This copy has been supplied by the Library of the University of Otago on the understanding that the following conditions will be observed:

1. To comply with s56 of the Copyright Act 1994 [NZ], this thesis copy must only be used for the purposes of research or private study.

2. The author's permission must be obtained before any material in the thesis is reproduced, unless such reproduction falls within the fair dealing guidelines of the Copyright Act 1994. Due acknowledgement must be made to the author in any citation.

3. No further copies may be made without the permission of the Librarian of the University of Otago.
Field-Based Training for Early Childhood Education Teachers in Solomon Islands

Joanna Daiwo

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

November, 2001
This study examined the impact of a recently introduced field-based training programme on the roles, relationships and activities of early childhood education teachers working in the Solomon Islands kindergartens, identifying and analysing any possible changes to their professional behaviour and teaching practice as a result of the training. It investigated the quality of the curriculum programmes being implemented, and parent and community people's views of the early childhood education programme and how the new approach to kindergarten education had generally impacted on families and the communities. The research study also considered how well the training programme suited the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographic context.

The project adopted a qualitative, formative and evaluative methodology that included in-depth interviews, participant observation and examination of appropriate documents. Sixteen early childhood education teachers who had received field-based training were interviewed for their perspectives of the training programme. Thirteen early childhood administrators and thirty-five representatives of members of the community were also interviewed to obtain their views of the programme. Participant observations were carried out in two kindergartens for the duration of a week in each kindergarten.

The thesis reports that the field-based training programme has succeeded in fulfilling its goal of training employed untrained kindergarten teachers throughout Solomon Islands. The educators have made significant gains in higher levels of reflection, confidence, sensitivity and competence and have engaged in reflective practice. The training programme is the first of its kind and the only field-based training programme currently operating in Solomon Islands. The training programme has important implications for foreign aid donors to majority nations like the Solomon Islands, and has promoted another way of viewing early childhood education. It has reinforced Solomon Islanders' indigenous pride and identity and has emerged as a mechanism for a gender-sensitive perspective in the Solomon Islands' communities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Developing this doctoral thesis has been a pleasant learning experience. However, it would not have been completed without the assistance of several special individuals who deserve special recognition and mention. As well as certain organisations that provided monetary support in view of my scholarship, and the fieldwork component of my research study.

In this respect I wish to sincerely thank all those people who have readily assisted in one way or another for their invaluable input, assistance, support, encouragement and inspiration. In particular, I am grateful and greatly indebted to my supervisors, Professor Anne B. Smith, Director of the Children's Issues Centre, and Dr Bruce W. McMillan, Lecturer at the School of Education.

I wish to thank Professor Anne B. Smith, for her scholarly advice, guidance, assistance, support, encouragement and insight during the entire research study. Her reflective and constructive input, understanding, patience and contributions to my effort were most encouraging, inspiring, outstanding and commendable.

I would like to thank Dr Bruce W. McMillan, for his advice, input, support, assistance, encouragement, guidance and enthusiasm. His helpful ideas and insight, particularly during the final stage of the thesis were greatly appreciated.

Many thanks to the New Zealand Government and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which is responsible for administering the Official Development Assistance Fund from which I was awarded a scholarship to undertake my PhD at the University of Otago, in Dunedin, New Zealand. Without the generous assistance and financial support of the New Zealand Government, I would not have been here to begin with, and researching and writing up this thesis would not have been possible in the first place.

I am grateful to the Bernard van Leer Foundation, for awarding the research grant that made it possible for me to travel to Solomon Islands to carry out the research fieldwork.
The University of Otago provided a proportion of the amount of money I needed to finance the different aspects of the fieldwork within Solomon Islands. I am grateful to these organisations for their generosity and thoughtfulness.

My sincere thanks to the kindergarten teachers, administrators, parents and members of the community who participated in this study and the people of Solomon Islands for their informative input, help, support, encouragement and whose enthusiasm during the research fieldwork was inspiring and appreciated.

The fieldwork would not have been as successful without the generous help and support of a lot of people within the Solomon Islands education system, provincial education boards, local communities and the wider society. In particular, I am thankful for the assistance given by and support of the national coordinator, the director of primary education, and the provincial coordinators. The Western Province coordinator whose own professional work had to be put on hold, for the duration of the research fieldwork in her province. She sent letters of notification to chiefs, church leaders, teachers and people of the islands and/or communities where the participant observation component of the study took place. She accompanied me to most of the different research locations within Western province, and became a link person who negotiated with chiefs to ensure their support. My appreciation goes particularly to the people of Kena, Hunda, (Kolombangara), Nusabanga, Rarumana, Baraulu, Pinadapada, Munda, and Gizo Islands who were most helpful and generous.

Many thanks to the chief education officers responsible for the provinces I visited, for their assistance, support and encouragement.

The Children Issues Centre at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, provided physical space for me to review literature and write-up the thesis.

I am thankful to Mike, Judith, Megan, Rachael, Kate and Karen, colleagues and friends in the Children’s Issues Centre for their friendship, kindness, professional assistance, support and encouragement.

I wish to thank each and every one of these people and organisations for the different roles they have played in the different stages of my thesis preparation, writing-up and in the entire process to its completion.
Last, but not least, I would like to record my gratitude to my family: Mum, Agnes; Brothers, Henry, Michael, Joseph, and Alfred; Sisters, Perpetua, May, Margaret, and Sarah; and my nieces and nephews, whose steadfast belief in me, continual prayers, support and encouragement have been a source of inspiration, motivation, determination and perseverance. They have been and will continue to be my guardian angels.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map of Solomon Islands ii
Abstract iii
Acknowledgements iv
Table of Contents vii

Chapter One: Introduction 1
Chapter Two: Solomon Islands: The Context and Background 5
  2.1 The history 5
  2.2 The geography and climate 9
  2.3 The people 11
  2.4 The Government: Political, administrative and legal structures 14
  2.5 The economy: Issues, trends, performance and policy 16
  2.6 The education system 18
    2.6.1 Early childhood education 21

Chapter Three: Literature Review 26
  3.1 The benefit of investing in early childhood education programmes: Perspectives from the majority world 27
  3.2 The quality phenomenon 30
    3.2.1 Structural and process quality 33
    3.2.2 Training, education and experience 34

Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework 46
  4.1 The Ecological conceptual Framework 47
    4.1.1 How the development of a Solomon Islands’ training curriculum for ECE teachers can be supported by Ecological Theory 48
    4.1.2 The Child 50
    4.1.3 Microsystems affecting the child 52
    4.1.4 Mesosystem 55
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1.5</td>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.6</td>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.7</td>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The Sociocultural Approach</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>How can the sociocultural theory support the development of a Solomon Islands' training curriculum for ECE teachers?</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>Factors affecting the child's learning and development</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>The zone of proximal development</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Five: Methodology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Rationale for methodology</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The aims of the study and research questions</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Ethics and participant recruitment</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>A representation of key participants' profiles</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Data collection and procedure</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Limitations of the study</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>The field-based training programme</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Six: Presentation of findings on Teachers' Perspectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Teachers' Perspectives</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.1</td>
<td>The importance of early childhood education</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2</td>
<td>The value of training for early childhood education teachers</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.3</td>
<td>How have teachers gained in confidence, competence and skills?</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.4</td>
<td>Teachers' assessment and evaluation skills</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.5</td>
<td>Personal skills and ambitions</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.6</td>
<td>Teacher-child relationship</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.7</td>
<td>A holistic early childhood education programme</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.8</td>
<td>Quality-inclusive programmes</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.9</td>
<td>The influence of culture</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.10</td>
<td>Encouraging gender inclusive relationships and equitable opportunities</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.11 Developing teacher, and parent and community relationships and support 125

Chapter Seven: Presentation of findings on Administrators' Views 134

7.1 Administrators' Views 135
7.1.1 Developing a sensitive philosophy 135
7.1.2 The partnership between Solomon Islands and New Zealand 139
7.1.3 Valuing autonomy and ownership 142
7.1.4 Professional roles and responsibilities of kindergarten teachers as perceived by administrators 144
7.1.5 Constraints 145

Chapter Eight: Presentation of findings on Community People's Viewpoints 152

8.1 Community People's Viewpoints 153
8.1.1 Family and community participation, involvement and support 153
8.1.2 Benefits for children, families and the community 155
8.1.3 How kindergarten children have behaved 164
8.1.4 The moral and spiritual dimension 166

Chapter Nine: Presentation of Kindergarten Observation Outcomes 169

9.1 Kindergarten Observation Outcomes 172
9.1.1 Teachers' administrative, leadership, planning, implementation and management skills 172
9.1.2 Teaching hours, class roll and teacher-child ratio 176
9.1.3 Play as a learning tool for young children 179
9.1.4 Encouraging creativity and advance learning skills in children 184
9.1.5 Developing peer relationships and friendships 195
9.1.6 Dealing with discipline issues 197

Chapter Ten: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations 203

Part One: Discussion of findings on Teachers' Perspectives 203
10.1 Teachers’ Perspectives 203
10.1.1 The advantages of training 204
10.1.2 Transformations in education being brought by early childhood education 207
10.1.3 The value of a holistic early childhood education programme, and quality inclusive curriculum programmes 209
10.1.4 The value of being culturally sensitive 211
10.1.5 The value of gender inclusiveness 213
10.1.6 The benefits of strong family and community relationships 216

Part Two: Discussion of findings on Administrators’ Views 220
10.2 Administrators’ Views 220
10.2.1 Developing a sensitive philosophy 220
10.2.2 The Solomon Islands and New Zealand partnership 223
10.2.3 Maintaining ownership of the field-based training programme 224
10.2.4 Constraints 226

Part Three: Discussion of findings on Members of the Community’s Viewpoints 229
10.3 Members of the Community’s Viewpoints 229
10.3.1 Family and community participation, involvement and support 229
10.3.2 How have children, families and community people benefited? 232
10.3.3 Transition to school: children’s experiences 236
10.3.4 The impact of the Church 239

Part Four: Discussion of the Kindergarten Observation Outcomes 242
10.4 The Kindergarten Observation Outcomes 242
10.4.1 Teachers’ administrative, planning, implementation and management skills 242
10.4.2 Play as a tool for children’s learning 244
10.4.3 Encouraging creativity and advance learning skills in children 248
### Part Five: Conclusions and Recommendations and Postscript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.4.4</td>
<td>Children's peer friendships and relationships</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1</td>
<td>The conclusions of the study</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.1</td>
<td>Training and reflective practice: professional development, education, experience, knowledge, skills, reflection, confidence, competence and sensitivity</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.2</td>
<td>A solitary and successful field-based training model</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.3</td>
<td>The field-based training programme promotes another way of viewing early childhood education</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.4</td>
<td>The field-based training programme reinforces the indigenous pride and identity of Solomon Islanders</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.5</td>
<td>The field-based training programme as a mechanism for a gender sensitive perspective</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.1.6</td>
<td>Implications for other development projects</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.2</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.2.1</td>
<td>There is need to employ additional trainers</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.2.2</td>
<td>Engaging in longer teaching experience</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.2.3</td>
<td>Further research</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.3</td>
<td>Postscript</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5.3.1</td>
<td>The prospect of a more peaceful and equitable society being restored when the values underpinning early childhood education are accepted by most citizens</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bibliography**

**Appendices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Letter from Professor Anne Smith asking for permission on my behalf to observe in a kindergarten in Dunedin</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Interview guide for teacher participants</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C Interview guide for initiators and designers of
the field-based training programme 307
D Interview guide for the coordinators 308
E Invitation letter to potential teacher participants
and consent form 309
F Research project pamphlet 311
G Consent form from Ethics Committee for
teacher and administrator participants 313
H Questionnaire form for teacher participants 315
I The research plan within Solomon Islands 317
J Fieldwork time line: Western Province research
segment 318
K A representation of Pidgin versions of key
participants’ interview excerpts 319
L Structure of the Field-based training
programme 322
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research project is primarily concerned with investigating the influence of a field-based training programme for early childhood education teachers in Solomon Islands. It adopts a qualitative, evaluative approach to examine teachers', administrators', parents' and members of the community's views of the field-based training programme, and observations in kindergarten settings.

The study is significant in various ways and the topic has been selected for professional and personal reasons. Fundamentally, the notions of early childhood education and field-based training are new initiatives and only recently introduced within the national education system in Solomon Islands. Thus, the research will be utilised as a mechanism to collect and record crucial data about the new concept of the training programme, how the training programme has influenced kindergarten teachers and how it has affected children, parents, families, the communities and the wider Solomon Islands society. Also, the study will serve as a source of, and contribute to, the theory and research field relevant to improving the quality of early childhood education in majority countries. The data will be valuable to researchers, policy makers and practitioners who are interested in obtaining information on early childhood education in Solomon Islands, and the introduction of an early childhood aid programme in the majority countries'. This study will provide new input into the literature on early childhood training, which has in the past been dominated by research carried out in Western countries.

The Solomon Islands' Government is determined to see the implementation of this field-based training initiative through, as it views the training of teachers as a crucial element in national potential building in the long term. The training package is a resource for trainees and trainers, with trainers utilising it to enhance their training approaches and to encourage teachers to be creative and imaginative in developing teaching resources from
local materials, with the assistance and support of families and members of the community. This study will contribute information on any barriers to effective implementation of the programme and suggest ways to improve its implementation.

Subsequently, the study is important for Solomon Islands\(^2\) because as a new concept, early childhood education has provided the people with another way of ascertaining how young children can learn life values, knowledge and skills. In contrast, young children’s traditional education is predominately carried out by village elders, chiefs, grandparents, parents and older siblings. The teaching structure is often informal and involves listening, observing, discussing, sharing, evaluating, explaining, assisted testing of skills and knowledge, and eventual self-testing of skills and knowledge by the young children participating in the process. The products of these self-examining sessions by pupils are then scrutinised by their teachers or by the rest of the family members, both nuclear and extended. This form of teaching practice is ongoing and does not involve time-tabling to guide those involved. In addition, life and cultural values, skills, knowledge, traditions, customs, norms, attitudes and expectations are also taught and passed on to younger members of the community. This traditional teaching process is verbal and has been in existence for generations. These traditional teachers utilise no text books, resources or materials, but rely on their own acquired traditional and cultural knowledge, skills and personal experiences in their endeavour to assist young children in their communities.

The establishment of the early childhood education programme initiated the introduction of early childhood education based on a curriculum within the Solomon Islands. Now children will continue to learn and develop, but with the support of qualified early childhood practitioners with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to help them plan activities and facilitate children’s learning. The programme has also filled an early education gap in the national education system. It provides a supplement to the other informal learning that children undergo in family and neighbourhood environments. It provides a complete and relevant learning process for young children and a linkage of their

---

\(^1\) Majority countries have been used to describe the developing nations, and minority nations have been used to describe the developed countries.

\(^2\) Solomon Islancs has been used to indicate the country; the Solomon Islands have been used to include all the islands that make up Solomon Islands.
kindergarten learning to their potential primary and secondary education. As a result, encouraging, enhancing and reinforcing a process where children can appropriately begin their learning at kindergarten and progress on to primary and secondary levels has become important for early childhood teachers in the Solomon Islands.

The conceptual basis for this study is the ecological and the sociocultural conceptual models of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Vygotsky (1978). I have adopted the ecological and the sociocultural approaches because I am looking at a community oriented early childhood programme with a component of a field-based training programme for kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands. These theories are also fundamental for my work because of their contribution to the understanding of the development and learning of young children, and their emphasis on the importance of social, cultural, historical, economic and political environments on children’s learning and development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) for example, highlighted the significance of the child participating in or being exposed to multiple learning settings with support from experienced adults and peers.

Development is enhanced as a direct function of the number of structurally different settings in which the developing person participates in a variety of joint activities and primary dyads with others, particularly when these others are more mature or experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 212).

Ecological and sociocultural theories (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett, 2000) emphasise that children’s learning and development is embedded in the social interactions and goals of the culture, as well as the wider social and political milieu.

My involvement in this study arose from and was inspired by my prior and professional association and collaboration with New Zealand teacher educators and academics. Also, my interest in it was influenced by my ethnicity as a Solomon Islander, and my concern for young children’s early education, and the place of research in Solomon Islands, as an indigenous and developing society. Also, I have been influenced and motivated by my scholastic, professional and personal aspirations. I am interested in the impact of early childhood education and field-based training on kindergarten teachers, children, parents, families, the village and members of the community and the wider society.
Furthermore, I engage in this research study from the perspective of a teacher educator who has become a researcher, as a student, a scholar, a professional, a member of the Solomon Islands teaching force, as a woman and as an indigenous Solomon Islander. As a teacher, I am interested in understanding the role of the field-based training programme in providing basic training for kindergarten teachers and its impact on the early childhood education sector and community. Also, as a teacher educator and researcher, I am keen to understand kindergarten teachers' roles, activities, and relationships with children, colleagues, parents, families and members of the community. I am further interested in understanding the process of teacher training, teaching practice, curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation, and management of kindergarten centres.

Below is the framework showing how the thesis is organised.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the background and context to Solomon Islands.

Chapter Three presents the literature review, focusing on the themes of early childhood education, teacher training for early childhood staff and characteristics such as quality.

Chapter Four examines the theoretical framework based on the ecological and sociocultural approaches, influenced by the principles of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Vygotsky (1978) respectively.

Chapter Five sets out the methodology, commencing with the rationale for the method adopted for this study.

Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine present the findings on teachers' perspectives; administrators' views; community people's viewpoints; and the kindergarten observation outcomes.

Chapter Ten presents the discussion, conclusion, recommendations and postscript. In parts one, two, three and four, of chapter ten, the findings on teachers, administrators, community people's perspectives and the kindergarten observation outcomes are discussed respectively, using the data from Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine. Part five of chapter ten is devoted to a discussion of the conclusions from the present study, recommendations and postscript.
Chapter Two focuses on Solomon Islands. I describe the general characteristics of the country, comprising the history, geography and the people. I next present an overview of the Government structures and the economy. The chapter concludes with an overview of the education system and the early childhood education field respectively.

The Solomon Islands’ context has been described in detail in line with the principles of Vygotsky, (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner, for example, advocates that “by analysing and comparing the micro, meso, and exosystems characterising different social classes, ethnic groups, or entire societies, it is possible to describe systematically and to distinguish the ecological effects of these larger social contexts as environments for human development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8). The immediate past history has contributed to shape the character of the people of the Solomon Islands.

2.1 The History

Solomon Islands is a culturally and ecologically diverse region with different explanations as to how it was first inhabited. However, historians, archaeologists and linguists agree that Solomon Islands may have been populated for as long as ten thousand years. During this period, experts believe that the first inhabitants, who were hunters and gatherers, travelled down from Southeast Asia. Archaeological and linguistic evidence also indicates that this group of people was followed some 4,000 to 5,000 years later by Austronesians, a neolithic people who eventually became prominent throughout these islands (Bennett, 1987; Stevenson, 1988; UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994).

Solomon Islanders lived in extended family groups inland or in coastal villages on their tribal lands, practising shifting agriculture, fishing, hunting, building houses and canoes, carving, weaving, feasting, dancing and story
telling. They kept very much to themselves in these isolated communities. Rule was by custom as interpreted by the village elders, although on some islands chiefly lines or extended families exercised a wider authority based on their prestige. In earlier times, ancestor worship was practised in many parts of the islands until Christianity brought about change in the people of the islands.

The first documented foreign contact with this region was made in 1568 by Alvaro de Mendana, a Spanish explorer who discovered the Solomon Islands, and named the group the ‘Isles of Solomon’ (Bennett, 1987; Stevenson, 1988; UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994). Many of the islands in the Solomon Islands still bear their original Spanish names. Thirty years after his first voyage and landing in the Solomon Islands, Mendana returned to establish a settlement. However, his dream of building a settlement was not successful due to fighting between members of his group and the indigenous people, who fiercely resisted this foreign intrusion, and also due to the settlers’ ongoing illness from malaria and other diseases. Mendana himself died in the Solomon Islands and a few months after his death, the remaining settlers departed to return to Spain.

Mendana’s arrival in Solomon Islands was followed by an influx of Western missionaries, traders, labour recruiters, beachcombers and castaways, and later by colonial administrators and other professionals. The influx being described did not really get under way until four hundred years later. There were also some Asian traders and labourers who had since then played an important role in the Solomon Islands’ economy. All these people had varying degrees of influence on the indigenous Solomon Islanders. This is apparent in the prevalent inclusion in the Solomon Islands’ culture of elements of Western and Asian cultures, ideologies, and material goods. Institutions such as the colonial administration, foreign companies, churches and schools have also contributed critically to an historical impact on Solomon Islands and its people.

