early childhood settings and identifying features will not be included in the final report. Confidentiality from all participants during the research process will be important. Care will be taken in the final report to ensure that nothing is included that might be harmful to relationships within the centre. Participants will have the opportunity to review and discuss the data that is collected about them and contribute to an initial analysis of this data.

Steps will be taken to ensure that participation in this study does not compromise your position as a student in New Zealand Tertiary College. Student identity and specific Information about their work and study will not be shared with other lecturers at New Zealand Tertiary College and I will not assess their work or practice during this study.

Data about the study will be stored securely. Only my research supervisors and I will have access to it. When the study is completed, findings will be submitted as a PhD thesis to the University of Auckland and a summary may also be presented at conferences or in education journals.

Please note that this research study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Auckland and the Research Ethics Committee of New Zealand Tertiary College.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign the attached consent form with this information sheet. Please return the consent form via email to [sean.dolan@nztertiarycollege.ac.nz](mailto:sean.dolan@nztertiarycollege.ac.nz). If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email for further discussion.

Thank you very much for your interest and support.

#### Contact Details

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may 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. Telephone 64 + 9 373 7599 extn. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 21/03/2014 for a period of 3 years until 21/03/17  
Reference Number 010676

## **Appendix D: Consent Form (Centre Manager)**

### **THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS**

**Title:** Negotiating identity within and without online learning: An exploration of student teacher professional identity formation

**Researcher:** Sean Dolan

My participation for this research project, of which I am informed, is voluntary.

I understand that:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I also understand that I may withdraw my support from this study at any time
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participation Information Sheet.
- I agree to allow the researcher to conduct an observation of the student teacher in my centre
- I understand the my centre will not be named and that pseudonyms will be used
- I understand that care will be taken in the final report to ensure that nothing is included that might be harmful to relationships within the Centre.
- I understand that the student teacher's decision to participate or not in the study will in no way impact upon their employment or relationship with the Centre.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE ON 21/03/2014 for a period of 3 years until 21/03/17  
Reference Number010676**

## **Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Student Teachers**

**Title:** Negotiating identity within and without online learning: An exploration of student teacher professional identity formation

Researcher: Sean Dolan

The following questions are indicative of the nature of the questions that will be asked.

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, perhaps we could start with what you were doing before you enrolled in this program?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences of being a learner in your home country, how would you describe the conditions?
3. Can you tell me something about your home centre, how did you come to choose this particular one?
4. What can you tell me about your home-centre philosophy?
5. Do you have many discussions with your associate teacher?
6. How do you use the online platform, do you use it to access readings, contribute to the discussion forums – do you find these useful?
7. You've started engaging with the national curriculum, what can you tell me about the organising principles?

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