Anne Meade (2007), in her discussion of the COI programme and the links between theory and practice, argued that teachers and educators in COIs “move from intuitive practice to higher level professional practice in their area of innovation by researching and by theorising. They generate research findings and theories to fill previous gaps between their premises and outcomes. Simultaneously, they become more adept at articulating their pedagogy, and more focused on investigating the effects of what they are doing for children and their families and whānau” (p. 5).

Practices that assisted Wadestown Kindergarten COI members to engage in critical reflection and theorising are considered in this chapter. We aimed to establish a culture of critical enquiry and learning primarily through the process of pedagogical documentation, but also through discussion of research-based and theoretical readings, and our own writing. We came to notice that just as different literacies offered particular affordances for communication and learning for the children at Wadestown Kindergarten, in a similar way the processes for critical enquiry offered capacities for different kinds of critique, reflection, and insight. We start by examining this idea of the different affordances for critical enquiry that were offered by the modes and tools that we used for supporting enquiry. We also draw links between the teachers as “multiliterate and enquiring” and their work to encourage these attributes in children.

In the second section, the teachers, senior teacher, and research associates contribute their own individual reflections regarding their insights, and highlight their own learning and their views of multimodal literacies.

In the conclusion, we consider implications to support all teachers to become enquiring and critically reflective practitioners.

**Affordances of pedagogical documentation**

We use the term “pedagogical documentation” in the way it is used by Dahlberg (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, pp. 147–148) as both content and a process. *Pedagogical documentation as content* was documented data gathered about children and events where literacies were evident. It included videotape recordings, written narrative stories, still photographs, written notes, samples of work, and transcripts of interviews with parents. These different types of data had their own qualities that made each better suited for somewhat different purposes.

Case study parents were asked about the value of video recordings compared with profile books (which included narrative stories, photographs, commentary on learning and development, and planning). From parents’ perspectives, both forms offered insight into their child within the kindergarten context when they were not there. Video recordings had the advantage of being a “live” in-action form of documentation. Portfolios showed children’s development and learning over time and place.
On videos:

The video was interesting to see, because [we were not present] when the video was done. That was what we learned. Because when we are present we’re out of sight or not, there’s still in her mind the knowledge that we’re near. And that’s a different dynamic. (Neil)

On portfolios:

I find it really interesting seeing things that have happened when I’m not there. Seeing things that we know nothing about because she often doesn’t tell us. . .She’s often not terribly good at saying what’s happening at kindy, and if she does it’s often unintelligible. (Lucy)

This is the most useful format for knowing what happens at kindy, because I ask Ben what’s happened at kindy . . . and you get very little response. (Andrea)

The video recording followed a child through a kindergarten session. The continuity over a half day revealed something of the child’s state of being:

He seems very happy though. That’s ultimately I think [most important]. The video suggests that he just, he loves it there and he’s very comfortable in his space I think. (Angela)

The video also allowed parents to analyse interactions. For example, Angela noticed ways Jonathan interacted with a friend:

There was quite a nice communication exchange with Sam without any words at all and that was over the trampoline. They actually switched places a couple of times almost naturally taking turns without saying ‘It’s my turn, get off.’ They didn’t have to say anything, they just kind of, one pulled themselves up and one jumped off and then the other pulled themselves up and they kind of knew so, and that was interesting. They didn’t need any more words. . .They got the result they wanted without even talking to each other. (Angela)

However, in largely unedited form the video was lengthy and could be tedious to watch:

With the DVD you get a lot of stuff that you don’t need to see. You know five minutes of something which the first time around you were really fascinated by, but then [it is repetitive]. (Andrea)

The portfolio offered stories over time as the child engaged in a variety of tasks and interactions:

The thing I found most interesting was . . . seeing him help another child doing something. . . .I was fascinated by the portfolio because it’s a photographic record of what I don’t see and I think it’s good to see him interacting . . . and doing something different, like for example the bubbles. (Angela)

I think it’s an outstanding piece of work on your behalf as professionals. . .We like the idea that each page captures a vignette, it’s a ‘slice of life approach’. I think that’s useful, because you can dip into it. The fact that it’s focused around the interpersonal aspects, we thought was good. (Neil)
The portfolio is a real snapshot and there’s a lot of variety. . .I think one of the messages for me is that his learning is taking place through lots of different activities and we don’t always see . . . You know you come in and the activities are set up, but I think to myself, ‘I bet he doesn’t even go near those things’. (Andrea)

Portfolios were also shared with the child.