Contact between the Solomon Islands and the Western World was often turbulent. While other Westerners visited the Solomon Islands from time to time to explore, trade and for whaling, they were often attacked by the indigenous people. Solomon Islands gained a reputation for being the most dangerous place in the Southwest Pacific in those days. However, for the most part, the islands were left alone and life remained much the same until the mid-nineteenth century. At this time, whaling ships stopped to clean their vessels,
traders came to settle, coconut plantations commenced to appear, labour recruiters arrived and missionaries began to establish missions. During this time, among the main factors troubling Solomon Islands was the uncontrolled forced labour trade for the Australian and Fijian sugar plantations, known as 'blackbirding,' where many Solomon Islanders were taken by ships, often against their will, to work as labourers on these plantations. During this period, a number of Westerners were murdered in the Solomon Islands, usually in retaliation for the activities of the blackbirders (Bennett, 1987, 2000; US World Journal, 1994).

This moved Britain to urgently bring some law and order to the islands. Britain's colonial interests were also heightened by German colonisation in the Pacific and an increasing French presence at that time. In 1893, Britain declared a protectorate over some of the islands in the Solomon Islands group. This resulted in the central region of Solomon Islands becoming a British Protectorate under the jurisdiction of the High Commission for the Western Pacific, which had its headquarters in Fiji. This declaration was also in response to Germany's claim to New Guinea and Bougainville, and to requests from the missionaries who insisted that the labour trade be brought under control. In 1896, Charles M. Woodford, (English) was appointed the first Resident Commissioner and set up his headquarters at Tulagi. The Santa Cruz group, Rennell and Bellona, became part of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1898 and 1899 respectively (Bennett, 1987; Stevenson, 1988; US World Journal, 1994). In 1900, other islands were added to the Protectorate, with Germany finally handing over its islands within the group to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Colonialism and Christianity were followed by an influx of foreign companies, while Chinese started their businesses after being brought into the territory as skilled labourers.

During the colonial period leading up to the Second World War, the British Government was perceived to have had no real goal beyond maintaining law and order and seeing Solomon Islanders and their land were not exploited. Revenues went towards the administration and establishment of a police force and a hospital at the colonial capital of Tulagi. Education was also left to the churches to administer and manage for the people.

Another significant landmark in Solomon Islands' history is the Second World War. In 1942, Japanese troops invaded the Solomon Islands. World
attention was focused briefly on Solomon Islands when the island of Guadalcanal, virtually unknown to the outside world, became the centre of a bitter, Homeric six month conflict between American and Japanese military forces during the war. The months that followed witnessed one of the bloodiest battles of the War in the Pacific. The war and its aftermath were significant for Solomon Islanders for a variety of reasons. The war left deep scars on the Solomon Islands and set a new era in the country’s development. Tulagi (capital, then) was destroyed by the Japanese, enabling Honiara to be built as the new capital out of what was left of the war infrastructure. Most of the early roads and airstrips in the Solomon Islands originated from the war. By the time the Japanese eventually withdrew in early 1943, thousands of lives had been lost on both sides in severe ground, sea and air battles. The landing of the United States and allied forces on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, resulted in the American forces recapturing the territory after some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific war. Solomon Islands became a turning point in the War in the Pacific. Many Solomon Islanders distinguished themselves with bravery by assisting allied forces as war scouts (UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994).

The social, cultural and political life of the people and their traditional customary environment now entered an accelerated period of change due to the disruptive external influences of the war as the colonial era approached its twilight years. The post-Second World War period was characterised by the rise of a proto-nationalist movement, termed as ‘Ma’asina Ruru’ or ‘Marching Rule,’ which took its inspiration from some Solomon Islanders who worked in voluntary American labour camps during the Second World War. The marching rule movement failed eventually, as it only happened at the local or regional level (US World Journal, 1994).

The government turned its attention to the basic developmental needs of the people, and local councils were established in 1952 (UNICEF, 1993), but they did not become elective until 1963. This process led Britain to develop a working policy to lead the Solomon Islands and its people to self-government and eventually to independence. Consequently, Britain began to promote general development and welfare among the people, with education and health improving greatly.

After a period of colonial rule under Britain, Solomon Islands ended its colonial era and became an independent state on July 7, 1978. Simultaneously,
Solomon Islands became a member of the Commonwealth and the United Nations. A National Parliament replaced the Legislative Assembly and the Chief Minister became the first Prime Minister of Solomon Islands. Throughout the country's history the most important players in influencing social transformations were colonial government officers, churches, other civil institutions and corporate businesses. History has also played an important role in impacting the process of development in Solomon Islands. The structure of the Solomon Islands' Government since independence has its roots in the colonial era; and has an important bearing on the implementation of development programmes throughout Solomon Islands.

2.2 The Geography and Climate

Solomon Islands is an archipelago of approximately 962 islands, islets, atolls and cays, stretching over a distance of approximately 1,600 kilometres in the Southwest Pacific. However, only about 350 islands are truly inhabited. Located in the coral-rimmed tropical waters of the Southwest Pacific, the Solomon Islands' closest neighbours include Papua New Guinea to the West, Vanuatu to the Southeast, New Caledonia to the South and Australia to the Southwest (UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994).

The country has a landmass of 28,369 square kilometres and includes six major islands, Choiseul, Isabel, New Georgia, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira (UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994). Guadalcanal is the largest island and Honiara the capital, with a population of about 40,000, is situated on its northern coast. Although the Northeast coast of Guadalcanal has extensive coastal plains, most of the larger islands are of volcanic origin.

Solomon Islands is a country of contrasts where mountains are covered in a variety of rare tropical forests in which colourful butterflies as big as birds still exist. Crocodiles can be seen sunbathing on mangrove sand; submarine volcanoes put on spectacular displays of natural fireworks and it is still possible to find numerous isolated beaches. The rainforests are rich in palms and ferns of different varieties. Over the years, a number of trees and flowering shrubs have been introduced and have flourished. Although there are no large endemic land mammals in the Solomon Islands, numerous species of native bats, rats, snakes, iguanas, wild pigs and other forms of wildlife are found in the islands. Spiders and several species of birds are abundant, and small
lizards, such as the house gecko, are plentiful. The seas around the islands are rich with a great variety of marine life, both vertebrate and invertebrate, while corals which form extensive reefs in the warm clear water, are found in every island of Solomon Islands.

The climate is tropical – hot, wet and humid, though temperatures are rarely extreme due to cooling prevailing winds blowing off the surrounding seas. The land breeze usually drops in the late afternoon, when there is a still, steamy period until the sun sets and the night breezes begin. The trade winds tend to also divide the climate into two seasons, ‘wet’ and ‘dry’, depending on the direction of the wind. It does not always follow true to pattern and in some years there is little variation. However, between the two seasons, a doldrum period can occur with little or no wind and hazy weather. The dry months run from April to October, when the Southeast trade winds can be experienced in the islands, with steady winds, fine days and occasional rain. The wet season falls within the months of November to March, a period characterised by a warmer and wetter Northwest monsoon. Thus, cyclones are common within and around the vicinity of Solomon Islands at this time. However, although the cyclones tend to start in the coral sea and in the Solomon Islands area, they usually move towards Vanuatu and New Caledonia or move down the coast of Australia, getting stronger as they advance.

Daytime temperatures are normally in the vicinity of 25 to 33 degrees Celsius, falling about 3 to 5 degrees at night, and with humidity ranging from 60 to 90%. Rainfall averages approximately 3,500mm per year, but it can be considerably heavier in the inland areas and on the windward side of the main islands (UNICEF, 1993).
2.3 The People

The population of the Solomon Islands is approximately 430,000 people. There are three main groups (Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian) comprising the population of Solomon Islands. The vast majority of the people are Melanesians, with most Polynesian people living on the outlying islands. The Micronesian people mostly occupy the western region of the country. The Melanesians comprise 93.4 percent, Polynesians 4 percent, and Micronesians 1.4 percent. The Micronesians are not indigenous, but immigrants that were brought in under colonial rule. Other immigrant groups are Europeans and Chinese. The quality of life has steadily been improving, with infant and total mortality rates dropping and life expectancy improving. However, in the past thirty years, Solomon Islands has had an exceptionally high rate of population growth, one of the highest in the world. The high population rate has important implications for the education system generally and for early childhood education in particular. Approximately 90 percent of the population dwells in rural regions. All ethnic groups can be found on both large and small islands (UNICEF, 1993; US World Journal, 1994).
Most people live in villages or hamlets, and rely on a range of activities for their livelihood, from subsistence production to market production to wage employment in various combinations. Everyone is involved in the cash economy to some extent, deriving income from a wide range of sources. For example, cash crops, commercial fishing, selling garden produce, wage employment, contract labour, small business activity, royalties, making handcrafts, selling marine products, and much else. Average incomes are generally very low.

Solomon Islanders follow the self-supportive lifestyle of their ancestors, where food crops are cultivated in gardens, both on flat land and very steep hillsides. Kumara (sweet potatoes), yams, panna, and taro are common food crops, though several different vegetables and fruit are planted for family consumption, and also for sale in local markets. In the coastal communities, the sea provides a rich source of protein, as well as recreation activities for the people.

Although Solomon Islanders live in subsistence agriculture-based societies in small-scattered inland and coastal villages on tribal lands, traditional customs and practices vary around the islands and there is great linguistic diversity. There are at least 87 different languages spoken on the islands, all with different dialects. Although one language may be dominant in a certain area, there is no vernacular language common to the whole country. Widespread communication is possible only in the Solomon Islands' Pidgin. However, English as the official language, is a medium of instruction in schools and is taught in schools throughout the country. While the Solomon Islands' Pidgin is an oral language and is based on English, it has a typical Melanesian syntax. It forms the most effective lingua franca at present (UNICEF, 1993).

Land is a complex and integral part of Solomon Islanders' way of life, and is generally communally owned by tribes or clans. Title to land in Solomon Islands is either through customary or registered processes. The Government recognises that all customary land is owned in a lineage group system. Registered land has its ownership and boundaries recorded in a land registry in Honiara and these are guaranteed by law rather than by custom. Permits to own a perpetual estate (free-hold interest) in registered land are limited to indigenous Solomon Islanders. Non Solomon Islanders, including expatriate Solomon Islands citizens, can only lease registered land. About 88% of land is
customary and 12% registered (UNICEF, 1993). The introduction of a cash economy alongside a subsistence economy is causing a number of substantial changes, as well as the influence of Christianity, nationalism, the structure of the government, the cash economy, a British-based legal code, numerous aspects of global consumer culture, and others more. The majority of people combine subsistence with varying kinds of involvement in the cash economy.

The social structure of Solomon Islands is extremely diverse and complex, varying from island to island and even between villages and clans on the same island with different customs, codes of behaviour, land tenure, leadership, traditional and contemporary religions, marriage customs, taboos, compensation and other cultural practices. Century-old customs shrouded in mythology, mystery, fear and respect are handed down from one generation to the next, and form the cultural values that characterise Solomon Islands. Traditional stories and legends, tales, songs and dances commemorating great feasts, raids, harvests, fishing, planting and other historic events. Customs, beliefs, traditions and practices remain a major part of everyday life for people in the rural communities, even though these are somewhat minimised by Christianity, the drift of young people to urban centres and other contemporary influences.

The extended family is an invaluable way of life for the people, providing an in-built social security system. Responsibility for looking after the old and sick is shared, and young children are cared for. The ‘wantok’ system is a further extension of the extended family. It literally means people who speak the same language, ‘one talk’ and wantoks are generally from the same tribe. Wantoks are obliged by custom to provide hospitality to each other, particularly in times of need.

Cultural pride and assertiveness still operate at the different levels from local to provincial to national, and also the equally problematic politics of cultural differences as one moves away from local settings. While Solomon Islands continues to be a mainly rural society, the commitment to village communities and local cultures will always be very strong; but this also means that wider level integration is a difficult and uncertain process. This is especially the case at the national level. The growth of nationalism and greater national integration has been taking place for a long time, boosted by urbanisation, larger organisations, for example, the churches and trade unions,
wage employment, and the formation of a national elite; but it is now in serious jeopardy as a consequence of the recent ‘ethnic’ crisis.

Most Solomon Islanders want to preserve their social and cultural strengths and develop them alongside modern education, improved health and earning cash income. Outside influences are considered desirable only when they enable social change to contribute to the wellbeing of the people, society and country. It is difficult for an outsider to appreciate the depth of cultural values and traditions that are expressed through the customs of the people. While most Solomon Islanders do not expect outsiders to understand their customs and traditions, they expect the visitor’s respect and appreciation for the Solomon Islanders’ way of life.

While ancient traditions and customary practices have tended to slowly wane, with the inevitable encroachment of modernity and socio-economic development, Solomon Islands has steadfastly maintained a vibrant, dynamic cultural way of life. Solomon Islanders are keenly aware of their special cultural heritage and traditional Pacific Island environment and are determined to maintain this and to have it co-exist in balance with the modern world.

Despite the influences of modernity, the traditional and customary way of life in the Solomon Islands is still a thriving, dynamic culture. There is still passion and enthusiasm for the people’s culture. It is surviving, is alive and remains a vital and vibrant element in the people’s daily lives and village practices. Culture is an essential aspect of the people’s existence, and they strive to preserve and maintain it for the future generations. The national and cultural sensitivity shown by the people should enable the traditional cultural patterns of the Solomon Islands to survive well into the 21st century.

Missionaries brought Christianity to Solomon Islands and about 95 percent of the population are Christian. There are five principal religious groups comprising Roman Catholic, South Sea Evangelical Church, United Church (formerly Methodist), Church of Melanesia (Anglican) and the Seventh Day Adventist Church (UNICEF, 1993). The missionaries introduced literacy programmes and promoted English as an official language.

2.4 The Government: Political, Administrative and Legal Structures

Solomon Islands’ system of Government is a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral legislature. Solomon Islands as a nation state adopted the
Westminster model of parliamentary democracy at independence in 1978. The British Monarch, as Head of State, is represented locally by a Governor-General, who is recommended to the Queen by the National Parliament. The Prime Minister is elected by and from members of Parliament, pursuant to general elections every four years by universal suffrage over the age of eighteen.

Solomon Islands has nine provinces in total, excluding Honiara (capital), which manages its administrative and legal structures separately. The provinces are from west to east, Western, Choiseul, Isabel, Central, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Rennell & Bellona, Makira & Ulawa, and Temotu. Decentralisation of power from central to provincial governments is enshrined in the constitution. However, concern was raised initially over the implementation of such costly structures. Key services were decentralised and re-centralised several times over the past two decades. Hence, while there has been a transfer of responsibility to the provinces in many key areas, resources needed for development have sometimes not been made available to provinces for various reasons.

Provinces face severe economic constraints in undertaking development activities and in providing services to their people. The national Government provides grants to finance some development activities and to help with recurrent costs. The area councils have also been constrained by economic difficulties. Although the Provincial Governments obtain some revenue from taxes, it is insufficient to alleviate the economic constraints and barriers. Families sometimes have difficulty paying their tax contribution. Although they are still at a very early stage of development, area councils have been created within each province as part of their political structure.

Since the roles of chiefs and traditional village and community leaders are still important, they are used as the basis for political support locally, leading to party allegiance being fluid. As indicated earlier, every person over the age of eighteen not only can vote in the national election, but can also vote in the provincial and local elections. Women have not been active in the political sphere and to date, there has only been one female member of parliament.

The legal system has two distinct components, English law and customary law. Customary law has an important role in land disputes over customary
titles. These cases have the right of appeal to both the Customary Lands Appeal Court and the High Court of Solomon Islands (UNICEF, 1993).

Since independence, the governmental and political institutions of Solomon Islands have been firmly established in theory and practice in democratic, representative systems of governance, with an exemplary record on human rights consistent with the stated high ideals of the United Nations Charter. However, this clean image was shattered in 1999 when a social conflict erupted in the country with devastating consequences for Solomon Islands and its people. Prior to the social crisis, political stability, civil order, harmonious ethnic and religious relations and a peaceful social environment were consistently referred to as outstanding national characteristics of the Solomon Islands, both in relation to its regional neighbours, and in relation to the political chaos and social upheavals around the globe. Sadly, as explained above, this unblemished record was broken when the social crisis broke out between two ethnic groups of people in Solomon Islands. Although the social and ethnic crisis was initially between just two groups of island people, its effect has been felt throughout the country economically, socially, politically and culturally. It has also created uncertainty and caution among international allies and aid donors to Solomon Islands.

2.5 The Economy: Issues, Trends, Performance and Policy

Solomon Islands is among the most struggling economies in the developing world. The economy of Solomon Islands is characterised by a dualism originating from its colonial past. The dualism in the economy is in turn characterised by a large, undercapitalised rural sector that has a few linkages to the urban money based-export sector.

In the mid 1990s, the Solomon Islands' economy was dominated by large increases in both exports and imports, but there were recurring problems. These problems included the excessive exploitation of the natural rainforests and a continuing fiscal imbalance. Also, the Government's domestic borrowing increased. Basically, there is an urgent need for the Government to address these problems if the economy is expected to achieve balanced long-term development and reasonable economic activity over the medium term. Excessive logging encourages a reduction in the economy's future resource base and inhibits sustainable growth (Bennett, 2000). When and if the economy's
capital base and level of activity expand in the future, the private sector has to be guaranteed adequate access to domestic savings by substantially lower government borrowing.

Since independence the economy of Solomon Islands has had fluctuating growth rates, reflecting its vulnerability to a variety of external factors. The Solomon Islands dollar, for example, has devalued by 50% with respect to its major trading partners, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Japan. However, economic growth rates have averaged 4% annually over the past two decades (Ogden, 1996). The growth is based on increased output from the natural resource-based activities in fisheries, forestry, agriculture and small-scaled mining. These activities are financed almost entirely by foreign capital.

In contrast to most of the other Pacific countries, Solomon Islands is relatively rich in natural resources and has significant potential for economic development. However, there have been some persisting problems, which have impaired the development of a self-reliant economy. These problematic features include an unreliable and insufficient national funding base, poor transportation and communications, the narrow economic base, limited physical infrastructure and weak domestic capital. The budgetary deficits and lack of fiscal management, resulting in heavy domestic borrowing, have also affected economic development.

The shortage of trained and literate human resources is a fundamental constraint to development in Solomon Islands. High rates of illiteracy (Oxfam New Zealand Report, 2001) and sickness are liabilities to economic development. Unfortunately, it is education and health services that are mostly reduced during economic recession, thus further forfeiting future human resources.

In addition, the current crisis has exacerbated the economic development woes. The Government has to pay out a considerable amount of money to compensate the people whose properties were destroyed at the height of the social and ethnic tension. However, despite the challenging and gloomy economic forecast, the Solomon Islands’ Government, elected in 1999, has adhered to the policy of encouraging the private sector and foreign investment to promote long-term economic development, and thus foster an eventual economic base for national self-reliance. It is committed to creating an economic
climate that was conducive to facilitating private sector foreign investment, and to establishing appropriate guidelines to guide potential foreign investors in Solomon Islands. In order to maximise its trading interests, the Solomon Islands' Government attempted to restructure existing internal and external marketing networks, to improve linkages with producers, local and overseas markets, and redefine the private sector as the foundation for the expansion of the employment system in the country. Prior to 1999, economic policy was highly contested over this period and subject to heavy pressure from the World Bank and other donor agencies.

The Government's overall success in attaining its stated economic development plans - self-reliance, self-sustainability and investment policy goals will be determined by its ability to implement efficiently and expeditiously these national development strategies and by rebuilding a foundation for sustainable, long-term economic growth in the future. By supporting macroeconomic polices designed to promote free market-oriented dynamics, generate long-term, export driven economic growth and foster economic self-reliance and import substitution, the Government has charted a challenging course in its attempt to rescue its struggling economy.

2.6 The Education System

Education is a priority sector for the Government of Solomon Islands. The Government, for example, is committed to providing a skilled labour force, and educating its growing population. However, increasing its pool of trained personnel and providing education for all means the government is opting to work closely and in partnership and collaboration with the donor community, educational institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the private sector and the general public. The government recognises that for this partnership to work effectively it has to encourage members of the organisations and groups concerned to participate fully in the process. Thus, encouraging factors such as political commitment, goodwill, time, effort, and finance to balance the education equation is essential.