He’s very proud of it and he loves to look at it. He loves to. He continues to love the photos. But it looks like you’re doing heaps of projects and things so it’s pretty cool. (Angela)

From a research team perspective, portfolios offered a capacity to document in different situations over time, and analyse learning and development, progression, and complexity. But unlike video recordings, individual items presented a static view, because the episode for documenting had already been chosen and “set” within the frame of analysis chosen by the recorder.

Videotape recordings on the other hand, as Maggie writes in her reflections (pp. 89–90), were able to “capture the multidimensional”, provide “modes and modal combinations that are able to be more fully captured in a video text”, and capture activities in “real time”. We refer the reader to Maggie’s reflections, which present a discussion about the affordances of video as a medium.

Pedagogical documentation as process involved the whole research team, working as individuals, in pairs, as small groups, and with the whole team and parents. We examined and discussed the documented material, holding an overall focus on the research questions, but retaining an openness to other ideas and questions. For example, as individuals we would examine a videotape of one of the case study children, and then come together as a group to discuss what we had seen. At times the process surprised us by illuminating aspects of interactions that we may not have noticed if we had not had a record of them and taken the time to examine them. Often we went over the same material again and again, often seeing an aspect we had not noticed before.

An example was the ways in which the boys ignored Heather’s and Yvette’s attempts to get listened to in the list writing episode discussed on p. 69. This prompted us to discuss the power dynamics at work here and whether gender was a factor. Gender and power dynamics are issues that we decided need to be further investigated.

Our experiences reinforced the value of analysing data over and over to reach new interpretations both alone and in discussion with others. It seemed that over time the participants became more open to the interpretations of others and to the value of seeking alternative interpretations. These analytic processes have become more embedded within pedagogical practice for these participants.

Affordances of reading and writing

In the early stages of the project, we set aside time in “pedagogical discussion sessions” to discuss research-based and theoretical readings relevant to the research focus. The purpose was to:

- investigate the thinking about and use of concepts and approaches relevant to our project
- keep up to date in our knowledge of relevant research and theory
- develop a wider view and understanding through the process of discussing different perspectives on the same material.
Each member of the discussion group (teachers, research associates, and senior teacher), was asked to come to the discussion session, having read the two readings under consideration. Later we extended this to each coming to the session having prepared a “one pager” of written comments beforehand, on key points we got from the reading. We were introduced to the idea of using written “one pagers” as a manageable way of getting ideas on to paper, by the Bush St COI research team, at a Ministry of Education hui of round three COIs (Mayo, Henson, & Smith, 2008). The way we used the idea of the “one pager” was not to prescribe the commentary—it included, for example, points that made sense to the participant, aspects that had not been thought of before, questions raised by the reading, linkages to own experiences, and food for thought in relation to the COI research. Each person in turn presented their views from their written “one pager”, and the group discussed the contributions.

The readings brought us into contact with new theoretical ideas and research studies. We used these in the study, drawing particularly on theoretical ideas about the nature of affordance, and on research studies investigating multimodal literacies. Yvette’s comments offer a glimpse into how the readings offered a platform against which to gauge ideas and perhaps confirm or intensify thinking, and a springboard for thinking differently or more deeply:

One of our research questions is to investigate how different literacies interact and support each other. Within this focus group example I can see parents are grappling with the same thing we as researchers are, they are beginning to notice the interwoven nature of literacies. As I continued to reflect on this example I was reminded of a segment in a book I am currently reading titled *Insights: Behind early childhood pedagogical documentation*, in which Fleet, Patterson and Robertson (2006) promote the sharing of pedagogical documentation with families. They suggest that through doing this stronger relationships are encouraged and a new type of relationship can be developed with families, ‘a relationship that centres on shared understandings of children’s learning where an ‘intellectual’ partnership with children is formed. This enables parents, teachers and children to reflect and search for meaning together’. (Fleet et al., 2006, p. 356)

The sharing of this example encouraged critical thinking. As we unpack ideas together we are generating a critical culture of investigation within the kindergarten, we are encouraging the concept Fleet at al (2006) call the interrelationship between pedagogical documentation and community. I am now challenged to think about the ways we can continue to have these meaningful discussions with parents. (Yvette, Milestone 4, March 2007)

The act of writing the “one pagers” seemed to encourage each person to thoughtfully process and synthesise the reading, and the social practice of having a turn to discuss their thinking within a larger group allowed points of difference and similarity to be uncovered, and new ideas and interpretations to be made.

Writing was also one of the ways in which teachers documented children’s processes of learning. For example, Mandy’s written documentation alongside the photographic documentation of Joseph’s strategy of linking the kindergarten bikes so they could all be pulled along together was discussed on p. 25. We wonder whether putting a strategy in a different mode is useful for seeing it in a different way.

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1 An example of the parent focus group discussion about the nature of “literacies”.
In summary, we suggest that the readings offered “food for thought”. The process of group discussions, in which each person had a turn to present, seemed to facilitate learning by enabling divergent and similar views to be foregrounded. Writing had a capacity to facilitate a deliberative, processed, and reflective kind of learning. Writing assisted teachers and researchers to enquire into theory and practice and to convey ideas in a focused way. Writing drew attention to Joseph’s strategies in ways that photographic documentation alone would not have.

**Teacher as enquirer**

Finally, we conjecture that when teachers become critical and self-reflective within themselves, and value critique and being open to other perspectives as a way to understand children and their own practice, they are also more likely to value and encourage such attributes within children. When teachers are competent in multimodal literacies, they are better able to resource children to become competent also.

**Research team reflections**

**Yvette**

I began teaching at Wadestown Kindergarten, April 2003. Prior to this I had held a strong interest in the multiple ways that children communicated. The work of Malaguzzi was something I was particularly interested in, coupled with project learning that has been at the forefront of the work undertaken in Reggio Emilia centres within Italy (Edwards, Gandini & Forman,. 1998). Howard Gardner’s (1991) ideas of multiple intelligences as well as research undertaken by De Bono (1999) (particularly the seven hats of thinking), seemed to fit with my developing philosophy and I spent a few years exploring these within the early childhood centres I was involved in.

When I arrived at Wadestown Kindergarten my ideas continued and combined with Mandy’s. She, too, was interested in project learning and together we worked through ideas on what this might look like for us as a new team. ICT was a particular passion of mine and together we pursued the ways in which this could be used to document children’s learning through the project approach. This was a catalyst for much change in terms of the ways in which we presented stories of learning. As we furthered our interest in project learning at Wadestown Kindergarten we began to “notice” the many languages that children were accessing to represent and communicate their ideas. Near to our time of applying for the third round of COIs Maggie introduced us to the term *multiple literacies* and we began to explore ideas presented to us through the work of The New London group who offer a broader view of literacy. This term *multiple literacies* drew me back to concepts and ideas I had already explored. I saw children’s learning and communication as multifaceted but was interested in delving into these ideas deeper.

It is interesting to reflect on the ideas that we held in the initial stages of our journey. I suppose, for me, my ideas of multiple literacies were still firmly aligned with “the hundred languages of children”, that multiple literacies was about avenues of expression. Over the last three years our ideas have been honed, as we have gathered data, read literature, and made connections with other research. The COI programme has given opportunity for us to deepen our understandings of multiple literacies. From the onset, the journey has been one of much discovery, enlightenment, and exciting discoveries, in which our ideas have morphed. The writings of Kress (2000, 2003), as
already explained, had a huge impact on the developments of our ideas. In reflecting on our views of multiple literacies I can see the progression in thinking as I now view multimodal literacies as ways of conceptualising and knowing, not only as avenues of expression and communication.