The government recognises the value of education, and acknowledges it to be a cornerstone of economic and social development for the people of Solomon Islands. However, despite the government placing a high priority on education, formal education is yet to be accessible to all Solomon Islanders, as it is neither
universal nor compulsory in the Solomon Islands education system. This is due to a set of complex and interrelating political, funding, social, cultural, demographic and economic factors affecting the Solomon Islands. As a result, many children are denied the opportunity to learn in the formal system. In most instances, girls are the most affected as parents are sometimes forced to make decisions about who is and who is not to attend school. Cultural norms make educational opportunities for girls a low priority. Some families, for example, seem to place a lower value on educating their daughters than on educating their sons. Other families may lack interest in the formal education of their daughters for other reasons related to their social and marriage expectations. In culturally conservative environments in some parts of Solomon Islands, adolescent girls may be viewed as socially suspect if they continue going to school.

Early marriage and the importance placed on preserving a girl’s good reputation for potential sons-in-law is highly regarded, as the bride price that is usually involved brings extra cash into the family and the tribe. Education is also perceived as undermining girls’ traditional attitudes and reducing their willingness to engage in physical labour, particularly in those conservative environments. Sometimes it is perceived as making females self-centred, defiant of parental authority and uninterested in household affairs.

In contemporary Solomon Islands, modern education has been recognised as serving as the principal mechanism for disseminating crucial accomplishments in society. It contributes and plays a critical role in producing and transferring knowledge and skills in the community. Also as a majority nation, the Solomon Islands policy makers acknowledge that basic education helps to reduce poverty, contributes to economic growth and enhances the growth of general awareness in the communities and in the wider Solomon Islands society (Oxfam New Zealand Report, 2001).

However, the Oxfam New Zealand 2001 report has also shown that only 41% of children in Solomon Islands were enrolled in primary education in 1999, and the national average literacy rate is 30% (Oxfam New Zealand Report, 2001). The low rate of adult literacy and the relatively low rate of enrolment in school highlight a real crisis in basic education in Solomon Islands. There is wide recognition among the people that the Government needs to expand and
reform the educational system and to address key issues such as access, quality, equity, and the relevance of education.

While access is limited at every level of education, it is particularly restricted at secondary school. Statistics have shown that only 27% of children enrolled in primary school progressed to grade 9 in secondary school in the early 1990s. Prior to that period, secondary school enrolment proved stagnant, revealing a minimal increase in the secondary school student roll (UNICEF, 1993), which was also evident in the low percentage of students progressing on to higher education from grade 12. At each level, access is determined by a series of examinations, which underpins the education system. Another essential part of the context is the intense competitiveness of the whole education system. Given that education is one of the main paths to formal employment, and formal employment offers limited prospects for a more affluent middle class life-style, there is intense competition for the limited opportunities that are available. This is one of the main reasons why rural communities have largely at their own expense - given their support to early childhood education.

It is acknowledged that there is a long-running public debate about the purpose of education. This debate began in the 1970s and has been continuing ever since. One of the factors that has kept the debate going, and will keep it going for some time yet, is that the education system, with its high 'push out' rate, is only serving a minority of people and is not meeting the needs and aspirations of the large majority of the population. It is not surprising that the public at large (and many leading intellects) should question the value and purpose of a system that only benefits a select minority.

Education also needs to be seen in relation to the well-documented socio-economic inequalities in Solomon Islands society. These inequalities such as rural versus urban, province versus province, within provinces, within islands, within towns - have grown out of the highly uneven development that has taken place across the country. There is a lot of public questioning about the role of the education system in this respect. There is the widespread perception that it fuels inequality rather than encouraging equality among members of society.

Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) is the sole provider of tertiary training and education in Solomon Islands. For the last decade, the
college has contributed towards an indigenous skilled labour force by offering multi-sectoral training in areas specifically prepared to meet the educational and training, economic, human resource development and health and welfare needs of the country. In addition, many students have continued to go abroad to undertake further studies and training at various universities, colleges and institutions in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

2.6.1 Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education as a new initiative has been bombarded with the constraints and difficulties surrounding the education system. Factors such as lack of finance and resources, for example, are common elements that kindergarten educators have to regularly face in their work with young children. The early childhood education sector has, up until now depended on a very high level of voluntary input among teachers and parents. It is not surprising that there has been so much interest in the field-based training programme because most communities need whatever support they can get for the improvement of early childhood education.

Solomon Islanders have increasingly become aware of the importance of early childhood education. It was, only included in the general structure of the national education system in 1995, when the government initiated and introduced the preparatory or pre-standard one classes for five and six - year-old children as part of its national educational policy. Historically, missionaries and wives of employed expatriates pioneered the notion of early childhood education, and established kindergartens and preschools in Solomon Islands. Prior to 1995, there were early childhood education community initiatives that preceded official recognition by the Solomon Islands Government. There were kindergartens operating in some rural areas up to ten years prior to it becoming part of the national educational policy. A key factor behind this was the competitiveness mentioned previously. Other factors included the high rate of population growth and the late age (7 years old) set for admission to primary school.

In the Solomon Islands situation, kindergarten teachers are predominantly women. Thus, assistance to the early childhood education field will not only directly affect women, but it will also enhance the potential to allow them to
benefit future generations. For example, it can influence women's decisions regarding the education of their daughters.

The early childhood education sector covers two distinct types of early childhood education services. These services include community kindergartens and preschools and preparatory or pre-standard One classes. The communities are responsible for the kindergartens and for paying the wages or salaries of teachers. The preparatory classes are administered and managed by the Solomon Islands Government, which also pays the teachers' salaries. Early childhood education in the Solomon Islands covers early childhood education for children from three to six years of age in kindergarten, preschool and preparatory early childhood services. In this context, the term early childhood education can be conceptualised as an umbrella environment encompassing all three early childhood education settings, kindergarten, preschool and preparatory.

Also, prior to the official establishment of early childhood education and the field-based training programme in the country by the Solomon Islands Government, kindergartens and preschools in Solomon Islands were administered and managed by church groups, non-governmental organisations, private groups and communities. The preparatory programme which was officially introduced into the Solomon Islands' education system in 1995 as noted earlier, was considered a foundation year for children before their transition to primary school. However, its curriculum was academically oriented with special emphasis on early literacy activities. The preparatory programme has continued to evolve and be refined to cater appropriately for 5 and 6 year old children as teachers set about preparing them for their transition to primary school. Also, the class structure was formal and most teachers assigned to teach in these classes were not qualified early childhood education teachers. Although the early childhood teaching force was predominantly women, the majority of whom either had minimal training or no training for their early childhood education role.

Early childhood education has increasingly encouraged a new direction and vision for early childhood education in Solomon Islands. It focuses on and highlights the holistic development of the child, and its curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn. The early childhood education programme was influenced by and modelled on New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te
Whariki, and adapted to suit the Solomon Islands' cultural context and Solomon Islanders' wishes for the future of their children. It represents a fresh and versatile early childhood model, which moves away from traditional ideas and practices within early childhood education. Thus, cognitive, physical, social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, creative and language and communication dimensions of children's development and learning, and their whole context, including relationships with others and the welfare of Solomon Islands' families and communities were taken into account when the module components of the field-based training programme were initially written.

The early childhood education policy was developed in 1999. It was adopted by the Solomon Islands' Government to provide a broad aim for early childhood education, reflecting its overall philosophy. It included collective guidelines for practitioners, particularly educators working in kindergartens in the communities. Specifically, the policy included a series of steps, strategies, actions and other relevant information of significance to children, teachers and other stakeholders. More information on the early childhood education policy, and its implications can be found in chapter nine of this thesis.

There was a strong sense of community responsibility towards the early childhood education project and its development within the Solomon Islands' communities. The data collected in this study showed that families and community members were offering their assistance and support to kindergarten teachers and trainers. This was their way of helping early childhood authorities to push the process of spreading the idea of early childhood education within the provinces and throughout the country as swiftly as possible. Family and community support meant and involved different things for people of various communities within the Solomon Islands. For the early childhood education coordinators among other things, community support meant explaining to the community the idea behind early childhood education, particularly at the initial phase of the project.

Community support for the centres involved helping teachers to create teaching resources from local materials, helping to keep the physical surroundings of centres and the outdoor space clean and tidy and making equipment such as swings for children, and helping with other appropriate activities. Some community members would help teachers in the classroom setting. Parents and community people were active and willing to work with
kindergarten teachers. Also, families and members of the community were responsible for constructing buildings for centres and helping to prepare them for use by children, teachers and other caregivers.

Solomon Islanders believe that their children could do well in school, as a result of the field-based training programme. It was clear from the research findings that community people were wary of the problem of the drop-out rate affecting the Solomon Islands' education system. The high drop-out rate is an issue that has gripped the whole of the education system to a stage that it is crucially relevant to parents' understanding of education within the country. It was suggested that children who had gone through kindergarten education were likely to have a better opportunity of progressing to primary and secondary schools. The people were optimistic that the high drop-out rate affecting their school children would change in the future. It was believed that as more untrained practitioners undergo their field-based training, the better it would be for the kindergarten centres as they would be managed by qualified teachers who would then influence children in a positive way.

An absence of previous research on early childhood education in Solomon Islands has made it difficult to identify and access any appropriate data and statistics on early childhood education. However, like the primary field, employing qualified and trained teachers remains a problem for everyone associated with early childhood education and children's learning. This affects the quality of learning and further constrains the development of early childhood education and the field-based training programme.

Summary

The Solomon Islands' Government is committed to providing for the needs of its people, and to creating an enabling infrastructure environment through its self-development policy. Embedded in its development planning, the Solomon Islands Government pursues a policy of self-reliance aimed at increasing opportunities for all members of society, including women and youth, as well as widening economic participation across sectors in all levels of the community. While education and health remain priority sectors of the government, the ultimate goal of the self-reliance policy is to reduce imports and increase exports. Solomon Islands' long-term objective is to diversify its
export product range, and thereby encourage and develop import substitution industries to be able to export a variety of products.

Despite the constraints of the Solomon Islands’ fluctuating economy, social crisis and the geographic challenges to development, and to the delivery of health and welfare services, these economic, ecological and social conditions have also generated a strong sense of self-sufficiency and regard for our unique natural environment, characterised by its great diversity. The Government’s key development challenges include investing in its people, pursuing economic reforms, protecting and managing its environment, encouraging and working with the private sector, and reorienting the Government. The Government has a commitment and vision to build a new Solomon Islands society, based on our past experiences as a nation and embracing the needs and aspirations of our people as the country enters the 21st century and beyond. Solomon Islands maintains its regional focus and international image through its membership and proactive participation in the South Pacific Forum and the United Nations.

Education has continued to be a priority for the Solomon Islands’ Government. The provision of early childhood education in the Solomon Islands has genuinely been accepted and is well thought of by the people. The common element in all early childhood education services is the growing awareness of the importance of early childhood education and the belief that quality early childhood education makes a difference and that for children’s learning and development strategies to be effective, a child-centred approach is paramount. The diversity within the early childhood education sector reflects the cultural interests, values, beliefs and expectations of the various communities throughout the Solomon Islands. Similarly, the early childhood education sector incorporates the provision and establishment of the field-based training programme for teachers working in early childhood education centres in the Solomon Islands.
Early childhood education can offer benefits to individual children, to families, to communities, and to society. Myers (1997) for example, compares the idea of developing and nurturing early childhood education programmes to the process of building a house, where it is necessary to lay foundation stones to support the entire structure. Thus, young children grounded within their family, their community and their cultural values need to be supported in the development of their physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social and language abilities, as these capabilities will enable them to grow and prosper as children and adults. Myers (1997) asserts that the successful education of the child during her or his years of schooling and the participation of that child in society as an adult depend to a great degree upon the foundation stones laid during the preschool years.

The early years are a time of rapid development when children are particularly able to benefit from good quality early childhood education. Early childhood programmes provide for the education of young children, focusing on all aspects of development including the child’s mind, body, emotional security, and social competence. Early childhood practitioners normally work closely with the families of children served in their programmes, supporting not only the children’s education, but also the wellbeing of the children’s families (Myers, 1992, 1995, 1997). Internationally, most early childhood education services are targeted for those children in the younger age group from birth to age five or six (Myers, 1992). In Solomon Islands, early childhood education services are for children from the age of three to six years.

Chapter Three provides a specific review of the relevant literature which sets the basis for the questions asked of participants to achieve the objectives of the study. The chapter commences with an overview of the benefits of investing in early childhood education programmes, specifically focusing on the situation in the majority world. Quality characteristics, including structural and process variables and issues concerning staff training and education are next discussed.
3.1 The Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Education Programmes: Perspective from the Majority World

The significance of providing good care and paying attention to children in the early years is believed and practised in many cultural and traditional societies. Research has shown that the early years are critical in the development of crucial characteristics of young children that benefit them as both children and adults (Myers, 1992). The survival and protection of young children has been the focus of many international, private voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations in the majority nations (Landers, 1991; Myers, 1992; Evans, 1994; Evans & Myers, 1994). These efforts have encouraged the development of early childhood education and care services.

Research (Myers, 1992, 1997; Evans & Myers, 1994; Woodhead, 1996, 1999; Torkington & Landers, 1999; Evans, 1999, 2000) on the majority countries has demonstrated that support of early development yields rich benefits not only in immediate ways for the child and its parents, but also over time in terms of the child’s ability to contribute to the community. It is suggested that applying intervention programmes in the early years of childhood offers an opportunity to help avoid or moderate learning problems, and to bring lasting benefits to the individual, families and society (Myers, 1997; Torkington & Landers, 1999; Evans, 1999, 2000). Support for young children includes establishing early childhood centres, devising intervention programmes and providing support for their primary care-giving contexts. Hence, for people who mainly rely on donor agencies for funding assistance, it is important that the essential elements that encourage, support and enhance quality learning environments for young children are implemented with care and thoughtfulness.

In the majority countries specifically, the benefits of early childhood education programmes and family intervention services can potentially improve several overlapping areas in the life of children and families. For example, as indicated earlier, previous studies carried out in some majority countries have shown that providing early childhood and family education programmes can provide benefits for children, the family and society as a whole (Myers, 1992; Evans, 1994; Woodhead, 1996, 1999). The advantages of establishing early childhood education and family intervention programmes in the majority world specifically include the following.
Cost savings for society. Investing in early childhood education programmes has been found to reduce costs and improve the efficiency of children’s primary schooling (Myers, 1992, p. 6). It has been found that children who are better prepared physically, cognitively and socially for school have an easier transition from home to school. Thus, drop-out and repetition rates are lower and the need for remedial programmes is reduced, cutting costs. Effective early childhood and family programmes can also initiate cost savings in areas besides education. Health care costs for example, can be cut through preventive measures in programmes that help reduce disease and accidents (Myers, 1992, pp. 8-9).

Strengthened values. The values of humanity are transmitted through children (Myers, 1992, pp. 6-7). The transmission of the social and moral values that guide all people in the future, begin in the earliest months of life (Myers, 1997). One must start with children to preserve moral and social values or to improve them. Values such as living together harmoniously, for example begin to take hold in the early years and can be promoted through early childhood education programmes. In societies where cultural values are being eroded, a strong incentive to find ways to strengthen values include introducing culturally strong early childhood education and family programmes. It has been reported that early childhood and family programmes can assist by strengthening parenting skills and by providing environments within which children can play and give attention to culturally desirable values (Myers, 1992, pp. 7-8).

Reductions in gender inequalities. All children have a right to develop to their full potential. However, the attention given to young girls often does not match the positive attention paid to boys, commencing and reinforcing an ongoing cycle of discrimination (Myers, 1992, p. 10). Existing literature has shown that early attention to gender can produce changes in the development of the girl child and in the way families perceive the abilities and future of that child (Evans, 1997). Moreover, early childhood education programmes can benefit women and older siblings by freeing them from constant child care responsibility so that they can learn and seek better employment and earnings (Evans, 1997).

Social and economic inequalities are reduced. Investments in early childhood education programmes have been reported to modify inequalities grounded in
poverty and social discrimination by giving children from disadvantaged backgrounds a fair start in school and in life (Myers, 1992, p. 6 & p. 12). Research shows that poverty and/or discrimination can inhibit development in the early years (Myers, 1992, 1995). By failing to step in to support positive growth and development for young children, governments passively endorse inequalities. This is certainly true if no special effort is made to assist those who have been discriminated against and if early childhood programmes are available only to those who can afford to pay for them. Studies suggest that disadvantaged children benefit more from early intervention programmes than their more privileged peers. Although no study has specifically been carried out in majority countries, the High/Scope Perry Preschool longitudinal study carried out in the United States of America by Schweinhart, et al., in 1993 (cited in Myers, 1997) can be used as an example. The study, which compared at age 27 children who participated in a quality preschool programme with children who had not, showed the returns to society to be $7.16 for every $1.00 invested in quality preschool programmes. The findings from the study are consistent with what is happening with children of most majority nations (Myers, 1997).

*Increased economic productivity.* Research has shown that intervention programmes that sustain young children’s intellectual and physical capacities lead to an increased enrolment and improved progress and performance in school (Myers, 1992, p. 6). School performance in turn has been linked to children’s economic productivity when they become adults (Myers, 1992, p. 12).

*An appropriate response to the changing social and demographic environment.* Increasingly, vulnerable children are surviving diseases they are likely to encounter, compared to the past when many children of the majority countries would easily die from diseases and illnesses that befell them. Family structures and child-rearing practices have also altered and are continuing to change. The other areas that contribute to the changing social and demographic environment include rural and urban migration, the situation of refugees, and an ongoing participation by women in the paid labour force (Myers, 1992, p. 6). As a result of these changes, there is an increasing need and demand for better and different ways to care for and ensure the wellbeing of young children in the majority countries.

The benefits of investing in high quality early childhood education programmes can produce good results for the people of the majority world. The
early childhood years provide the basis for learning lifelong skills and attitudes. Early childhood programmes are inclusive of all the activities and interventions that address the needs of young children and help strengthen the contexts in which they are found, including the development dimensions. In the majority countries, integrated programmes that promote challenging cognitive stimulation, loving exchange and communication, better family and parent support systems, and good health, nutrition and safety, potentially provide the best foundations for lifelong learning for young children (Myers, 1992, pp. 6-12). Generally, early childhood education enhances and strengthens local communities.

3.2 The Quality Phenomenon

The notion of quality is currently under an ongoing debate in the early childhood arena. However, it is important, especially in relation to early childhood education issues and programmes. For example, most of the research on early childhood education outcomes tends to conclude that by far the most important issue influencing outcomes in early childhood education is quality, while it is also increasingly being recognised as contextual in nature. Quality is influenced by the early childhood microsystem, comprising roles, relationships and activities - the sociocultural environment within which children learn and develop. For example, in their early childhood education literature review report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett (2000) explained:

Quality is defined here as the essential components of early childhood environments which are valued in our society, and which support the well-being, development and rights of children, and support effective family functioning (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett, 2000, p. 44).

Similarly, Woodhead (1996) identifies examples from certain majority nations to illustrate the sensitivity of one's own bias, and the need for diversity to be key elements to adopt in all aspects of early childhood work in majority countries. He maintains that as a complicated notion, quality can be defined in various ways depending on the goals, objectives of the programme and the viewpoint taken. In the majority countries, “any early childhood programme is a complex system involving people, individuals and interest groups.” Hence, quality can be interpreted in different ways that are closely associated with
beliefs concerning goals and responsibilities. “These beliefs are in turn influenced by views on childhood, cultural patterns, personal values, social structures, wealth, levels of poverty, and other related issues.” Thus, it is necessary to adopt a “policy framework that can encircle multiple views, beneficiaries and benefits”, instead of trying to recognise world wide, objective signs of quality. Quality is, for example seen as a “subjective” and “dynamic” assessment that tends to incorporate different stakeholders’ views as they change over time. Thus to respond to real needs of children and parents, quality standards should be established within each context (Woodhead, 1996, p. 37).

Increasingly, research evaluations on early childhood education programmes are taking a cross-cultural view (Woodhead, 1999). Woodhead (1999) notes that quality early childhood education has become part of the globalisation process. Diverse programmes of child care, early education and family support have increasingly been found throughout the world, although these programmes are very often strongly influenced by models that originate in minority countries such as North America and Europe (Woodhead, 1999). Focusing on quality issues from both the global and historical perspective encourages a broader view on the particular issues, challenges and priorities that determine what counts for early childhood quality in specific cultural, educational, political and economic contexts (Woodhead, 1999).

The issue of quality programmes for young children will lead the early childhood profession into the 21st century (Arthur, et al., 1996; Woodhead, 1996, 1999). Existing literature for example, has consistently maintained that there is an increasing move to monitor and improve the quality of environments provided for young children, irrespective of the type of early childhood setting that is in existence. The need to provide quality environments for children is particularly prominent for children under five who may spend long periods of time in care (Arthur, et al., 1996; Woodhead, 1996, 1999). Thus, in recognition of the impact that the amount of time spent in care has on children’s intellectual, language and cultural, social, emotional, moral, and physical development, a growing emphasis is being placed on the quality of that care (Myers, 1995; Woodhead, 1996, 1999; Evans, 1997). In the United States for example, a voluntary system of accreditation which addresses quality outcomes for children, developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), has been in place for several years (Epstein, Schweinhart &
McAdoo, 1996; Evans, 1997). In New Zealand, a major initiative to improve quality has been the introduction of an open-ended early childhood curriculum, *Te Whariki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996).