Goodfellow and Hedges (2007) explain, “it is through participating in inquiry that practitioners develop their capacity to think critically, reflect deeply and, in the process, develop new understandings” (p. 203). For me, participating in this journey has been one of excitement, development, and growth. Through becoming a teacher-researcher, and through participating in the COI programme, we have been given the opportunity and time to critically reflect on our practice, to reflect on our relationships, to explore what it is we do at Wadestown Kindergarten, to recognise and analyse what we are seeing, and to act on our findings. For me, the insights that we have gathered have encouraged me to look at the ways that this can be made evident for all children and families. Family involvement has for us been an important part of our research journey. Through this relationship and through the furthering of these relationships we have been offered many rich insights. Miro was a catalyst in our initial ideas about family literacies, and a catalyst for me to begin wondering how we could connect with families on a deeper level. We reflect on the ways in which families have contributed to the project, and how parent engagement in the programme over time has deepened, as the research findings have impacted on our ideas and teaching practice. It definitely has impacted on the ways in which I connect with families within the programme, hold conversations to draw out their views of their child’s learning, and respond to their voice. We are excited by this and look forward to continuing to build this community of learners.

A huge thing for me has been developing my confidence presenting our findings to the wider early childhood community. This has been a transformative experience for the whole teaching team I think. As we have furthered our ideas, we have become excited by the stories we have been able to share. I recall an article by Smiles and Short (2006) that we read along our journey about transforming the teacher’s voice through writing, suggesting that sometimes we have to reach beyond our immediate connections to broader spheres, and writing is an avenue for this. It has been a highlight to be able to participate in dissemination and for us (the teaching team) to develop confidence in writing for publications.

**Mandy**

Over the past few years that I have taken part in this research, I have been both inspired and challenged. Inspired by all the readings I have read, the insights that others have shown and taught me, and the changes I have seen, now that I am viewing literacies in another lens. The shift in lens is away from an emphasis on traditional print-based literacies, to a lens that is wider, incorporating many literacies; for example, art or climbing or twirling or dancing. I look at what the possibilities are for children’s learning and development that emerge from these wider literacies.

In turn my challenges have been great too. I have had to shelve some of my prior beliefs about the nature of literacies and documentation. At Teachers’ College I learnt to use a checklist of abilities, e.g. the child could write their name, hold a pencil correctly, write from left to right. I am now doing more documentation about different literacies that incorporates a story around the episode, and might include input from my discussion with the child’s mum. I have been stretched and
pulled in regards to my thinking and introduced into a whole new world of ideas and terminology. But what a trip it has been, and will continue to take me on, over the following years.

I can easily see that these literacies are in action and that they have their place on the same plane as the more “traditional” print-based ones, but I am also constantly battling with the way that I was taught to believe before. For so long we were told that reading and writing were very important for future education, our own and that of the children we are teaching. And they are still important but through this study we can see that they are not the only and most valid way of getting a message across that you are trying to communicate. And in turn as a truly visual learner who prefers other options than just the written word, I have been encouraged to know that other children with a similar learning style to me will now be able to express themselves in a variety of modes.

I have also learnt a lot of new ideas in regards to family literacies. Through all the discussions around Miro’s and James’s families, and our thoughts and insights after the whānau interviews, all of these put together showed us that the children do use literacies that are prevalent and supported in their families and home life too. After attending Ben M.’s interview and hearing more about the family’s love for supporting Ben in his sport, and ‘physicalness’ with so much time and patience, I could see that they were supporting this style of communicating that they could see within Ben. I had never before looked at the ‘physicalness’ of children’s play in this way.

And also the same with Kate’s family. Being in the interview with Kate’s family augmented my knowledge of her and her history. I found out about the humour that occurs daily within the house, saying everyone’s names backwards, games of eye spy. It made my knowledge of her much richer. I could get the jokes. And also the art in their house…surrounded by Grandma’s paintings. And there always being paper out for Kate and her brother to use and create with, and then seeing this at kindergarten with Kate regularly being involved in creating at the collage table. When you hear directly from home, you know so much more about the family.

In regards to my thinking when I am writing up stories, I think I am still on a journey with this one. I am sometimes seeing places where I could add my thoughts and this feels like it fits just right, but other times I wonder if that would be too much. I’d like to use this as an opportunity to weave in some of the research and theory I’ve been introduced to even if it’s only for my own professional development. Something for me to keep working on, finding the right words to use.