Quality has become a key concern among those engaged in early childhood education services and programmes in majority nations (Evans, 1997; Myers, 1997). International literature indicates there is a push from researchers, programme planners, practitioners and parents to define the factors constituting a high quality programme, to determine what constitutes success in a programme, and to identify the aspects that contribute to the learning and development of young children (Evans, 1997). With particular reference to majority nations, policymakers and funding agencies are particularly interested in identifying indicators that can measure success to use as a basis for making investment decisions. Parents and practitioners are keen to see quality environmental and care giving support for young children and their families. However, addressing the issue of quality from many perspectives can make it difficult to identify a workable definition of quality early childhood programming (Woodhead, 1996; Evans, 1997; Myers, 1997).

The stakeholders challenging the early childhood community addressing the issue of quality service for young children range from those directly involved in early childhood education programmes as beneficiaries and implementers, to those who make decisions related to the availability and potential impact of such programmes. One of the primary reasons quality is being sought is that research has highlighted the value of quality early childhood education programmes. In the majority nations, the known outcomes of quality programmes include better primary school experience for children, benefits to families, the communities and the wider society, and the reduction of gender inequalities (Woodhead, 1996; Evans, 1997; Myers, 1997) as discussed previously in section one of this chapter. Children in quality early childhood education programmes have been reported to make a better adjustment to primary school and perform better in school than those children without an early childhood education experience. Children are also more likely to remain in school and less likely to need to repeat grades than those children without early childhood education experiences. Children with quality early childhood experiences have better self-esteem, have greater ability to learn and have
greater problem-solving skills, and they view themselves as learners (Myers, 1995, 1997; Evans, 1997).

3.2.1 Structural and Process Quality

Quality indicators are generally grouped under two broad headings: structural and process indicators. Structural indicators reflect the measurable characteristics that are usually used as a basis of producing favourable outcomes for children (Smith, et al., 2000). Process quality comprises the general environment and social relationships and interactions taking place in the early childhood setting that are directly experienced by children and families (Smith, et al., 2000). Process quality covers the actual interactions which children participate in with others.

Researchers agree that process quality is the most significant component of quality (e.g. Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997; Lamb, 1998; Meade & Kerslake Hendricks, 1999; Smith, et al., 2000), which suggests that process quality can be informed by theories and empirical knowledge and can focus on the most appropriate aspects of children's ecological context. Socio-cultural theory advocates one way of viewing processes in early childhood education (Smith, et al., 2000); and is concerned with the relationship between mental processes and historical, cultural, social and institutional environments (e.g. Wertsch, 1995; Woodhead, 1999) influencing the developing person.

Views about what constitutes good quality in early childhood education and care differ greatly across groups and individuals in any given society (Woodhead, 1996; Howes, 1997; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). The variability of goals and values among parents, practitioners and governments presents a challenge for the development of any widely accepted definition of quality. There is, however, general agreement about some key determinants of quality (Howes, 1997; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer, 1997; Moss, 1998; Gould, 1998; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). These include:

- Adult-child ratio;
- Group size;
- Staff training, education and experience;
- Staff wages and working conditions;
- Staff stability;
- Staff qualifications, expertise, attitudes, and staff turnover;
• The nature and frequency of interactions between staff and children, and staff and parents;
• the range and type of activities engaged in by children;
• the physical environment, facilities and resources;
• management and planning systems and practices.
While other international literature indicates that:
• regulating levels of qualifications of staff improves the quality of teaching practice in early childhood education settings;
• coherent qualifications are important to the process of learning and teaching in early childhood centres and influence outcomes for children;
• there are benefits if the 'lead teacher's' qualification is at least at child development associate level and preferably with a degree (Howes, 1997), which indicates the need for early childhood staff to at least operate at the diploma of teaching qualification levels;
• low education levels of teachers have a potentially harmful influence on teachers' beliefs and programming;
• staff qualifications, and the number of qualified staff in centres and services influence the effectiveness of professional development.

From the perspective of staff, the study of programme quality is crucial as staff levels (Woodhead, 1996), staff satisfaction and staff attitudes have significant impact on the children’s experiences in child care and in other early childhood learning environments.

3.2.2 Staff Training, Education and Experience

Training and education of practitioners has increasingly become a major issue within the early childhood profession. Rhodes and Hennessy's (2000) research on children’s experiences and development in child-care settings, focusing on structural features including practitioner education and training, for example, has shown that employing trained early childhood education personnel in early childhood care and education services for young children produces positive benefits to all involved. Staff training and supervision have also been associated with improving programme quality. Rhodes and Hennessy's study showed that the quality and competence of staff are the most important determinants of the quality of early childhood education programmes and the outcomes for children attending (Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). It is also generally
acknowledged that there is an integral link between trained staff and the provision of quality care and education in early childhood centres. The confidence of the staff to plan and deliver quality programmes is dependent on the knowledge and expertise they gain from training. Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett (2000), for example, state:

Training should offer early childhood teachers with a framework of knowledge and supervised experience which will allow them to deliver the best kind of learning opportunities to children through working sensitively and responsibly with them, as well as preparing them to be a professional who can plan, manage, assess and reflect on the effectiveness of their work with children and families. Training also weeds out unsuitable people and provides those who are naturally gifted with children, with an understanding of how children develop and are influenced by their environment (Smith, et al., 2000, p. 52).

Highlighting the importance of training, Barbour (1983) stresses that early childhood education teachers must possess the knowledge, skill, competency and sensitivity to interact successfully with not only the young child, but also parents, guardians, social agency personnel and others affecting children. Training must also accommodate the breadth of interests and needs of young children in a diverse society.

However, Moss (1998) cautions that education and training of early childhood workers and the structuring of the workforce itself cannot be isolated from critical questions concerning early childhood services and work. Services and work for which different countries do, and will, come up with different answers to such questions, for example, as what are the purposes of early childhood institutions and the work they undertake and how do they train the early childhood worker? He points out that there are a variety of answers to these questions, reflected in the different terms identified to describe different groups of workers in different countries- for example, pedagogue, teacher, nursery nurse, childcare assistant and others (Moss, 1998).

Moss (1998) has also suggested important understandings of the early childhood worker in relation to learning as illustrated by Dahlberg (1999) and associates. Dahlberg, et al., (1999) for example, compared two concepts of the role of the worker. First, the early childhood worker as a transmitter of predetermined knowledge and culture to the child, and a facilitator of the child’s development in ensuring that each milestone was reached and that the child’s activities were appropriate to his or her stage of development. Next, the worker as a co-constructor of knowledge and culture, both the children’s and
their own, in a pedagogy that denied the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive and knowledge as unchanging material to impart. The researchers’ other constructions of the early childhood worker included her as being a substitute parent, providing a close, intimate relationship with the children in her charge; as an entrepreneur, marketing and selling her product and managing the institution to ensure high productivity and conformity to standards. That is, an efficient production process; and as a researcher, seeking to deepen understanding of what was going on and how children learned, through documentation, dialogue, critical reflection and deconstruction (Moss, 1998; Dahlberg, et al., 1999).

Education and training play a key role in determining the make-up of the early childhood workforce. For example, if entry requirements and/or costs are high, then it may deter less advantaged groups; this will be particularly problematic in societies with high levels of inequality and material disadvantage. Similarly, training institutions can contribute to, or challenge, the gender-inclusive nature of early childhood work. Policies adopted by training institutions on recruitment, for instance for more male students, are likely to be most effective if part of a wider set of policies are adopted by all organisations and institutions concerned with early childhood, from government through to individual centres (Jensen, 1996, cited in Moss, 1998).

The presence of early childhood trained and experienced teachers has consistently been linked to high quality interactions between children and adults, and therefore is an important factor in the social, language and cognitive development of children in group settings. Research indicates that staff who specialise in early childhood training engage in substantially more appropriate interactions with children of all ages (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Increasingly, many education authorities are moving towards preferential employment for early childhood trained staff in the first years of school. The call for improved qualifications for teachers of young children is widespread and persistent among early childhood leaders (Bredekamp & Willer, 1992; Morgan, Azer, Costley, Genser, Goodman, Lombardi & McGimsey, 1993).

The research literature has argued that staff training and education contribute positively to interactions with children and child outcomes (Smith, et al., 2000). Training is viewed as being a key attribute in maintaining quality

3 The terms, teacher, educator, practitioner and staff have been used interchangeably.
environments for young children, although research shows that training and education are linked to other series of quality variables (Myers, 1997; Smith, et al., 2000). Some examples include a higher level of caregiver stimulation from frequent social interaction and language exchanges, joint attention episodes involving adult and child and improved quality of the classroom literacy environment. Also an increase in parent involvement; more positive and less negative feedback from adults; more child social competence, compliance and self-regulation; and greater child intellectual competence (Myers, 1997; Smith, et al., 2000).

Support for the relationship between teacher qualifications and the quality of the care and education young children receive has been provided by the National Day Care study (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979), by the National Child Care Staffing study (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989). The National Day Care study examined the impact of aspects of childcare that can be regulated, including teacher-child ratios, group sizes, and teacher qualifications on the quality of care. The authors reported a relationship between the level of teachers' general education and classroom behaviours associated with higher quality. However, a much stronger relationship existed between education specific to child development and early childhood education and the appropriateness of teachers' classroom behaviours. In addition, teachers with training related to educating young children engaged in more social skills training with the children in their classrooms and had children in their classrooms who were more cooperative and who had higher attention spans than the children who were in classrooms with teachers with less education (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989).

The National Child Care Staffing study in the United States found that staff in the early childhood centres provided more sensitive and appropriate care giving if they completed more years of formal education, received early childhood training at college level and earned higher wages. That is, better quality centres had higher wages, better adult work environments, lower turnover, better educated and trained staff and more teachers caring for fewer children (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989). A later review of research in the United States by Morgan et al., (1993) also concluded that quality in early care and education programs was directly linked to the training received by
practitioners. While the review concluded that findings about formal levels of education were less clear-cut, it was clear that specialised training did have positive effects on quality for children both in centres and in family day care, although no study had determined the amount of training that would ensure effectiveness. The review reinforced the harmonious relationship between training, compensation and quality. It concluded that both increasing practitioners’ compensation and increasing the level of practitioner training were crucial for high quality early care and education programmes and that training without increased compensation would still lead to turnover and thus would not produce high-quality programmes.

Ann Epstein (1993) also found that the quality of early childhood programmes could be increased through the improvement of in-service teacher training. This study noted that teacher-training programmes are most successful when they include active participation of teachers, observation and feedback of teaching practices by experienced mentors and practical, hands-on learning. Specific improvements in programme quality included greater collaboration among teaching staff, significant positive changes in adult-child interactions, and increased parent and volunteer rates.

A literature survey by Wangman (1995) in Australia emphasised two types of components of quality in childcare: components that contribute to quality, and those that determine quality (Meade, Podmore, May, Te One & Brown, 1998). Wangman asserted that components that contribute to quality are those that provide favourable conditions in which good quality outcomes are mostly likely to occur. Wangman specified that regulations and staff training are both contributing components of the programme quality in early childhood services. On the basis of evidence from the research literature, she reported that, if good quality programmes were to be delivered, relevant training in early childhood education and child development was the most significant contributing component (Wangman, 1995).

Anne Smith (1996) undertook a study in New Zealand, concentrating on staff attributes in New Zealand early childhood centres, examining relationships between staff characteristics, training and measures of process quality (such as Abbott-Shim & Sibley’s 1987 Assessment Profile, cited in Smith, 1996). Smith surveyed a national sample of 100 childcare centres for under two year-old children, and used observational and interview measures to assess
various aspects of quality (Smith, 1996). The study revealed moderate to strong correlations between training and education variables and Abbott-Shim scores. Smith found that the influence of early childhood training appeared strongest when there were more staff with three-year training, and there were no significant relationships between lower levels of training and quality. The study found that centres with more staff with three-year training had effective programmes which were better planned, resourced, managed and children experienced more positive and responsive interactions (Smith, 1996). In addition, the general level of staff education at school level proved a powerful forecast of quality (the second strongest predictor of quality on a stepwise regression analysis), so that centres with larger percentages of staff with no school leaving qualifications tended to be of lower quality. The study supported the view that training was related to quality, but found the strong relationship between better wages and working conditions and measures of quality most striking. Lack of school qualifications was also associated with more controlling behaviour and fewer warm and positive interactions.

The study showed that while most childcare staff were relatively happy in their work, far too many of them had low levels of school education, were untrained, poorly paid and experienced less than adequate working conditions. Training did make a difference to quality, with centres that employed more trained staff providing better quality environments for children. The strongest relationships with quality were, however, with working conditions, wages and school qualifications (Smith, 1996). Smith concluded that the more staff with higher level qualifications were in a centre, the less likely were the participating children to be observed wandering around or waiting for another activity to start (Smith, 1996).

Also, Wylie, Thompson, & Hendricks (1996), in the first phase of the longitudinal project, 'Competent Children at 5: Families and Early Education', examined the competencies of 307 children in the context of their family background and home activities. The researchers also investigated the length of the children's early childhood education experience and the quality of their early childhood experience as they turned five years. The study found that quality of the early childhood education services was related to:
- whether the staff held an early childhood education qualification;
- the highest staff salary paid;
• the children to staff ratios;
• group size;
• the type of early childhood service.

Moreover, the categories highlighting levels of staff qualifications included:
• teaching diploma in early childhood education or higher diploma in early childhood education;
• certificate equivalent to two years full time training, based on a training curriculum; all other modules, training or qualifications which did not fit into any of the above broad categories and no early childhood qualifications. The study found that 23% of staff had an early childhood education diploma, 16% had a certificate or equivalent, 45% had other sorts of modules, and 13% had no qualifications. The researchers noted that quality ratings of centres increased with more qualified staff, when higher salaries were paid to staff (Wylie, Thompson & Hendricks, 1996). In centres where the highest staff qualification involved two or more years of training, qualifications were associated with programme quality and with children’s self-esteem. When the analyses of all staff members and coordinating adults were combined, highly qualified staff were linked with total quality and with effective adult-child interactions (Wylie, et al., 1996).

Similarly, a report by Whitebook, Sakai & Howes (1997) on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation found that centres, with or without accreditation, retained a greater percentage of highly skilled practitioners and were more likely to receive better ratings on overall classroom quality. Skilled teaching staff were more likely to remain at their job if they earned higher than average wages, worked with a higher percentage of well-trained teaching staff, and worked in a climate where other well-trained and educated teachers remained on the job.

A research study carried out by Michael Gaffney and Anne Smith in 1997 produced similar results. In this study, the researchers evaluated eight early childhood contracts that provided professional development on Te Whariki in 1995. Interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data from kindergarten, childcare, playcentre and other early childhood centres. The previous training of course participants or lack of training was identified as critical. Staff with more understanding of child development and of early
childhood curriculum made maximum use of professional development. The study found that centres with well-trained staff, and a low rate of staff turnover were likely to benefit most from professional development (Gaffney & Smith, 1997).

An analysis of qualitative data from another study undertaken by Smith in 1999 showed that the attendance of staff with three years training contributed positively to the amount of joint attention experienced by children. Joint attention, or shared attention between adult and child to some object, activity or idea, is considered an important aspect of the socio-ecological environment for children’s development. The study showed that there was a greater number of joint attention episodes in centres where more staff had Diploma levels of training (Smith, 1999). These studies by Smith (1995, et al., 1996, 1999) have reinforced what existing research literature has highlighted about the linkage between the early childhood educator training, education, experience and other quality variables.

Besides pre-service training, in-service training is equally regarded as important by the early childhood education profession. Smith, et al., (2000) for instance, cited the national ChildCare Staffing Study which revealed that caregivers who participated in more than 15 hours of in-service training were found to be more sensitive, less harsh and detached. The three studies concluded that both general education and early childhood training had positive effects on quality. The authors concluded that a significant aspect of early childhood centre quality was that staff should possess a diverse range of educational and training backgrounds, skills and abilities. Effective staff training policies should assess the individual training needs of staff and guide the professional development of teaching staff in ways that are inventive, individualised and effective (Smith, et al., 2000). Significant professional development opportunities, in-service training, mentoring programmes and self-assessment are all important features in maintaining high quality care (Smith, et al., 2000). Training not only makes a difference to quality, but centres that employ more trained staff provide better quality environments for children in their care. Training assists staff to recognise the importance of interacting in a caring and educational way with children and helps them to be sensitive to children’s individual needs as well as those of their parents.
Moreover, in his review of early childhood education research in the United States, Moss (1998) ascertains that quality in early care and education programmes is directly linked to the training received by practitioners. He points out that specialised training does have positive effects on quality for children, both in centres and family day care.

A literature review by Anne Meade and colleagues (1998) in New Zealand highlighted significant examples of research studies that link training to quality in early childhood centres and its impact on children’s development and learning and staff job turnover. These researchers cited the Centre for the Child Care Workforce (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989) that had also released its 1998 replication of the 1988 childcare staffing study. In their study, childcare centres in five cities in the USA reported high levels of job turnover and serious difficulty in finding qualified teaching staff. The study found that centres that paid better wages in 1997, as in 1988, experienced less teaching staff turnover. While centres that had remained in business over the nine-year span of the study paid higher wages, employed more college-educated staff, and reported lower staff turnover than those centres that had ceased operation. Preschool classrooms in centres that remained open were rated higher in quality in the initial study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989).

The review by Meade (1998) and her team also noted the Structural Analysis of Head Start classroom quality study carried out by Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarty (1998). This analysis showed that the educational level of teachers had a direct effect on inappropriate beliefs which in turn influenced inappropriate instructional activities that influenced the quality of the classroom environment. Teachers’ educational level also impacted on their attitude to families. The authors theorised that teachers with a low level of formal education had taken a practical view of teaching where they used sets of activities and techniques rather than basing their work on reflection and theory, with teachers focusing more on what they could do, than why (Abbott-Shim, Lambert & McCarty, 1998; Meade, et al., 1998).

Meade (1998) and colleagues also cited a Programme study devised for children identified as being at risk for educational failure. In this study, Judy Florian and colleagues from the High/Scope Educational Research Association (1998) studied a programme for children identified as being at risk for educational failure. They found that high quality programmes affected
children’s development more than medium quality. The quality variables correlated with child observation ratings included funds provided to employ staff with appropriate training and expertise. The early childhood specialist or supervisor/head teacher was affiliated to an early childhood professional organisation and had appropriate education, training and experience (Meade, et al., 1998; Florian, Schweinhart & Epstein, 1998).

In the review by Meade (1998) and associates, another significant study undertaken by Larry Schweinhart and colleagues in 1998 was also mentioned. In this study, Schweinhart (1998) and colleagues from the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation compared three types of Head Start early childhood services. The High/Scope study involved public schools, non-profit childcare centres, and explored the impact of professional development on their centre quality, using observational measures. The teachers were mostly qualified with a Bachelor of Arts degree in High/Scope programmes, while the majority of teachers in other types of early childhood services had lower early childhood training and education. In High/Scope services, the agency inservice training variable and its length had the greatest effect. The professional development approaches in the other types of early childhood services showed curriculum issue workshops, and observation and feedback had negative effects on their programme quality. This study appears to suggest that positives tend to go together, and what is needed to be a foundation for quality early childhood education is advanced education and training for early childhood teachers (Schweinhart, Epstein, Okoloko & Oden, 1998; Meade, et al., 1998).

In a study of early childhood educators’ experiences on one professional development programme, Gould (1998) explored the experiences of ten early childhood educators who attended a professional development programme offered by the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education Studies at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. The programme consisted of three two-day modules, one day apart. The study found that teachers who had completed a professional development programme felt their ability to introduce changes to their centre’s programme was hindered by having unqualified staff members in the centre. The study highlighted the high levels of unqualified staff employed in early childhood centres. For example, participants who worked with unqualified people in their centre often found it harder to implement change. The programme facilitators thought that unqualified people
often did not possess the basic level of understanding about early childhood issues that was often assumed in professional development programmes. Gould (1998) concluded that the qualifications held by the people in a centre were an important element of the people component in an early childhood centre.

Summary

Staff training and education including pre-service, ongoing staff development and supervision are perceived to be significant determinants of programme quality. However, teaching experience alone does not improve quality unless it is obtained in the context of a well-run programme with ongoing training. A good programme environment for children is dependent on a good work setting for adults, which includes adequate salaries and benefits, costing in preschool programmes, and administrative support for staff development.

Teacher training is an essential component of quality as previously noted, and is much influenced by the way quality is perceived in early childhood education and care services and programmes. Teacher preparation is an integral part of any meaningful early childhood education programme. Based on the wide variety of roles that teachers are to fill, new teachers need to have practical experience in quality inclusive settings. The effective teacher needs to be flexible and reflective in the planning, programming, and management of the classroom, and must relate well with children.

Essentially, formal education, regardless of the field of study, is viewed to be the best predictor of appropriate staff interactions. Teachers with college degrees have been reported to demonstrate more positive behaviours, such as sensitivity to children, and less negative behaviour, such as harshness and detachment. Also, teachers with the most advanced education have been reported to be the most effective. There is a positive relationship between the most advanced teacher preparation and teacher responsiveness. This demonstrates the importance of employing a lead teacher with a coherent qualification and specialist training in early childhood education.

The relationship among quality, cost, outcomes for children, regulations, staff education and training, and qualifications of early childhood workers is perceived to be essential and influential in early childhood education settings and classrooms. Data from studies reviewed in this literature overview show
that high quality early childhood education is fundamentally related to overlapping characteristics such as higher staff-child ratios, higher levels of staff education and training, teacher turnover and administrators’ experience and their effectiveness in curriculum planning. Teachers’ wages, general education level, and their specialised training in early childhood education are characteristics discriminating most between low quality and high quality centres. Stronger regulations and standards for care do make a difference, as they contribute to the positive side of regulations and improve the standards of quality of early childhood education available to young children.

This literature review has reinforced the messages from research advocating that staff training is a critical and key component of quality in early childhood education programmes. It has also reaffirmed the belief that policy efforts in improving training, especially in the Solomon Islands context, to provide, support and monitor training of kindergarten teachers throughout the country is vitally important. Other issues relating to improving training for kindergarten practitioners are just as important, such as supporting and monitoring opportunities for in-service training and professional development for teachers. The research on training has clearly suggested that gaining a basic qualification is an important avenue for moving towards establishing and monitoring a fully trained early childhood workforce for the Solomon Islands. These findings have important implications for staff and establish the understanding of the roles of early childhood education educators and care services, and their impact on young children as they create linkages between the working conditions of staff and the quality of care provided for children. These findings suggest that the full development and learning of children in early childhood centres is affected by conditions in which the practitioners must work as well as their training and education.
Chapter Four explores two conceptual models that I have adopted as a basis for this doctoral thesis. Ecological and sociocultural models for development focus on the contexts in which children's learning and development occurs, and the relationships and the ongoing interactions between systems that enhance children's learning. The training curriculum fits into the scenario as it concentrates on providing training and education for early childhood teachers helping children to learn.

Ecological and sociocultural approaches form a relevant foundation for this thesis as I am specifically looking at a community oriented early childhood programme with a component of a field-based training programme for early childhood education teachers in Solomon Islands. These frameworks are also appropriate as they have implications for children's learning and teaching in early childhood education in specific cultural contexts. The ecological setting includes the roles, activities and relationships of teachers with children, parents and community people and how the people and children's indigenous culture and cultural differences have been considered while planning and designing the field-based training programme. The formation of professional networks that encourage collaboration among the people who are responsible for children's learning in Solomon Islands is supported by these valuable approaches. Within Solomon Islands, this partnership is seen in the relationships and ongoing interactions between people and teachers and administrators in respect of children's education. The partnership is further demonstrated in the processes relating to the national early childhood education programme and the field-based training and kindergarten curriculum programmes. These early childhood issues and other related factors are discussed in the context of Solomon Islands' cultural and geographical setting.
This chapter commences with an overview of the ecological perspective. The sociocultural approach is presented next, where I discuss how Vygotsky’s principles have interpreted and explained children’s learning and development.

### 4.1 The Ecological Conceptual Framework

In ecological research, the properties of the person and of the environment, the structure of environmental settings, and the processes taking place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and analysed in systems terms. Lying at the very core of an ecological orientation and distinguishing it most sharply from prevailing approaches to the study of human development is the concern with the progressive accommodation between a growing human organism and its immediate environment, and the way in which this relation is mediated by forces emanating from more remote regions in the larger physical and social milieu (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 13 & 41).

As expressed in this quote, the ecological perspective addresses integrative characteristics showing how different aspects of the environment interact to enhance development. These aspects reflect the child’s existence, examine the interactions between the developing individual and the environment and describe child development in the context of environmental systems. The ecological framework perceives the environment at four specific positions, comprising the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem refers to roles, activities and interactions experienced by the child in his or her immediate surroundings; for example, within family, neighbourhood, village and kindergarten; and with his or her teachers, parents and/or peers. Mesosystem refers to the interrelationships between microsystems that affect the child; for example, interactions between family and school. Exosystem refers to the overseeing structures that are not directly experienced by the child, but are also influential in his or her development for example, parents’ jobs. The macrosystem refers to the larger social group in which the child lives, for example his or her culture. These systems work together to guide the child’s development and learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Ecological theory bridges human development, family relationships, and society. Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that child development cannot be fully understood without considering the context in which a child is being raised. He emphasises that development is influenced by contexts which include both...
children’s immediate settings, such as home, or early childhood centre; and also by children’s relationships with their peers, and the contexts beyond them, which in turn impact on how their teachers and caregivers interact with children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

The ecological, contextual perspective’s role in highlighting the environmental roles and relationships that contribute to individual differences is essential. Within the Solomon Islands context for example, knowledge about early childhood education and how to teach at the early childhood level can continue to grow and expand. Also, Solomon Islanders are continuing to change their attitudes and are becoming more tolerant at the national, provincial and community levels. People are increasingly getting involved, and becoming genuinely interested in understanding better the type of skills needed to teach in an early childhood setting. As a result, members of the community are all the more enthusiastic and keen to support community-based incentives toward spreading the early childhood education concept, and in initiating and establishing the field-based training programme throughout the country.

4.1.1 How the Development of a Solomon Islands’ Training Curriculum for Early Childhood Education Teachers can be Supported by Ecological Theory

As a tool in itself, ecological theory can be used to explore and/or interpret the dynamics and development of a Solomon Islands’ training curriculum for early childhood education teachers. The ecological perspective describes individual development in the context of environmental systems. How these things fit into the different systems affecting children vary in different learning settings. In the Solomon Islands’ early childhood setting for example, how knowledge on the part of kindergarten teachers can affect children and their learning depends on how well teachers apply their new skills in planning and implementing curriculum programmes for children they work with.

The ecological theory supports the concept that the individual is vitally connected to everything and everyone in her or his environment. It provides an enriched relational structure that expands through the diversity of relationships embedded in that structure. For example, the interactions within and between the microsystems, which reflect and reinforce the interdisciplinary origins of ecological thought as well as underline that a range of approaches are possible
in undertaking sensitive teaching in the early childhood education field. In the context of Solomon Islands, for example, early childhood teachers can form interactive networks and mesosystems within their kindergarten community. They can build working relationships with parents, families and members of the community. In this context, ecological aspects can be seen in practice in the various roles, relationships, and activities directly affecting and supporting kindergarten teachers, in their endeavour to help children learn. Since the inception of the early childhood training programme in Solomon Islands, there was and has continued to be a strong sense of community responsibility within which people work together to assist teachers and help solve structural problems which affect teachers’ teaching and professional processes. In the Solomon Islands context, examples of exosystem factors such as families and community members can work together to organise activities to raise funds for the centre and/or to pay the teacher’s salary.

In the Solomon Islands’ situation, characteristics of the ecological perspective can also been seen in the processes contributing to the establishment of the field-based training programme, and the way the training programme can contribute to and enhance practitioners’ competence, confidence and professionalism. The facilitation of field-based training for early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands, for example, is about several things, but particularly, it is about techniques, methodologies, tools, approaches, strategies, acquiring appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, negotiation and collaboration skills. Teachers’ training can equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to assist them in their work with children. It is also about applying those features in a way that is harmonious with Solomon Islanders’ values and beliefs. The introduction of the training programme is also about engaging in appropriate working processes, politics and ethics of power relationships, which signify who decides, who benefits and how. In generating and creating authority among the people with their dignity, integrity and self-confidence strengthened and their abilities and energy enhanced, the early childhood field-based training programme can make it possible for educators and the people of Solomon Islands to make a reality of an ideal.

A potential relationship that can be formed between home and the community as a result of the field-based training model can be seen as an important component of teaching in early childhood education in Solomon
Islands. It is one example of how a mesosystem process can operate within the Solomon Islands' early childhood services. Early childhood teachers would recognise the importance of addressing the relationship between children's home and school environments and how each setting works with one another. As a result, ongoing collaboration with the kindergarten committee chair people and community leaders should be encouraged. The members of the community, for example, should be encouraged to work, help, participate, contribute, and to support their child's learning and development, and the centre activities. The existence of a strong sense of community wholeness should also encourage families to work closely with the centre staff and to learn more about early childhood education and how it impacts on young children. Increasingly, parents will come to recognise the importance of supporting the early childhood field-based training programme in their community.

In the Solomon Islands' context, the ecological concept is useful because of the human component inherent in its inquiry processes. Knowledge about early childhood teaching lying at the core of the ecological theory, for example, affects and is affected by the people, activities, roles, relationships and processes within the surrounding microsystems. These environmental roles and relationships can contribute to individual differences and are central to the ecological model. In relating the idea to Solomon Islands, for instance, the relationships and roles can be played out in the teachers' kindergarten settings and classroom experiences, and in their interactions with children. Knowledge about early childhood teaching, therefore, is dynamic rather than static. In relation to the Solomon Islands teachers' roles, for example, instead of early childhood practitioners concentrating most of their attention on the child, they can attempt to look at and understand the environment in which the child develops, by establishing and enhancing a working relationship with families and the community.

4.1.2 The Child

Each child is unique, has abilities and potential, and needs opportunities to play, think, communicate and reflect. The child's early education experience lays the foundation for future learning and progresses hand in hand with her or his development (Woodhead, 1996). There is an active and holistic process of interaction between children, adults and the environment that integrates all
learning areas. In the Solomon Islands' context, for example, early childhood education can build on children’s interests, experiences, ideas, and cultural norms. Influenced by their traditional knowledge and skills, for example, kindergarten teachers can plan activities that encourage children to create attractive artefacts and cultural symbols as part of their learning. Kindergarten practitioners and children can also explore other cultural skills and knowledge such as custom story telling and bag weaving, to enhance and reinforce children’s cultural understanding.

The child is the central focus in the ecological contextual model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), including inherited and biologically based factors, and cognitive capacities, temperament and personality. Based on need to understand development in terms of the everyday setting or environment in which children are reared, ecological theory suggests that children’s experiences should be studied in the home, early childhood education centres, neighbourhoods, communities, and the historical time frame in which they occur. Ecological theory emphasises a range of situations and contexts individual children encounter and their consequences for development. Thus early childhood education teachers have a role in initiating and facilitating children’s learning environments to enhance the richness of their roles, activities and interpersonal relationships.

The key aspect of understanding an ecological perspective is to understand that the child’s behaviour is based on his or her perception of reality. The focus is on children’s interpretations of their surroundings rather than on the objective characteristics of those surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Rosenthal, 1999, 2000). Thus it is important to remember that the ecological model proposes two broad processes that promote development, children’s interactions with people, and activities in which children engage. As part of their personal characteristics, children bring attributes to their encounters with people and activities. These personal features include for example, those that either invite or discourage the sorts of responses that will promote or disrupt growth, and the child’s interest or selective responsivity. They also include the tendency of children to restructure their environment, and the need to increase the ability to organise their beliefs and use them to achieve goals or directive belief systems (Woodhead, 1996, 1999; Rosenthal, 1999, 2000).
4.1.3 Microsystems Affecting the Child

In respect of Microsystems affecting the child, Rosenthal (2000) proposes four distinctive ecological-oriented principles, which include child characteristics, child-rearing processes, eco-cultural context, and time and change. The child characteristics aspect highlights children’s features as temperament and gender-related or age-related behaviour which both impact and are influenced by child-rearing processes. Additionally, child characteristics can influence and be influenced by the eco-cultural context aspect.

The child-rearing processes can be considered in two ways. ‘Mediating’ and ‘proximal processes’ refer to characteristics of adult caregivers such as teacher, parent, or grandparent’s values, beliefs, expectations, assumptions, and basic knowledge of children and their development (Rosenthal, 2000). The proximal processes refer to the interactions and relationships between the child as an active, self-regulating learning agent and the outer mechanisms such as adults, peers, objects and symbols which in the Solomon Islands’ context can include carvings and musical patterns in its immediate setting. These ongoing interactions and relationships are significant orientating tools for children’s learning and development. Therefore, both mediating and proximal processes procreate the ongoing interactions and experiences of children in their immediate settings, which in turn propel their development. Both processes impact, and are affected by the eco-cultural context in which families and teachers initiate and socialise their children and the various aspects of children’s individual characteristics.

The eco-cultural context notion as advocated by Rosenthal (2000), refers to the ecological setting, the cultural values and traditions, and the economic, social and political forces and other agencies in a given community or society. Similarly, cultures differ in their goals for development of their children, and in the emphasis they place on the importance of similar goals (Rosenthal, 1999). Hence, the goals of early childhood education in different cultures are related to the cultural framework, and the society’s values and beliefs about children and their development. In the Solomon Islands context, these elements influence funding and the provision of services for children and families, the goals of early childhood education and for professional training and development of teachers in Solomon Islands. In relation to the type, Solomon Islands has
adopted, and placed emphasis on collectivist goals rather than individual goals for its early childhood education programme. One of the goals of the present study was to examine how well the field-based training programme for early childhood education teachers suited the unique cultural and geographical context of Solomon Islands. Another goal has focused on the roles, relationships, and activities of early childhood education teachers working in Solomon Islands’ kindergartens, identifying and analysing any possible changes to their professional behaviour and teaching practices, which are discussed in part one of chapter ten.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) on the other hand, perceives the environment at certain specific positions, which consist of interaction and relationship systems from the most intimate to the most remote. The first, the microsystem is the setting in which the individual lives and interacts with people such as family, peers, centre or the neighbourhood, as noted previously. These factors have the greatest impact on a child, because they are experienced directly and concretely by the child. In the microsystem setting, the developing child is an active participant in constructing information within these settings. The first level is the most immediate setting or microsystem in which the developing individual interacts with people. The microsystem contains the factors within a child’s immediate environment; factors that directly affect the child, and in turn, may be affected by the child. That is, the child has direct experience and interaction with the factors involved. Research on preschool outcomes has shown that having a trained teacher in a kindergarten is one factor that contributes to quality learning for children (Moss, 1998; Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse & Barnett, 2000).

Different microsystems include home, neighbourhood, village, kindergarten and school that include classmates, peers, teachers, and classroom resources. The microsystem includes the personal qualities of others, the physical and material properties of everyday settings, and the activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing child at this level. The relationships between a child and family members in the home, and the relationships between a child and teachers or peers in the centre, are significant examples of microsystems. Within the microsystem the child participates in activities, is involved in relationships with others and is expected to fulfil particular roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). In the case of early childhood
education in Solomon Islands, to enable the initiative to develop and advance, there are certain essential microsystems that should be considered. These microsystems include the early childhood setting with its inherent factors, teachers, parents, families and community people. While the focus of this discussion is on the impact of the training programme, perceptions of early childhood education administrators and members of the community are also important, as these groups are part of the exosystems surrounding the kindergarten community. This is supported by a recurring message from existing literature on early childhood education which stresses that if the two microsystems of family and early childhood centre are to be considered, they should be studied concurrently (Smith, et al., 2000).

One of the goals of this research study was to examine how the new approach to early childhood education had generally impacted on families and the communities. The outcomes are discussed in part three of chapter ten. However, it is hoped that combined outcomes to which early childhood education contributes are reflected in the overall level of social cohesion within the Solomon Islands' society. The processes that work together in Bronfenbrenner's systems have a range of outcomes at different areas of society.

Theoretical ideas are tools; in themselves they do not address the realities of the Solomon Islands' context. However, in terms of the curriculum for children, ecological theory can support the relationships between the developing child and kindergarten, the family, the culture and the community as indicated earlier. As the child is the central focus in the ecological perspective, adults dealing with children's development and learning need to understand that the child's actions are based on her or his perception of reality. The focus therefore is on children's interpretations of their surroundings rather than on the objective characteristics of those surroundings. In the Solomon Islands situation, for example, the early childhood training programme emphasises that aspects of children's cultural values and beliefs should be incorporated in their learning activities. Early childhood teachers should ensure that aspects of interrelated factors with a potential to contribute to children's development and learning are integrated into the kindergarten curriculum by, for example, seeking assistance from members of the community with cultural expertise, knowledge and skills to help in implementing children's cultural activities. In this context, children can experience day to day interactions within
their cultural values, and their capacity for understanding and dealing with wider spheres of reality should increase with each new learning experience they undertake.

4.1.4 Mesosystem

The mesosystem, described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as an interlocking structural pattern of the environment, consists of the relationships between the various Microsystems in which development takes place or the ongoing interactions affecting the child’s immediate contexts. In a wider context, the Solomon Islands’ teachers’ field-based training, for example, should enable them to gain the necessary skills and knowledge that they can utilise in the kindergarten setting to help children learn. In terms of the child, an example of a mesosystem is the relationship between a child’s home and early childhood education centre. In relation to Solomon Islands, these connections between contexts may reflect the relationship of the family to the centre and the centre to the church. The church has a commanding influence on many aspects of life, and participates in community life, including families, kindergartens and schools. It plays a varied, significant role in providing educational services to communities and to society as a whole. Research has shown that when looking at children’s development (Woodhead, 1999), it is very important to look carefully at the behaviour in multiple settings to gain a more complete picture of the individual’s development.

The mesosystem encompasses the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing individual actively participates, such as, for a child, the relations between home, school, and neighbourhood peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Family members’ perceptions on how early education should affect the child and how closely these relate to the expectations of kindergarten staff, is an example of a mesosystem linkage or connection. Another example of the mesosystem linkage can involve the teacher’s or the centre’s relationship with the child’s family and how it may affect the child’s ongoing learning process. Similarly, how children relate to peers in the classroom setting may affect relationships outside class. For example, a child inviting school friends to her or his birthday party. Children’s access to books at home may affect their learning to read at school, while encouraging social
groupings may affect the range and kinds of friendships that children have with their peers and how these friendships can be developed and maintained.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises that one setting where the child spends time, for example his or her home, has links with other settings such as early childhood centre, and the nature of these links (the mesosystem) has a major influence on the child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The mesosystem describes the way in which factors in two or more microsystems interact. Transitions that children make between settings impact on the course of their development. For example, when a child moves from home to early childhood centre if there is good reciprocal communication and warm relationships between early childhood teachers and parents, the transition is likely to be supportive of development. This is also reflected in the situation where the early childhood centre has working policies that ease the transition of the young child from home to an early childhood setting. Dalli (1999) explains that this process can be seen in a primary caregiver system where one staff member has one-on-one relationship with the child and parents are supported and informed over the transition process, to ensure an easy transition. In the Solomon Islands’ situation, despite the idea of early childhood education being relatively new, mutual effort by both teachers and parents is making transition for children increasingly easier. Parents, for example, are encouraged to support and assist in the centre and with other kindergarten-related activities.

4.1.5 Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that aspects of the environment that do not directly affect the child still have an influence on development. The exosystem consists of settings that indirectly affect the child, but still influence his or her development and learning. The exosystem, for example, includes the parents’ workplace and the formal and informal social, economic, political, religious institutions and other settings that indirectly affect the child. In the Solomon Islands’ context, for example, a mother working may affect the child’s experience, or the village committee that is involved with recreational facilities can provide an enriched or impoverished environment for children.

Extending the border, the exosystem describes those factors or settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what is happening in the setting.
closely responsible for the developing person as noted earlier. It also may include abstract factors beyond the immediate environment of the child. In the Solomon Islands’ situation, the primary education division of the Solomon Islands’ Ministry of Education that administers the early childhood education field provides an example of an exosystem setting. How the Ministry of Education is organised for instance, can affect programme implementation. Any of these exosystem factors can affect the experiences of individual children in individual programmes by their contributions, help, support and the various indirect roles they play in ensuring children continue their education regardless of any problem that may arise within the kindergarten community.

Decisions and interactions made in the exosystem sphere may affect the cultural experience of children in kindergarten. For example, school boards that mandate the implementation of a particular curriculum or teaching practices regardless of their appropriateness are undermining the teacher’s role as thinker and decision-maker (Rodd, 1997). These decisions may lead to teaching practices that do not challenge children to think, explore, and question, and do not foster a child-centred, constructivist perspective on teaching and learning that takes into account individual and cultural differences and promotes diverse, holistic, child-centred and inclusive approaches.