One area I have enjoyed the most about this research is in regards to presenting to all my peers. I love the moment when you are telling a story, or explaining a case study example and people go “oh yeah that is like…” and they name a child to whom they can relate this topic straight away. So many of them are also realising that there are more ways to communicate and many of them come up to us afterwards and say it is so great to hear that these research findings are getting out there. Many of them talk about their communities and how they want their children writing their names and working on the alphabet, and when they hear us talk they say that they will go back to their centres with this information to share with their families.
André

To be honest, when I first joined the teaching team at Wadestown Kindergarten I didn’t know anything about multimodalities/multiple literacy theory. The thing that I knew that came closest to it was the concept of “multiple intelligence”. I could understand and get my head around this because I saw evidence of this theory in action as I observed the children in my care who were all full of wonderful potential but all with different abilities. I also thought that this theory was pretty similar to others including that of the research into children’s schemas where children are “categorised” into different ways of learning/behaviour and fully focused on exploring these interests to make sense and to fully understand their current interests. The way I try to view most theory is to fit it all together like a puzzle and take bits and pieces from different places as I believe it is the learner who should direct the teacher. There are always exceptions to any rule.

I was a reliever when I started and didn’t know what was happening. It wasn’t until I read through some articles, talked to you all and saw what you were doing—interviewing parents, videotaping children—that I understood how you were going about the research. I saw what was going on here: I actually found the emphasis on multimodalities was part of the centre, how things were, part of the culture. So coming into Wadestown Kindergarten was a real eye opener and quite a steep learning curve. Professionally it has been a great experience learning what was a new approach to teaching and learning. In particular, a project approach was something I had not followed through in depth. It has a lot to do with the kindergarten being a community of learners. Everyone has a part; parents and grandparents come through and contribute time and resources. Probably I am now more into letting children direct learning. I noticed a bit of that in the literature. I support children when they need certain things but I don’t lead the direction. I give children more choice, such as at mat time when children now stand up and say their piece, rather than me planning five songs and two stories, and then finish. I exert a bit of control, like a conductor, otherwise it would be chaos. This offers children opportunity to find their confidence in a group.

I am still learning a lot and don’t claim to be an expert on our research and what I have learnt so far. Someone asked me the other day what we were doing for our research when I went to pick my son up from his crèche. This question always makes me feel quite nervous as I don’t want to seem like a moron and give a bad answer, so the way I answered this teacher’s question was to ask her if she had heard about Gardner or Kress and their work. She told me she had read a bit so I told her about our research and methodology and a brief outline of our work to date. This seemed to get her interested and she is now keen to come and visit and see our work first hand.2

Lynette

As part of professional development I was involved in facilitating on computers in early childhood programmes in 2004 and 2005. I became aware of a broadening of the concept of literacy to include children’s developing competency at deciphering messages from print, visual images, movement, and sound, often when these are being delivered simultaneously. ICT was seen as

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2 This teacher did come to visit the kindergarten and saw the work first hand.
providing opportunities for children to develop an understanding of how to make meaning from different mediums.

My understanding of multiple literacies deepened through initial discussions with Yvette, Mandy, and Maggie as we worked together on a *Kei Tua o te Pae* project. As we revisited the team’s documentation on their Medieval project, the multiple ways that children involved in the project had explored, made meaning, and then shared their understanding about particular aspects of the investigation that interested them, became increasingly evident and included sewing, painting, drawing, and construction both with boxes, collage, and outside in the sandpit. This early documentation also highlighted the value that the teaching team placed on whānau participation. Throughout the Medieval project, the teachers’ understanding and valuing of different modes of sharing meaning making continued to grow. This awareness and valuing meant that teachers were more responsive to different children’s modes of communication. In turn, this responsiveness validated the mode of communication for individual children and their whānau and also seemed to support children to further develop their favourite mode and to try out others.

I remember a particular episode that we used early in the project involving Charlie’s dancing. Charlie was a quiet child at kindergarten, but his interest in expressing himself through dance and demonstrating his competence with this form of communication developed as the teachers supported his literacy. As his confidence grew, he opened up opportunities for other children’s engagement in dance. His sense of himself as a confident, competent communicator was enhanced by the value that other children, his whānau, and the teachers placed on his dancing. The team was also beginning to explore the use of video in documenting aspects of children’s learning that were difficult to show in traditional ways and the benefits of videoing short dance episodes enabled Charlie’s competence to be revisited and shared with his wider whānau who then came to kindergarten to see him dancing. This episode is also an example of a concept the COI research explored further around the affordance of different literacies—the affordance dance offered Charlie as a mode of expression and communicating with others enhanced his image of himself as a competent and confident communicator.