In relating the notion to early childhood education in Solomon Islands, there are two important exosystems for the two microsystems that are responsible for developing the child. The first is the geographical isolation of the family, and the extent of supportive networks of family and friends. In the Solomon Islands, family exosystem can create barriers that in turn can contribute to parents or families’ discouragement in enrolling their child in a centre. Such barriers, for example, may include insufficient knowledge on the importance of early childhood education and why parents should enrol their child at kindergarten, lack of income to pay fees, or lack of access to transportation. In relation to the problem of transportation, it specifically affects the majority of children who are most likely to travel a fair distance to get to their early childhood centre. These are real problems with the exosystem affecting the microsystem. The early childhood setting microsystem includes all the factors that make up quality in the child’s microsystem. The exosystem involves factors that support quality, such as training and professional development opportunities for staff, resources, such as the availability of
materials and advisory support, access to a relevant Solomon Islands based curriculum and local community support.

4.1.6 Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to the overlapping consistencies consisting of values, beliefs, accepted practices and ideologies that influence the individual's interactions and relationships within a culture or subculture in which the other systems operate as indicated previously (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It also includes larger societal factors such as overall economic conditions, federal and customary laws; and historical events such as famines and wars, or ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, spiritual and religious values, legal and political practices, ceremonies and customs shared by a cultural group (Rosenthal, 1999, 2000). Cultural beliefs and values about child rearing practices are part of the macrosystem. Culture refers to the behaviour patterns, beliefs, values, accepted practices and all the products of a group of people that are passed on from generation to generation. This cultural setting has a marked influence on the development of the child. The consistencies, in the form and content of lower order systems (the micro, meso, and exosystems) exist at the level of subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems underlying such consistencies. Hence, the macrosystem reflects a shared assumption, among people, of how things could be done. The ecological model has a function in promoting and evaluating social policy. Over time the macrosystem factors can and will change. Thus, an early childhood education programme that is culturally sensitive can bring about changes in practices and policies in centres and other childcare institutions. In Solomon Islands, other examples of factors operating at the macrosystem level include the policies of early childhood education or school systems and social policies that connects organisational layers, such as national or provincial governmental organisations. Also, foreign aid support as delivered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the New Zealand Government to the Solomon Islands' Government, and training programmes at the Solomon Islands' College of Higher Education responsible for training teachers, are other examples of processes operating at the macrosystem.
4.1.7 Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1986) later included another system called the 'chronosystem' to indicate environmental influences on individual or family development over time. Chronosystem effects can be events that are associated with individual life transitions like going to school for the first time, or the effects of cumulative sequences of developmental transitions over the life course within the particular historical time in which people are embedded. The Great Depression of the nineteen thirties for instance, has been understood to have had a lasting effect on children's lives through changing family functioning and roles (Smith et al., 2000). The attitudinal change and nature of the family in the last decade in areas such as the benefits of having a small-sized family, and an increase in age of mother at first birth, and the move towards a market-based economy could be considered features of the chronosystem in Solomon Islands. In addition, the social and civil unrest that erupted and engulfed Solomon Islands in 1999 is another example of an aspect of the chronosystem.
4.2 The Sociocultural Approach

The sociocultural perspective focuses on the relationship between cognitive processes and cultural, social, historical, and institutional settings (Wertsch, 1995; Woodhead, 1999). The sociocultural perspective based on Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural-historical framework, emphasises certain overlapping principles of learning and teaching which have vital implications for early childhood teachers, caregivers and other professionals responsible for young children’s learning and development and the wider society as a whole. In a strict sense, the sociocultural model is specifically a framework for understanding learning and teaching (Wertsch, Rio & Alvarez, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 1996).

From a sociocultural perspective, considering how children learn and develop to influence teaching strategies, introduces another way of looking at the developmental process and the products that affect children’s development (Rogoff, 1990; Woodhead, 1999). The recognition of children’s culturally and biologically influenced traits affecting their actions, reasoning, social relationships, and ability to create changes, has significant implications for how educators, researchers and other professionals theorise and carry out research in the area of early childhood education. This is important for teachers as this knowledge can assist them to analyse and understand useful characteristics of early childhood programmes, and to further connect them to the goals of, and priority areas in, children’s learning and development (Woodhead, 1999). For example, it is crucial for practitioners to understand, respect, acknowledge and integrate children’s cultural backgrounds when formulating goals for early childhood curriculum programmes. The accumulation of reliable data on the impact of contexts on children’s development from cross-cultural studies, means it is no longer relevant to generalise about the sociocultural factors influencing children’s development and learning in the field of early childhood education. Existing cross-cultural literature (e.g. Valsiner, 1988; Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Myers, 1992; Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu & Mosier, 1993; Wertsch, 1995; Woodhead, 1996; Rosenthal, 1999, 2000) supports that the sociocultural context impacts the process of development and learning for young children. Thus, for example, comparing a modern European kindergarten with a kindergarten in Solomon Islands is inaccurate and
distorting. As it only highlights characteristics of the varieties of contemporary early childhood programmes and processes from Europe (Woodhead, 1999), ignoring features and different outcomes of the various early childhood education programmes that have been established in majority countries. That action in turn can potentially ignore the sociocultural characteristics of the child-rearing processes of the majority nations.

A sociocultural view can also change approaches available for assessing quality. Martin Woodhead (1999) for example, maintains that:

The ‘developmental appropriateness’ of children’s experiences, the ‘harmfulness’ or ‘benefits’ of their environment cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives, their prior learning experiences, and future prospects. Unlike frameworks that emphasise supposedly normal and natural criteria for judging the quality of child development, cultural approaches argue that these criteria are constructed and contextual. In due course, human societies may come to share beliefs about what is ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ for children. The implication of accepting that early child development and learning has to be understood as a social and cultural process is that benchmarks of quality are not intrinsic, fixed and prescribed. They are extrinsic, historically-specific and negotiable within a framework of promoting children’s rights and welfare (Woodhead, 1999, pp. 14-15).

Similarly, Rosenthal (2000) discusses potential benefits for children when they engage in ongoing interactions with adults, peers and the environment. She maintains that children’s interactions within their social worlds enhance their learning and development. She cautions that the eco-cultural contexts in which children are reared ascertain the nature and quality of these interactions and the manner in which they influence children’s development and learning.

A sociocultural approach provides the way to an integral understanding of the factors that shape children’s lives. The model acknowledges that children’s early childhood experiences are socially based, thus implying that they can also be ‘reconstructed’. Woodhead (1999) ascertains that the chance of an early childhood education programme becoming effective is greater if it is supported by the “physical and human resources, beliefs, values, goals and experiences” of those who are engaging in it. Moreover, Woodhead cautions that teachers, students and researchers working in cross-cultural environments have a “moral responsibility to be alert to how the tasks of childhood are perceived, felt and understood by those children, their parents and other caregivers” (Woodhead, 1999, p. 20). This is important because these people are
often the ones experiencing and attempting to find answers to the problems of living and growing up in conditions that are greatly different from those that form "academic and personal priorities" of people of the minority nations (Woodhead, 1999, p. 20).

4.2.1 How can the Sociocultural Theory support the Development of a Solomon Islands' Training Curriculum for Early Childhood Education Teachers?

Sociocultural theory has the potential to contribute in a variety of interrelated ways to the development of a Solomon Islands’ training curriculum for kindergarten teachers. It advocates issues that have implications for teacher training, a culturally influenced classroom environment for meaningful educational experiences, and bridging the gap between kindergarten and the community. Also, considering sociocultural factors in early childhood practices means that teachers in Solomon Islands should be sensitive to conservative attitudes to enable them to move forward in helping children learn. Early childhood teachers for example, recognise that the presence of diversity in the classroom highlights the cultural and individual differences of kindergarten children.

Vygotsky’s theory (1978) maintains that the child’s learning and development is inseparable from the social and cultural activities he or she participates in and is exposed to. It is both a theory of education and a theory of cultural transmission. Bruner (1986) maintains that education for Vygotsky implies not only the development of individual potential, but also the historical expression and growth of people’s culture as they live it, as members of their society. Significantly, Vygotsky’s (1978) concepts of socialisation have significant meaning to teaching, particularly his ideas of inter-subjectivity and the zone of proximal development. For example, the zone of proximal development is appropriate, practical, and implies that a kindergarten teacher’s practice contributes, facilitates and guides a child’s learning and development by proceeding ahead of the child, highlighting the dependence of learning as a process on the child’s social interactions within his or her culture.
4.2.2 Factors Affecting the Child's Learning and Development

The social context affects children's development and learning in critical ways, and provides them with intellectual tools and practices that facilitate reaching appropriate solutions to problems; and structures individual cognitive activity (Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, et al., 1995). These processes involve information tools, skills and practices which are transmitted to children through interaction with more experienced members of society. Vygotsky (1978) for example, explains that both physical manipulation and social interaction are necessary for development. Pattern making for Solomon Islands children, for example, not only develops children's ability to understand relationships between objects, but also provides practice in using traditional and cultural symbols to represent these relationships.

In creating and recreating knowledge, and to cater for the process of the co-construction of knowledge, the sociocultural approach emphasises the importance of identifying what the children actually understand. Through sensitive and thoughtful exchanges with the children, for instance, the teacher can discover the children's current concepts and understanding. Thus the active role that the children play in this process is recognised. Also, teaching that is child-sensitive and responsive involves the mutual negotiation of activity and joint construction of meaning in social, communicative contexts. It is this form of teaching that may provide the best means for early childhood teachers to be responsive to individual differences in children's competence.

Child development is a cultural process, but it does not only focus on cultural differences. It takes place within environments that are physically structured and influenced by the cultural meaning systems of the people inhabiting these settings (Valsiner, 1988; Cole, 1992). Woodhead (1999) further explains that when a child is born, he or she is born into a cultural, social and historical setting equipped with activities and meanings. However, early childhood environments, either at home or within a kindergarten setting are not completely natural.

All environments are culturally constructed, shaped by generations of human activity and creativity, mediated by complex belief systems, including the proper way for children to develop. The most significant feature of any child's environment is the humans with whom they establish close relationships. These individuals (usually family) are themselves cultural beings. They are the product of cultural history and circumstance, which structures their lives and gives meaning and
direction to their experiences of their offspring, as they introduce them to cultural practices and symbol systems. The way parents care for their children is shaped in part by their cultural beliefs (or ethno-theories) about what is appropriate and desirable, in terms both of the goals of child development and the means to achieve those goals (Woodhead, 1999, p. 13).

Similarly, Rogoff (1995) maintains that learning and development occurs as people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community, transforming their understanding, roles, and responsibilities as they participate. Besides its other roles, culture according to Bruner (1996), shapes the minds of individuals, and promotes the process of meaning making within appropriate cultural contexts. Thus it is an essential aspect of development and learning for young children. Before they enter school, children are already learning cognitive and linguistic skills through social interactions with other people.

In the Solomon Islands’ situation, through their sociocultural relationship networks, children are given opportunities to interact with their siblings and peers, and learn about rituals, ideologies, social rules and meanings. An essential aspect of early learning for young children is their capacity to engage in a series of different interactive styles based on setting and relationship. This shows that in complex, changing traditional situations, children can experience a variety of both competing and conflicting ideas as a normal part of their everyday life and development (Woodhead, 1999).

In an early childhood education programme inspired by a sociocultural approach, the notion of guided participation can be explained as a structure for evaluating the way children learn cognitive and social skills that are perceived to be useful to their society (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff et al., 1993; Woodhead, 1999). The concept of guided participation extends Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development, in which individual development is regarded as occurring during joint problem solving with people who are more skilled in the use of cultural tools and practices (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1998). It refers to the process and system of involvement of individuals with others, as they communicate and engage in shared endeavours. It also emphasises children’s involvement in structured and diverse relationships and activities with a variety of other people. In Solomon Islands for example, cultural child-rearing practices and activities are crucial to children’s growth, development and learning. Child-rearing practices are ingrained in the culture and cultural differences, and are interwoven. Thus, the cultural processes are influenced and
guided by social patterns, values and beliefs, which have been practised by people over several generations. Listening, verbal instructions and learning by participation are valued cultural learning tools in Solomon Islands' culture and are used to teach children societal and cultural values and social activities.

The sociocultural approach acknowledges the role of social transmission in children's development, social transmission being the passing of the accumulated wisdom of the culture from one generation to the next. It highlights that social transmission influences primarily the content of knowledge for children. Thus, early education implies for the sociocultural notion not only the development of individual potential, but the historical expression and growth of human culture from which people originate. The theory provides concepts of socialisation that have particular meaning for early childhood teaching. For kindergarten teachers, for example, curriculum programmes should attempt to incorporate sensitive goals that reflect children's diverse cultural representation.

The sociocultural principles in the classroom setting highlight learning and development as being a social and collaborative activity rather than a formally taught process. When providing appropriate situations, one must take into consideration that learning should take place in meaningful contexts, preferably the context in which the knowledge is to be applied (Rogoff, et al., 1993; Rogoff, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Social structures also impact on a child's cognitive processes and the cultural tools of society also influence the way people think. Solomon Islands' children, for example, are socialised to learn and show respect by avoiding a direct glance and looking down when being spoken to by adults. Also, abstract thinking, such as using numbers, is learned in a different way depending on the cultural norm. Children use their hands in a demonstrative way to help them count and add.

Vygotsky's (1978) promotion of play as a tool for children's learning, and liberating children from situational constraints and allowing them to experiment with meaning fits appropriately into the Solomon Islands' situation. Vygotsky also ascertains that the goals of development are culturally determined, and advocates that children have an active role in constructing their own unique understanding within the cultural context. He believes that within this cultural context all development begins with social interaction and that the quality of interpersonal relationships facilitates learning and
development for young children. Thus Vygotsky places significant emphasis on the role of the teacher and her or his relationship with the children. The warmth and reciprocity of children's relationships with their teachers is vital, an intersubjectivity process highlighting the coordination of views.

A sociocultural view also promotes the interrelationship between play and literacy. It considers the influences of culture and social understandings on children's play and the incorporation of literacy activity into this context. Play provides a window on the meanings and uses assigned to literacy by different cultural groups. This process reveals cultural differences in how people conceptualise literacy as a communication tool. It also provides children with a friendly and inviting environment for activity, where they can play with their peers or adults while engaging in communication roles and processes. Play provides an important context for children, practising literacy skills and acting out social roles associated with literacy. Thus, children's play, like everyday literacy practices, draws meaning from being situated within cultural histories, values, and practices, and thus generates engagement, involves networks, and is consistently related to the everyday lives of people in their communities.

4.2.3 The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's concept of a Zone of Proximal Development is a means of explaining and clarifying the interrelationships that affect children and how these in turn influence the way children perceive and engage in their classroom learning. As explained earlier in this chapter, the term refers to the awakening area of development as opposed to the actual development level (Vygotsky, 1978; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch, et al., 1995). The zone of proximal development defines the range between what children can do on their own and what they can achieve with the assistance of others who are more skilled in a particular domain of knowledge. For example, teachers facilitate and guide children through their learning activities. Working within this zone, children gain skills that allow them to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning. They learn not only to perform a given task, but also how to structure their learning and think critically when engaging in problem solving processes.

Teaching in the zone of proximal development provides a scaffold to support the child in learning mental and social skills and processes.
Development of higher mental processes by children involves them learning to use the tools of culture (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, et al., 1995). Thus, while children actively construct an understanding of their own world, they also benefit from guided interactions with more skilled partners such as teachers, parents, siblings or peers. That is, children learn through scaffolding (Bruner, et al., 1976, cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development has another important implication for both children and early childhood education teachers. For instance, the process indicates that children who have similar, but not identical knowledge or ability, stimulate each other's thinking. This is a description of a process of learning and interacting embedded in the notion of inter-subjectivity which is the process of co-ordinating perspectives by sharing a purpose and making sensitive adjustments to each other during interpersonal activities. This concept is essential to teaching in a culturally diverse society.

For adults, among other things, these skills include the ability to assess the needs, abilities, and interests of a diverse group of children, and to know how to meet and respond to these once they are discovered, and to do so by drawing from a variety of teaching strategies. Even in early childhood classrooms where individualised learning is enhanced through activity centres that provide multiple options and challenges for child involvement, considerable time, knowledge, and skills on the part of the teacher are necessary. To develop such skills, it is important that teachers are provided with opportunities to observe competent practitioners of responsive teaching; to practise newly acquired skills; to receive feedback about their teaching; and to be assisted by a skilled mentor while they are teaching. Self-reflection has been recognised as a useful technique for connecting personal experience to that of others. Teachers' thoughtful and careful examination of their prior experiences as a teacher and learner, and their intuitive understandings are necessary for achieving intersubjectivity in responsive teaching.

In this way of thinking, a teacher cannot begin to understand the perspective of the learner without first considering her or his own system of values and attitudes about teaching and children's learning. Thus, teacher education and training programmes must encourage prospective teachers to use self-reflection to help them get in touch with their personal experiences and the ways in which these experiences may influence their teaching practices.
Once teachers have done this, they can examine their teaching practices against the experiences, values and beliefs of others, especially those from diverse backgrounds.

Summary

In relation to the current study, the ecological and sociocultural models are relevant to the issue of training early childhood teachers. The models complement each other and focus on the impact of the socio-ecological and sociocultural environment on the child’s development, and its implication for teachers, supervisors and prospective early childhood teachers and the curriculum.

The ecological perspective is best known for its insight into the mutual accommodation of the child and her or his environment. Children engaging in holistic learning experiences is an example of an aspect of this versatile model, and its support may cover the development dimensions, language and cultural setting that the child comes into contact with and is exposed to, in her or his everyday life. Children’s interactions with these various ecological settings potentially develop and enhance mature forms of thinking in relation to their learning and development. Language specifically can increase the power of thought in range and rapidity by representing actions, freeing thought from space and time, and organising actions. Children as independent seekers of knowledge, learn about their surroundings, reflecting their ability to acquire or apply knowledge that encourage and can help determine their level of learning. Thus, all early childhood teaching should be adjusted to the abilities of children. The consideration and evaluation of the field-based training programme; and the roles, activities, relationships and professional practices of early childhood teachers working in Solomon Islands’ kindergartens, can be explained in the context of ecological model as a useful conceptual framework. This approach acknowledges that a child’s development is influenced by factors working at different systems levels within a broad, ecological structure. This framework can support the interaction between an individual and the social and physical environment. The active interaction surrounds four interlocking structural settings. These include the most immediate as well as the larger social settings including the values and ideologies of a particular culture.
The sociocultural model defines children as social and cultural identities. Children's learning and development influence and are affected by their social and cultural setting. Thus processes contributing to children's learning and development are inseparable from the social and cultural activities they are exposed to, and are actively participated in, on an ongoing basis. Thus, it is both a theory of education and a theory of cultural transmission. This approach has direct implications for early childhood education programmes that are culturally sensitive, and for teachers who implement them. It contributes to people's knowledge of how children learn, that is education, and of how and what to teach, that is schooling, from a sociocultural perspective. It supports the notion that children construct their own knowledge and social interaction plays a part in the process. Early childhood education thus implies for the sociocultural model both the encouragement of individual potential as well as the historical expression and growth of people's culture from which a child originates.

The sociocultural view has vast and in-depth vital implications for learning and teaching, for early childhood teachers and supervisors who are responsible for facilitating and managing children's learning in early childhood education settings. Teachers in Solomon Islands, for example, have been dedicated to helping children to learn and structuring effective learning environments for children and guiding children's learning activities. The primary function of language as a social and cultural tool for communication leads to a view of literacy as a communication form, and as the media for sharing meaning. While the zone of proximal development leads to the situation where the teacher provides the learner support as they collectively build bridges of awareness, understandings, and competence through social interaction. This relationship is also extended to families and members of the community, as they also affect children, their development and learning through their involvement with them. The sociocultural theory supports a system of families and children, and highlights the role of private speech, the importance of adult guidance, reciprocal teaching and the role of peer interactions.