Engaging in pedagogical discussion, both about the research data and the articles we read, with the teaching team and the researchers was an effective way to explore and further develop our ideas and understanding. These discussions were very precious as time was limited. The research has deepened and broadened my understanding of the Communication strand of *Te Whāriki* and the role that a focus on multimodal literacies can have for children who are developing and refining various forms of communication in order to make meaning and convey their understanding to others.

The COI research has also highlighted that when teachers engage in depth with whānau about their child’s learning it has very real benefits for children’s further learning and teachers’ ability to enhance this. The building of strong relationships with the case study children’s whānau was supported through discussions at the kindergarten and also through the interviews held at parents’ homes. Our challenge is how to incorporate this engagement more effectively with more whānau in our very busy centres.
But perhaps the most significant outcome of the research for me as a senior teacher was to witness the continuing growth of the teaching team. Yvette, Mandy, and André were already reflective practitioners, but their ability to articulate their developing pedagogy of multimodal literacies and their COI journey to the ECE sector and beyond, has grown enormously. The journey has been one of huge growth, not only about multimodal literacies and the implications for teaching practice in our early childhood centres, but also in meeting the challenges offered through being involved in such an in-depth action research project for three years. I appreciate immensely the expertise and commitment that Maggie and Linda have shared so willingly with the research team.

**Maggie**

I have enjoyed being one of the research associates for the Wadestown Kindergarten COI project. For me the project brought together long-time personal interests in early childhood curriculum, learning and teaching, ideas about literacy, and the use of video as a pedagogical and research tool. It is the affordances of video as a medium and its role in helping us to engage in critical enquiry that I would like to focus on in these reflections.

Video’s capacity to capture the multidimensional is something that captivated me when I first started videoing in early childhood centres, about 20 years ago. I remember referring to this once in a presentation as video’s capacity to capture the “un-write-downable”.

The “un-write-downables” we looked to video to provide in the Wadestown Kindergarten COI project included the modes and modal combinations able to be more fully captured in a video text. Video gave us better access to the dynamics of action, the use of body language, gestures, and facial expressions, and qualities such as the intonation, timing, and emotional tone of a voice; or the intensity, direction, and duration of a gaze. Video not only helped us to more fully appreciate the affordances of different modes, but also the extent to which modes are used in combination.

Video enabled us to capture activities children were engaged in that happened too fast or were too intricate for us to fully apprehend in “real time”. Playing and replaying sections of the videos, as we frequently did, allowed us opportunities to “unpack” some of the detail and helped alert us to things we had previously missed. This is what happened, for example, with Ben M.’s participation in a dramatic play episode about the arrival of a new baby. Our initial impression was that Ben had been “flitting in and out” of the drama and had we been writing up this observation this is probably how we would have portrayed him. It was only after viewing the footage several times that we became aware that Ben had maintained a connection to the dramatic play and that he was observing from the periphery, at times out of camera frame.

Etienne Wenger (1998) says, “We pay attention to what we expect to see, we hear what we can place in our understanding, and we act according to our worldviews”. Events such as us misconstruing Ben’s involvement in the drama became the catalyst for useful discussions about what did and didn’t get videoed, what we did and didn’t notice, what we tended to privilege, and why. This particular episode led to a discussion about children on the periphery of the action often being “simply not noticed” (Meade, 1987) and prompted us to give closer consideration to the role of watching and listening as ways of learning. Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía, Arauz, Correa-Chávez, and Angelillo (2003) say that “intent participation” need not involve direct action, but may
involve “keenly observing and listening in anticipation of or in the process of engaging in an
endeavour” (p. 178). There is, they suggest, a key distinction between observing with the
expectation of future involvement and observing incidentally. Kei Tua o te Pae (Ministry of
Education, 2005) draws attention to children “initially visible on the periphery of photos” later
being drawn in to interests and activities (Ministry of Education, 2005, Bk10, p. 10).

The use of video lent itself well to the kind of collaborative interpretive analysis (teacher
researchers, senior teacher, research associates, and parents) that became central to our work. In
the course of these collaborative viewings and discussions we were frequently alerted to things we
had bypassed as individuals and to different perspectives or interpretations of the same event or
situation. Video worked well in allowing viewers more direct access to data they could interpret
for themselves. This was illustrated, for example, by parents in an interview, talking about what
they had been able to tell from their child’s body posture in the video. Parents’ knowledge of their
child and the knowledge of the family context parents brought to their viewing, added key
dimensions to our analysis.