Taken together, the sociocultural and ecological models can provide an integrative framework for including culturally sensitive practice in the essence of teaching in the early childhood education field. The sociocultural model can
be used to critique the relevance of competing cultural ideologies on the developing child. In the Solomon Islands' context, for example, both the sociocultural and the ecological ideologies can support the examination of the national early childhood education programme, kindergarten curriculum programmes, teacher's practice, and policies; interpret research findings to suit cultural and geographical context, and social, political and historical events. Subsequently, appropriate training, teaching, supervisory and management strategies can be constructed to cater for any changes which are likely to be made, to bring about improvement. Within this same context, the Solomon Islands' democracy which in turn, can be used as a shared assumption, supported in the macrosystem of the ecological model about how best culturally sensitive early childhood education could be implemented throughout the country.
CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

The most important characteristic of the present study is that research was carried out in a culturally sensitive way, and looked at a culture that had not been studied before in relation to early childhood education. Solomon Islands has a traditional culture with unique characteristics and processes. The culture has values, beliefs, customs, traditions and lifestyle suited to the people's way of life. Thus, as an indigenous researcher, I was constantly aware and cautious of the cultural processes, and was sensitive to cultural protocols and practices, throughout the duration of the fieldwork in Solomon Islands. Studies such as this study should contribute to the current knowledge base, particularly in relation to aspects of traditional cultures and societies, and should further enable researchers to get a window on what children of varied cultures do and what their heritage means in the wider cultural context.

Chapter Five commences with the rationale for methodology; followed by the aims of the study and the research questions. The ethics and the participant recruitment processes are next described, followed by a description of the participants of the study. A representation of the key participants' profiles is next presented, followed by the section on data collection and procedural strategies that were adopted to gather data for this study. It next looks at an explanation of the data analysis process, and followed by the limitations of the research study. The chapter concludes with a description and the structure of the field-based training programme.

5.1 Rationale for Methodology

The research study is an in-depth qualitative study. I employed a qualitative formative evaluative methodology that included in-depth interviews, examination of appropriate documents and participant observation, and an ethnographic style of data collection. Qualitative research endeavours to understand how people put meaning to their lives, experiences, life stories and
the structures of the world. It also deals with and places emphasis on processes rather than products and is persuasive in its techniques, creating notions, theories and assumptions from details (Holloway, 1997; Schwandt, 1997; Creswell, 1998).

Similarly, Ballard (1986) maintains that because individuals may evoke and experience environments in unique ways, it is vital to know about people’s individual perceptions, beliefs and understandings relating to what they are doing and what is happening to them.

According to Creswell (1998):

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p.15).

Thus, researchers use qualitative approaches to explore and understand the social reality of individual people, groups and cultures (Maxwell, 1996; Holloway, 1997; Schwandt, 1997; Creswell, 1998). In contrast, Maycut and Morehouse (1994) note that “quantitative research is based on observations that are converted into discrete units that can be compared to other units by using statistical analysis” (Maycut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 2). Qualitative research, on the other hand, “examines people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants” (p. 2).

One significant aspect of qualitative research is the reflective role that the researcher plays in the research process (Creswell, 1998). In this context, as an indigenous Solomon Islander undertaking this research, my background and ethnic origins contributed to and helped in forming a good relationship with the participants, and in gaining valid data. I gained the people’s trust without special effort on my part, and I was also able to scrutinise issues and form opinions from the perspective of both an indigenous person and a Western-influenced researcher.

Prior to the research fieldwork, my association with the participants was initiated and developed through the national coordinator for early childhood education, who acted as a link person. However, mutual relationships rapidly developed soon after I was introduced to the participants and the people of the communities where the research took place. The fact that I was interested in
early childhood education definitely played a major part and impacted on my relationships with the participants in the study and on the responses they offered. Furthermore, the communities took me in as one of them and I was often invited to attend community meetings, ceremonies and events. My opinions were sought on specific early childhood education matters and also on general issues concerning the education system and the economy of Solomon Islands. I was humbled by the generosity and friendships of the participants and members of the communities who took me in as a researcher, as well as one of their own people, but with a Western-influenced outlook. As a professional woman, I was respected in the communities I was working with, throughout the duration of the research.

Qualitative educational research specifically seeks to understand events, behaviours and relationships and the effect they have on the ordinary conduct of people's day to day lives. One of the legitimate perspectives for qualitative research and in particular, on early childhood education is that it looks at children's experience as it is lived, attempting to see the world from different perspectives. For example, it can analyse classroom discourse, and the rules of conversation that shape interactions between caregivers and children. It seeks to understand the systems of meaning that prevail in classrooms, playgrounds, family day care and other community settings (Landers, 1991; Torkington & Landers, 1999).

Moreover, qualitative studies of early childhood education have closely examined such commonplace events as a teacher reading a storybook to a group of children, or a toddler throwing a tantrum at a day care centre. They have looked at the experiences of the adults in children’s lives, studying for instance the relationships between mothers and family day care providers. The premise of such studies is that children learn in the context of relationships; the goal is to understand the specific kinds of ties and interactions that promote or inhibit learning for specific groups of children in specific settings. Qualitative studies can yield "thick descriptions" of classrooms, childcare centres, family care settings and communities. They can be fascinating to read and are often more meaningful to practitioners than statistical studies that collect numerical data (Landers, 1991; Torkington & Landers, 1999).

Qualitative approaches attempt to remove clinical distance from interviewing procedures and endeavour to establish relationships with
interviewees. The emphasis is on the process of conducting the interviews more like a conversation where participants can initiate and ask questions as well as answer and reply to questions (Holloway, 1997; Creswell, 1998). Also when interviews are the primary method of data collection, they are as open-ended and unstructured as possible, allowing the interviewees to structure their own interpretations and to enable the interviewees to readily tell stories or narratives about their experiences (Kvale, 1996).

Ethnographic study, a type of qualitative research, originates from anthropology (Holloway, 1997). However, since the twentieth century, it has been adopted in all fields of research, including the field of education (Holloway, 1997; Creswell, 1998). It is basically concerned with the methods and strategies the researcher uses to collect data. It also unites process and product, fieldwork and written text (Schwandt, 1997). As both a process and an outcome of research (Creswell, 1998), ethnography is a product of research, typically found in book-length form. As a process, ethnography involves prolonged observation of a group, typically through participant observation in which a researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people or through one-on-one interviews with members of the group (Creswell, 1998). In the present study, the researcher carried out one-on-one interviews with the participants.

The ethnographic approach also involves studying, understanding and putting meanings of behaviour, language and interactions of the participants in context (Creswell, 1998). In the current study, the ethnographic component included participant observation and informal unstructured interviewing techniques to determine parent and community people’s perspectives on the early childhood field-based training programme.

Triangulation, the procedure for establishing validity in qualitative research, involves the use of data from several sources so that the research uses a constellation of evidence to substantiate conclusions (Schwandt, 1997). It is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences the researcher draws. In the present study, I used early childhood education teachers, administrators and community people’s perspectives and perceptions on the early childhood education field-based training programme, combined with the observational aspect of the study as a useful approach to triangulating the data. Although the fieldwork mostly involved interviews, participant observation and informal
conversations. I also created and collected other fieldwork data sources, which included a participant questionnaire, a journal, a diary, photographs, official documents, publications, reports, paper presentations and participation in community meetings. This helped establish validity through triangulation. Qualitative approaches focus on understanding a phenomenon in a holistic way rather than operationalising, isolating and statistically manipulating different variables (Smith, Taylor, Gollop & Tapp, 1997). In the current study a narrative has emerged from the data analysis that presents the findings in a meaningful way relating different perspectives about the impact of the early childhood education field-based training programme to each other.

Woodhead (1999) cautions that there is a severe knowledge inequality affecting young children's development and learning. He ascertains that a great deal of early childhood development and education studies have been performed in minority societies, predominately in Europe and North America, where often, the studies were carried out in restricted "socio-economic and cultural" conditions. He also points out that research bias in several ways is certain to occur, because researchers have to make choices about what relevant components of research need to be "studied, included, asked, selected, used and how data are recorded, analysed and interpreted." "Cultural context-specific accounts" can easily be disguised as "universal statements about what is natural, normal, or developmentally appropriate" (Woodhead, 1999, p.9).

Culture determines the nature of many elements of young children's development environments (Smale, 1998). It has been suggested, for example, that early childhood development involves a partnership between the cultural world of the family, and that of other representatives of society engaged in caring for children (Adamson, 1998; Bram, 1998; Smale, 1998). In the wider context, cultures have some unique values, beliefs, customs, traditions and lifestyles. These characteristics certainly influence the role of research in each culture and how researchers manage their research. However, there are characteristics that are universal regardless of sociocultural variations and/or differences in cultures and social groups (Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu & Mosier, 1993; Rogoff, 1990, 1995; Lamb, 1998; Woodhead, 1999; Rosenthal, 1999, 2000). It has been suggested that, such understandings could help designers and educators assess current views about children. Thus, they should be as authentic and
respectful as possible if they are to best serve the interests of children from multicultural backgrounds of the community and family contexts.

An emphasis on teaching in accordance with indigenous values has increasingly been recognised as influencing the effectiveness of learning and achievement in recent years. Much research in multicultural contexts tends to concentrate on similarities or contrasts between different systems for the provision of education, or to “educational outcomes”, rather than to the processes of learning. That is, much literature deals only with educational systems and their failure to provide equitable outcomes for students, rather than with what is “different” about the context for the learning (Bishop, 1998). There is therefore considerable pressure for small educational systems to emulate their parent systems, rather than develop unique strategies more appropriate to local contexts. It has been reported, for example, that voices that call for cultural pluralism, social empowerment, and affirmation of diversity are often silenced, in order to protect the belief that academic excellence for minority students will be achieved through cultural absorption into the mainstream (Bishop, 1998).

Bruner (1996), a leading contemporary educational theorist, argues that the individual expression of culture is in meaning making, which “involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know what they are about” (Bruner, 1996, p. 3). He suggests that although meanings are “in the mind”, they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created. It is thus cultural locality of meanings that assures their negotiability and communicability. It is culture that provides the tools for organising and understanding our world in communicable ways (p. 3).

Diversity among the traditional cultures is distinct, and while there are vast differences, there is also similarity of beliefs and practices found within traditional societies, particularly in relation to child-rearing practices and beliefs. Individual child-rearing practices are influenced by cultural norms that have evolved over time and which, in turn, are grounded in cultural beliefs and values; and are impacted by the social, economic, political and physical structures and processes. Rosenthal (1999, 2000) for example, maintains that our understanding of children’s development is culturally constructed and that the cultural context of a given cultural community shapes its child-rearing ideology
and its basic assumptions and beliefs concerning children's development. Researchers have values and they consider questions important to their culture. They develop research methods that are best suited to their own culture. They can look at results through 'cultural spectacles.' However, cultural differences can create strengths in cross-cultural child development information (Woodhead, 1996, 1999) and can contribute to learning taking a culturally sensitive perspective. Therefore, people need to learn not to judge other cultures with their own models. Gonzalez-Mena (1993) points out that people tend to be ethnocentric and see their own cultures as normal and others as not normal. Researchers need to also realise that not all aspects of their own cultural environments may be appropriate and applicable in another culture. In other words, taking something of one culture and assuming it may work in another culture is a general and dangerous assumption on the part of any potential researcher.

5.2 The Aims of the Study and Research Questions

This research study evaluated the impact of a recently introduced field-based training programme on the roles, relationships and activities of early childhood education teachers working in Solomon Islands kindergartens, identifying and analysing any possible changes to their professional behaviour and teaching practices as a result of the training. It further examined the quality of the kindergarten programmes being implemented, and parent and community people's views of the kindergarten programmes and how the new approach to kindergarten education had generally impacted on families and the communities. Part one of the study involved interviewing early childhood education teachers and administrators in Solomon Islands, representatives of parents and members of the community, and the New Zealand-based initiators and designers of the field-based training programme. Part two involved participant observations in two kindergartens in one of the seven provinces visited during the duration of the fieldwork.

The key research questions were:

1. What are teachers' perspectives of the early childhood education field-based training programme and the training process?
2. Which parts of the training programme do teachers perceive to be of most and least value?
3. How do the teachers perceive the field-based training programme to impact on their teaching practice and professionalism?
4. Are high quality programmes being implemented by teachers who have received training and is children’s learning and development being supported in the way intended by the training programme?
5. What do teachers, administrators, families and community people think of early childhood education?
6. How do administrators, parents and members of the community view the field-based training programme and is it perceived to have had any impact on kindergartens, families and communities?
7. How well does the training programme suit the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographic context?

5.3 Ethics and Participant Recruitment

Although the data for the present study was collected in the Solomon Islands, as a student at the University of Otago, I adhered to the University’s policy stipulating ethical guidelines, gained ethics consent and used the ethical principles (Refer to Appendix G). It must be noted, however, that written information and written consent was not a culturally appropriate method for giving information or receiving consent from some Solomon Islands participants. Nevertheless, all participants were fully informed about the aims and procedures of the study prior to consenting to their participation. In part one of the study, written information was provided and written consent collected from teachers, the programme initiators and designers, administrators and the national director for primary education, also responsible for early childhood education. For part two of the study, participants were informed verbally about the study at organised meetings, where I invited them to participate in the study.

I also verbally informed all participants in the study that the data for the study (interview transcripts and other sources of data) would be used to answer research questions relating to the field-based training programme. Participants were also informed that the findings of this project would be written-up as a thesis for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Also, the findings would be published in at least one international early childhood education journal, and would also be used for the purposes of contribution to
the educational development of Solomon Islands. Participants were also assured that any information or data included in written reports would in no way be linked to any specific participant and any identifying features would be removed and data would remain anonymous. Participants were under no obligation to supply information, and there were no consequences for choosing to withhold information. Points concerning the individual person's rights of access to and correction of personal information were covered in the information sheet for participants (See Appendix G).

The principles of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, right of withdrawal at any stage of the research process and verification of interview transcripts by participants were incorporated into the research strategies and were adhered to carefully (see Appendix G). Pseudonyms are used throughout to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants. The verification of transcripts by participants was made through a visiting early childhood education consultant from New Zealand to Solomon Islands. Five selected translated transcripts of the interviews were given to the consultant for the chosen participants to read and to check. As a proof of the checking of their individual transcripts, the teachers concerned signed their transcripts before returning them to the author through the early childhood education consultant. Since the study involved working with both teachers and members of the community, I adopted particular care throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Participants were given careful explanations of what was expected of them if they participated in the study right at the commencement of the fieldwork component of the study.

I identified potential participants with the assistance of the national coordinator for the early childhood education sector in Solomon Islands. From her recommendation, I generated a list of early childhood education teachers meeting the criteria of the study as a basis for me to advance my study preparation. The final teacher participants were selected in an attempt to represent a range of perspectives. The process was implemented with the assistance of the national coordinator for early childhood education in Solomon Islands.

The original criteria were intended to be that the main participants would consist of twelve trained and qualified early childhood education teachers

4 The terms, coordinator and trainer have been used interchangeably.
teaching in various kindergarten centres in the Solomon Islands and on Kolombangara Island in Western province, the anticipated research location. Part one of the study would involve interviewing participating teachers and initiators and designers of the field-based training programme. Some parents and community people in the research location were also to be included as informal participants and were to be interviewed informally when the researcher was visiting the two kindergartens where participant observation was going to be carried out. These unstructured interviews were necessary to determine the families' and the community people's perspectives on the impact of the field-based training programme. Part two of the study was to involve participant observation in two kindergartens in Western province.

The study concentrated on the first set of Solomon Islands kindergarten teachers, participants from the initial number of seventy one that commenced and successfully completed the requirements for the 'Introductory Certificate of Attainment in Early Childhood Education', in May, 1996. Forty-nine teachers from the initial seventy one successfully completed the requirements and had graduated from the field-based training programme. For the purpose of this study, six of those forty-nine kindergarten teachers who had attained their early childhood education teaching qualifications were to be participants in the study. In addition, another six teachers were also to be selected from the second group of kindergarten teachers who commenced and had successfully completed their field-based training and had achieved their teaching qualifications. These anticipated twelve teachers were employed all over the Solomon Islands.

The research fieldwork location was also originally planned to be restricted to Kolombangara Island in the Western province of Solomon Islands. The selection of Kolombangara Island as a research location was based on the understanding that the early childhood education situation on this particular island had not been influenced by other outside agencies such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

However, as a consequence of the circumstances that are next explained, the criteria were broadened to accommodate changes to the structure of the fieldwork component of the research study. The number of the key participants, for instance, was increased to sixteen from the original number of twelve participants. The sixteen main participants consisted of eight qualified teachers
from the first group and another eight from the second group of kindergarten teachers to graduate from the field-based training programme. The increase came about because people were intensely eager to be part of the study. Furthermore, based on how pleased, excited, enthusiastic and optimistic people were about the concept of early childhood education and its establishment throughout the country, they readily expressed an interest in being involved in the research study. A significant characteristic of the study was that people took the initiative to express to the researcher their wish to be interviewed about the impact of the field-based training programme. It reached a point where the researcher had to make a firm decision and politely informed potential participants that she would no longer include additional participants in the study.

In relation to the research locations, after the researcher had further consultation with the Solomon Islands national coordinator it was agreed that the number of research locations would be increased. It was decided that to obtain a broad range of people’s views, the study needed to be extended to include six other provinces in other parts of Solomon Islands where kindergartens have also been introduced and established. These other six provinces were selected in addition to Kolombangara Island of Western province, which was originally chosen as a research location.

Interviews with teachers also involved internal travels to each participant’s workplace. Originally, it was planned to interview each teacher on two occasions - once early in the three months and once at the end of the three months. This process was to have been adopted as follow-up in rechecking data and in looking at progress since the first visit. However, since circumstances changed to accommodate the need to visit the additional six research locations, interviews with participating teachers took place only once.

Also, within Western province itself, instead of merely concentrating on Kolombangara Island and talking only with people of the communities where the two kindergartens to be observed were located, it was decided that the fieldwork be extended to other islands and communities. As a result of that decision, I travelled to seven different locations within the Western province: Gizo, Rarumana, Pinadapada, Baraulu, Munda, Nusabanga and Kolombangara islands.
The key participants were recruited through the Solomon Islands national coordinator based in Honiara, who had been involved in the training programme. Before I left New Zealand to carry out research in Solomon Islands, I sent letters to the Western province early childhood education coordinator and the Chief Education Officer for Western province to seek permission to carry out the fieldwork on Kolombangara Island as originally planned. Based on the knowledge of how long mail from New Zealand to the Solomon Islands tends to take, it was decided that the teachers would confirm their interest in participating in the study by signing the consent form at the time of their interview. This arrangement was adopted without any difficulty and all the key participants signed the consent form at the beginning of each interview to confirm their participation before progressing with the interview.

I also sought advice and assistance from the provincial coordinators of regions visited on identifying potential informal participants for the study. The other participants selected were representatives of parents, education personnel, other early childhood education and preparatory teachers, and members of the community. The community people consisted of parents, chiefs, church elders and leaders, village women and men, kindergarten chair people, other early childhood education teachers, school and preparatory teachers, as indicated earlier, and government workers. The national and provincial coordinators, the director of primary education responsible for the early childhood education sector and the coordinator of the School of Education early childhood education programme were also interviewed. Also, the New Zealand-based partners who initiated and designed the field-based training programme in consultation with Solomon Islanders were interviewed.

5.4 Participants

The participants in the study included:
- 16 Early childhood education teachers;
- 13 Administrators;
- 35 Members of the Community.

The key participants consisted of trained and qualified early childhood education teachers who had completed the field-based training programme; were working in various kindergartens within the communities; and with some others still undertaking their training. Also, seven other educators who had
qualified in the field-based training programme, but were at the time of the research undergoing another teacher training programme. I interviewed each of the sixteen participants alone, often at her or his place of work or study. The seven teachers were attending the School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) in Honiara. The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education’s School of Education is the only teacher training institution in Solomon Islands. These kindergarten teachers were attending the training institution to upgrade their teaching qualifications to an advanced teaching certificate in early childhood education. However, the seven participating educators were only interviewed for their perspective of the field-based training programme, since they had previously trained in it.

Nine participants were attached to various kindergartens in the provinces at the time of interview. Fifteen of the participants were female and one was male. Their age ranged from twenty two to forty six years, with a mean age of thirty years. The three main groups, Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian, residing in Solomon Islands were represented in the participants. Thirteen were Melanesian, and were working in Western, Central, on Malaita, Makira, Temotu, Guadalcanal provinces, and in Honiara. One was Polynesian, and was visiting from Rennell & Bellona province, and two were Micronesian, and were teaching in Western province. However, it is important to point out that these representative terms are solely token gestures in view of the kind of diversity found throughout Solomon Islands. In other words, these groupings are outdated from an anthropological perspective.