It was sometimes a challenge to achieve a balance between capturing children’s activity
authentically and sufficiently fully and the “watchability” of the video. Ochs and Capps (2001,
cited in van Oers, 2003) suggest that the attempt to balance authenticity and coherence is
characteristic of every narration. Our research agenda kept us mindful that too much in-camera or
post-camera editing can mean missing or distorting crucial moments. However, relatively unedited
tracts of video footage can make for challenging viewing. There are limits to what even the most
devoted of parents will engage with. On the other hand, although video footage of children
watching and listening, for example, does not generally make for engaging viewing, it was
important for us to become more alert to the amount of watching and listening happening with
particular children as well as more generally in the kindergarten. The tensions between
authenticity and considerations of audience are complex, but given that teachers can encounter
similar tensions with pedagogical documentation, it would seem useful for the early years’
education field to explore this further.

I have learnt a lot from the opportunity to discuss and analyse data with colleagues in the research
team and have relished the opportunities we have had to explore and discuss ideas and readings
together. Another highlight has been the opportunity to be a relieving teacher at the kindergarten
for half a day per fortnight for much of the first two years of the COI project. I gained such a lot
from the time I spent alongside children, teachers, and families, and am enormously grateful for
this enriching “cross-sectoral” opportunity.

Linda

The process of working within the Wadestown Kindergarten COI project has deepened my
understanding of the roles that differing literacies may play in communication, conceptualisation,
and knowledge creation. My shift in thinking has been away from a predominant focus on the
form that literacies take, such as expressive arts, or mathematical thinking, or visual arts, and the
competencies gained through participating in a particular form, towards an appreciation that each
literacy is unique in the affordances it offers. It was theoretical ideas about the notion of
“affordance” as the way particular capacities of a literacy may facilitate different types of
communication and learning that were introduced to us through the work of Kress (2000) and Carr (2000), that got me and the rest of the research team thinking down this track. And so, not only can ECE open possibilities for children to be artists or scientists or mathematicians or writers or sports people, but through participation in differing literacy modes, children and adults can also create and convey understandings that contribute to a richer society. Richer because it is multidimensional, and recognises and values different ways of contributing.

I have always been struck by Mason Durie’s speech to Hui Taumata in 2001, where he talked about education as preparing people “to actively participate as citizens of the world”. I think multiliterate competence can support this goal. Mason Durie was speaking about Māori educational advancement. One of the goals for Māori education, he said, was enabling Māori to live as Māori, to have access to te ao Māori. Cultural literacy is one area that we did not consider within our project, although we discussed it in the early days. I think it is timely to investigate notions of cultural literacy within an ECE setting, not only because we need to take some responsibility for enabling children “to live as Māori”, but also because of the ethnic and cultural diversity among children today.

I enjoyed being one of the research associates for this project. I enjoyed the opportunity to analyse data from Wadestown Kindergarten alongside the rest of the team, and I was immensely struck by the power of video documentation as a tool for analysis and a catalyst for discussion with families. The interviews with families confirmed my beliefs that parents have knowledge of their own children that we in ECE rarely tap into in any depth. The project showed that interviews, focused on pedagogical documentation about the child and a desire on our part to find out, is one way in which we might do this.

Conclusion

Our experience points to the value and importance of:

- reading and discussing theoretical and research-based literature
- gathering and analysing documentation and data from our own setting and from families
- finding out about divergent views through formal and informal means, using a range of tools and methods
- analysing documentation by oneself and within a wider group, and including parents in analyses.

These activities supported a culture of critical enquiry that flowed through into interactions and practices within participants’ spheres of influence.

If we are to build a “culture of enquiry” for all teachers, we also need facilitating environments to enable such a culture to flourish. A facilitating environment such as we had in this COI project included professional expertise and access to readings; tools for documentation, especially access to ICT—video cameras, photographic equipment, computers, printers, and scanners; and time to experiment with different ways of documenting, get together as a group, hold the discussions, analyse the documentation, and talk with and interview parents. These should be available to every teacher in an ECE setting.