All sixteen participants could not be sent copies of their individual transcript to verify, due to the fact that they were scattered over seven provinces within Solomon Islands and because of the length of time it would have taken to contact each teacher. However, I am confident that their stories are validly represented, as they are consistent with others, informally validated by conversations with the national and the provincial coordinators who participated in this study. Consequently, only five of the teachers who participated in the study had an opportunity to receive a copy of the translated transcript of their interview to peruse and scrutinise, and to change any details should they wish to. However, no changes were requested. All the names used throughout are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants.
Fourteen teachers had secondary education, and ten had post-secondary education. Two of the participating teachers had senior primary education. Nine teachers also had a primary teaching qualification. Six of the teachers had other early childhood education teaching qualifications and one teacher had only attained her teaching qualification from the field-based training programme.

The length of time participating teachers had been working in the early childhood education sector ranged from one to fourteen years with a mean duration of five years. Twelve teachers had started working in an early childhood centre before their training and four had commenced working after they had completed their field-based training. Nine teachers had started the early childhood education field-based training programme in 1996. Of these nine teachers, one completed her training in the same year, five finished their training in 1997, and three completed their training in 1998. Four other teachers commenced their training in 1997 and completed their training in 1998. Three other teachers started their training in 1998 and finished it in the same year.

The thirteen administrators included the national and provincial coordinators; the director for primary education, also responsible for early childhood education; the coordinator of the School of Education early childhood education programme at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE); and the designers of the field-based training programme. Similarly, I interviewed these participants at their place of work.

The thirty-five representatives of the community included other early childhood teachers, school and preparatory teachers, parents, families, chiefs, church elders and leaders, village women and men, kindergarten chair people and Government workers. I informally interviewed participants with jobs at their place of work, while I interviewed the other participants in agreed places in their villages. I held conversations with these people to obtain their perspectives of the impact of the field-based training programme on the Solomon Islands society, education system, families and communities.

Part one of the present study involved conducting and tape-recording in-depth interviews with the teacher and administrator participants to get their perspectives of the field-based training programme. I further interviewed the New Zealand-based initiators and designers of the field-based training programme to obtain their perspectives of the field-based training programme.
and its impact on Solomon Islands society. I also interviewed representatives of community people. In part two, I observed teachers and children at work in two kindergartens in one of the seven provinces I visited during the fieldwork. The process also enabled me to form a holistic picture of what was happening in kindergartens as the result of the establishment of the training programme for teachers working in early childhood centres throughout the provinces of Solomon Islands.

5.5 A Representation of Key Participants' Profiles

It is reminded that these are pseudonyms to retain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants.

Sandie (35) was employed by a private kindergarten centre, and had a senior primary education. She had been teaching for three years when she decided to do her preschool course at another institution. She began her field-based training with the first group, and successfully completed it. Sandie was interested and enrolled at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) to do the two-year certificate course in early childhood education. She was doing her teaching practice, when she was interviewed for her viewpoint on the impact of the field-based training programme. She was looking forward to gaining her early childhood education qualification, and was keen to undertake further training in a tertiary institution overseas.

Lilly (24), with high school education, did a private preschool certificate course. She had been teaching for two years when she started her training. Lilly was among the first kindergarten teachers to do their field-based training. She next enrolled at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) to pursue her certificate in teaching in early childhood education in the two-year training programme and was to gain her early childhood education qualification soon.

Molly (28) had been teaching in kindergarten for six years when she began her field-based training. She was educated to high school level, and had wanted to be a teacher since she was little. She commenced her training in the field-based programme, and gained her early childhood education qualification with the rest of the members of the first group to enrol in the field-based training programme. Molly went on to enrol at SICHE, to do the two-year certificate
course in early childhood education, and was excited about graduating with another qualification in early childhood education teaching.

Ted (28) was a kindergarten supervisor and teacher with high school education. After leaving school, he worked in his community for sometime, as a helper and youth leader. He was appointed a kindergarten teacher in his province, and began his teacher training for a preschool certificate qualification through a private tertiary institution at the same time. After he graduated, he started kindergarten teaching in a centre owned and managed privately, where he was also appointed supervisor of the centre. He was part of the first group of employed untrained kindergarten teachers to undertake the field-based training programme. After he graduated from the field-based training programme, he sat the entrance examination to the Solomon Islands College of Education to undergo the two-year for a certificate of teaching in early childhood education. Ted was looking forward to graduating with his second qualification, and was keen to do further studies abroad.

Amy (22) had a high school education, and had been teaching as a kindergarten teacher for two years when she was recommended to do her field-based training. She was pleased to have completed her training and attained her qualification in early childhood education. Amy was in the second group of the untrained kindergarten teachers to do their field-based training. She was interested in undergoing further training preferably abroad, if she was given opportunity to do so.

Laura (25), with high school education, had been teaching for three years when she started her field-based training with members of the second group of teachers who undertook the training programme. She was employed in a private kindergarten, and had a second preschool teaching qualification from another institution. Laura was ambitious and hoped to do an advanced training course in the future.

Rosa (26) had a high school education, and started teaching at kindergarten soon after she completed her secondary education. She commenced her field-based training after having only taught at a community kindergarten centre for a year. She was pleased to be included in the second lot of kindergarten teachers to do their field-based training and to obtain her early childhood
qualification. Rosa had nearly completed the two-year training course in early childhood education being offered at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. She was interested to pursue further training and education abroad in the years ahead.

**Kelly (30)** completed her high school education, and worked in a private company for a while. She later took up teaching as an untrained teacher in a community kindergarten. She began her field-based training after two years of teaching, and graduated after successfully completing her training a year later. At the time of the fieldwork, Kelly was attending the Solomon Islands College of Higher education doing the teaching certificate course in early childhood education.

**5.6 Data Collection and Procedure**

A series of strategies was adopted to gather data for this research study. Key sources of appropriate presentations and publications came from intense searching in the libraries of the University of Otago and Children's Issues Centre. Useful data were sought from references such as books, presentations, publications, report documents on early childhood education, preschool, kindergarten, day care teaching, teachers of young children, teacher education and/or other related issues in the field of early childhood education.

Appropriate publications from the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank were also viewed particularly to provide information on the majority nations. Sources were also obtained from an online database for the majority countries and from my personal books and documents. I have also incorporated information based on my personal experiences and observations regarding the Solomon Islands.

Another key source of data particularly on the early childhood education field-based training programme was the fieldwork I carried out in Solomon Islands. As one component of the present study involved carrying out home-based research, an application was made to the Solomon Islands Government through the Ministry of Education (ME) for approval to carry out the study. When the consent was provided, I then travelled to the Solomon Islands to undertake the fieldwork. The fieldwork covered thirteen weeks of travelling to seven different provinces within the Solomon Islands. The fieldwork commenced in early March and ended in late June 1999. The travels involved
flying and travelling by canoe and truck. However, because of the geographical nature of the country, most travels involved first flying to different locations within the Solomon Islands and then travelling by canoe.

Interviews with all participants involved travelling to the seven different provinces. These interviews also involved internal travels to the participating teachers' kindergarten centres and to various villages and communities in the country. I interviewed each teacher participant at her or his workplace or study as indicated previously, and I also interviewed each of these key participants individually. The interviews with participating teachers took place only once. As the sole researcher in this study, I was also responsible for conducting all the interviews, which were in-depth and tape-recorded in pidgin. I subsequently transcribed and translated all of the tapes. Also, I interviewed the participating administrators in their workplace and separately.

Prior to fieldwork, I interviewed the New Zealand-based initiators and designers of the early childhood education field-based training programme to ascertain the goals of the training programme and how these had been adapted to suit the Solomon Islands needs. The initiators and designers were two staff from the Dunedin College of Education (in New Zealand), and the interviews were carried out in New Zealand before the other interviews in Solomon Islands.

Within Solomon Islands, I also interviewed the community participants individually, in designated places that were mutually agreed by the interviewees and the coordinators in the villages and communities concerned. I selected the participants with the assistance of the provincial coordinators, and I tape-recorded interviews with them using a battery-operated tape recorder.

The interview schedule was semi-structured and consisted of largely open-ended questions guided by the research questions, and I asked them in the pidgin language. This process was adopted to allow the participant to talk about his or her perspective of the field-based training programme and its impact on the Solomon Islands' society freely. Some participants required minimal prompting and questions were kept to minimum, while other participants needed a more structured interview guide.

Interview questions were focused on the issues raised in the research questions. Prior to the fieldwork, interview protocols were piloted in a New Zealand centre. The interview schedule covered the following general areas:
participants’ job as a teacher, and training. The interview then moved on to ask questions on these specific areas: teacher roles and activities, teachers’ relationship with colleagues, parents, community, national and provincial coordinators, supervisor and children. The other content areas included the satisfaction and usefulness of the training, impact of teachers’ training on her or his job, the philosophy behind the training, the impact of teachers’ training on teachers’ work with children, children’s learning and presence at kindergarten, teachers’ work with families and parents. Also, the impact of training on teachers’ professional role, teachers’ personal perception of being a teacher, whether the training programme was appropriate to teachers’ cultural and geographical context; whether teachers had any suggestions for improvements in the training programme, the kindergarten programme for children, families and community, and for improving teachers’ job satisfaction and effectiveness.

A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix B under the appendices’ section.

The interviews varied in length from 2 to 8 hours, with 8 hours being the longest. Interviews were relatively informal and participants readily shared their perceptions on the impact of the field-based training programme. At the end of the interview the participating teachers completed a brief background questionnaire. This was provided to obtain factual demographic data about each of the participating early childhood education practitioners.

Part two of the fieldwork involved participant observation and was carried out at two centres on two different Islands within Western province. The participant observation included observing teachers and children at work, dictating field notes into the tape recorder; recording conversations between teachers and children; and keeping a journal of the daily interactions, appropriate actions, behaviours and/or events in the two centres selected for the segment on participant observation. The journal I kept also served as a means of recording other experiences that I had not originally anticipated such as attending a community meeting. The participant observation component also involved collecting copies of teachers’ worksheets, children’s work, the curriculum, timetable and other relevant documents suggested by the participating teachers as other sources of data. I also took photographs of teachers and children at work, the school environments, centres and other appropriate happenings in the kindergarten centres for visual data.
The first week of the fieldwork was spent in Honiara (capital) interviewing the national coordinator and three other participants. An arrangement was also made with the coordinator of the School of Education's early childhood education programme to interview some of her on campus students who had completed the field-based training programme. The School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) is responsible for training teachers for the Solomon Islands education system. The remaining days were spent visiting centres in Honiara before departing for Western province, the original designated research location.

The Western province component of the study took a month to complete. As a result of the decision to widen the internal research location, I travelled to seven different island and community locations within Western province, as mentioned earlier. These islands are long distances apart thus travelling has to be carried out by canoe to reach the chosen island communities. Also, in Western province, in addition to interviewing participants, community meetings were also organised in three different locations, two villages and one island with the help of the Western Province coordinator. People openly shared their perceptions and views on the impact of the field-based training programme and other related issues at these meetings. These meetings were often attended by approximately 25 people and would proceed for more than an hour. I was able to write down notes in my research journal as the people expressed their views.

The remaining eight weeks were used to cover the other six provinces including Honiara. The eventual seven provinces selected were Western, Malaita, Central Islands, Makira, Guadalcanal, Temotu and Honiara. Although I did not visit two other provinces, Isabel and Rennell & Bellona, I was able to interview their early childhood education trainers in Honiara where they had gone to attend an early childhood workshop. Travelling to the additional provinces began in mid April after returning from the Western province and it ended in mid June.

In Malaita province, in addition to teachers spoken to, I also interviewed the early childhood trainer for the province, and I visited two kindergartens.

In Central province, I interviewed the trainer and visited two kindergartens where I spoke with teachers and took down notes. I also co-
assisted the national coordinator in running a workshop for parents, early childhood workers and teachers, facilitated by the provincial coordinator.

In Makira province, I visited three kindergartens and interviewed participants. I also dictated notes into the tape recorder from my kindergarten visits and observations.

In Guadalcanal province, visits were made to three kindergartens and I interviewed the teachers and wrote notes.

In Temotu province, I interviewed participants and visited a kindergarten centre. I also spoke with five parents, the education officer in charge of the province, four primary school teachers and five members of the community.

In Honiara, I interviewed the six participants studying at the School of Education and the coordinator of the School’s early childhood education programme. Besides interviewing the Solomon Islands national coordinator as indicated earlier, I also interviewed the director of primary education who was also responsible for the early childhood education sector. I also visited five kindergarten centres; and spoke with twenty people including teachers, trainers, parents, other educators, government officials, men and women. In addition, I collected appropriate and useful documents from the national coordinator and the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education Office.

5.7 Data Analysis

I concurrently transcribed and translated the interviews and identified the themes that emerged when I returned to New Zealand. The analysis of the content of the transcripts was influenced by the research questions. However, themes did arise which I had not anticipated. After all the interviews had been transcribed and translated, I rechecked the narratives of the participants to determine consistency and accuracy. Once the categories and concepts were finalised, the transcripts were coded according to themes. Data were then proof checked as a means of cross-referencing interview material.

I have constantly revised the findings to ensure no one participant’s perspectives were omitted, nor allowed to dominate the presentation. All views are represented.

The questions used in this thesis are verbatim, but in some of the chapters where the findings were presented, my prompts or follow-up questions have been omitted. This contributes to the apparent length of some of the quotations.
5.8 Limitations of the Study

In this research, the absence of data on what was happening before the intervention, particularly relating to teachers' practices and philosophy and children's kindergarten experience, restricted the scope of the evaluation of the field-based training programme. It also limited the extent to which an evaluation of processes of change within the early childhood education sector in Solomon Islands was possible.

5.9 The Field-based Training Programme

The field-based training programme was designed for untrained teachers working in kindergarten centres. In this context, field-based meant that teachers' training was centred in the province where they were based and teaching. Teachers used their centres to fulfil assessment requirements. The training programme differed from other training models because kindergarten teachers did not have to take a lengthened leave of absence to do their training, that is, teachers did their training while still doing their job.

The field-based teacher training programme consisted of five modules: Child Development, Working with Children, Learning Areas, Culture and Language, and Administration and Management (Taylor & Foote, 1996). Each module comprised four components requiring 20 hours of kindergarten teachers' contact time with a trainer and another 20 hours on reading, doing assignments and practical work in a kindergarten centre (See Appendix L). The four components of the Culture and Language module, for example, included the importance of language and culture, promoting a good language model, tradition and culture, and implications for early childhood education. The philosophy of the training programme included: focusing on children as learners, developing resources to support children's learning, how to go about programming children's learning areas, developing resources in each learning area, how to work with children, enhancing teachers' knowledge of culture and language, making of appropriate resources using local materials, managing and administering of kindergarten programmes, and working with parents (Taylor & Foote, 1996).

Workshops were organised by trainers to teach the training modules, and teachers were required to attend them. Besides observing teachers working
with children in the centres, trainers also set assignments and practical tasks for teachers to do as part of their assessment. A child study, for example, and/or making specific resources to support an aspect of child development.

The field-based training programme and early childhood education are part of the early childhood sector in Solomon Islands. However, it is emphasised that, since the training programme has yet to enfold the whole sector, the teachers who had benefited most from it were those who had been teaching and selected from the zones where the field-based training programme had been introduced. Due to financial constraints and other factors, coordinators have to consider several factors when they are examining teachers’ training applications. The implication is that even in the regions where the training programme has been established, many kindergarten practitioners are yet to undertake their field-based training. The other teachers who also have not benefited from the training programme are those teaching in the centres and/or areas where the programme has not been introduced. Therefore, the people involved in the field-based training programme and the institutions that are reported in this thesis, do not necessarily represent the whole early childhood education sector.

In 1996, working with the New Zealand team, the Solomon Islands national coordinator and the provincial coordinators established the guiding principles for the curriculum for the early childhood field-based training programme. The guiding principles are based on what the Solomon Islands early childhood education sector intends to achieve and on what it should attempt to avoid in its early childhood settings throughout the country. The areas in which the early childhood education sector intends to achieve include:

- Learning areas – creating an environment;
- Parent involvement;
- Relationships – teachers, children, parents and families;
- Philosophy – Values and beliefs;
- Teaching strategies;
- Reflecting and using culture and language;
- Daily recording of children’s development and learning needs;
- Developing local resources;
- Management and organisation.

While what the early childhood education sector should avoid includes:
• Costly and culturally inappropriate equipment;
• Lack of variety within the early childhood programme;
• Lack of teacher and/or minimal involvement;
• Lack of health and safety regulations;
• Lack of physical space (Taylor & Foote, 1996).

There is considerable emphasis on the cultural context, local language, local resources and community involvement and participation in the early childhood education programme. The field-based training programme modules, for instance, were written around these headings.

The idea to develop a field-based training programme for early childhood education teachers in Solomon Islands originated from the Government’s concern for the need to improve the quality of education for young children in Solomon Islands. Based on its recognition of the need to ensure kindergarten programmes were of high quality and to maximise the benefits of early education for children, the Solomon Islands Government requested the New Zealand Government in May, 1995 to commission a project design study to examine the training needs of early childhood education teachers and to make recommendations on how these needs were to be met. Consequently, two academic and professional consultants from the Dunedin College of Education in New Zealand were appointed to undertake the project and presented their eventual report to the Solomon Islands Government in October, 1995. The report, entitled “Report on training needs and a proposal for early childhood education in the Solomon Islands” noted that the majority of the kindergarten teachers had no professional qualifications. The report recommended the development and establishment of a field-based training programme to provide immediate support to practising teachers in Solomon Islands and to develop more substantive preservice training to begin the development of a pool of qualified teachers, at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE).

Hence, from the report recommendations, a two-year project jointly funded by the New Zealand Government, through its Official Development Assistance (NZODA) grant was put into place, and an early childhood education field-based training programme was initiated and designed by the New Zealand consultants with input from the people of Solomon Islands. The field-based training programme was recommended for implementation in part
one of the early childhood education project in Solomon Islands. In this context, a field-based training programme enabled practising early childhood teachers to study for a qualification while concurrently working in a kindergarten centre, as indicated earlier. While first preference for entry to the programme was offered to practising kindergarten teachers, people who were not employed in a kindergarten centre could also be considered to undertake the training package if places were available. On successful completion of the field-based training programme, practitioners would obtain their teaching qualification and acquire an "Introductory Certificate of Attainment in Early Childhood Education."

Also based on the 1995 report, the New Zealand consultants were commissioned in 1996 to implement the completed field-based training programme and work commenced in February of 1996. In May of 1996, 71 early childhood education trainees commenced their field-based training in five provinces. By October 1997, 49 teacher trainees had achieved the requirements for the introductory certificate of attainment in early childhood education and graduated from the field-based training programme.

To implement part two of the early childhood education project, a certificate of teaching in early childhood education programme was developed by a group of selected staff from the School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), with the assistance of the national coordinator and the provincial coordinators, and professional advice from the New Zealand officials involved in the project. This certificate training programme was to provide kindergarten practitioners with a qualification equivalent to that available to primary school teachers. Subsequently, the first intake of 25 kindergarten teachers enrolled at the School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education to pursue their two-year training in early childhood education, in January 1998. Members of this first group have since graduated with their teaching qualification in early childhood education.

The focus of the field-based training programme was on quality kindergarten programmes and child-centred activities. According to the New Zealand consultants who were also the initiators and designers of the field-based training programme, the over-riding principle of the field-based training programme was that training would enable kindergarten teachers to provide high quality programmes for young children, meeting the overall aims of
education of Solomon Islands. The aims of the national education system encompassing primary, secondary and tertiary education include:

- to meet the Solomon Islands' need for skilled manpower as soon as possible;
- to provide a basic education for all children suited to and related to the environment in which they live and work as adults (Taylor & Foote, 1996).

Since the field-based training programme was introduced in 1996, community kindergarten centres have increased in numbers considerably. Since it was the first early childhood field-based training programme to be introduced into and owned by Solomon Islands, it has important implications for the government, policy makers, the private sector, churches, education authorities, early childhood education personnel, teachers, children, parents, the communities and the wider society.
CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ON TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE FIELD-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME

This Chapter presents the findings on the participating teachers' perspectives of the field-based training programme for early childhood teachers employed in kindergartens in the Solomon Islands. The aim of this study was to review the influence of a newly introduced field-based training programme on the roles, relationships and activities of early childhood teachers working in Solomon Islands kindergartens and to detect and scrutinise possible changes to their professional actions and teaching practices as a result of the training. It further investigated the quality of the kindergarten programmes implemented by teachers and administrators’, parents’ and community people’s views of the kindergarten programmes and how the new approach to kindergarten education had generally impacted on families and the communities as noted in chapter five. The views of administrators, members of the community, and the observation outcomes are investigated in chapters Seven, Eight and Nine respectively. The subsequent questions (from the seven key research questions; see chapter five) are the only ones relevant to this chapter.

1. What are teachers’ perspectives of the early childhood education field-based training programme and the training process?

2. Which parts of the training programme do teachers perceive to be of most and least value?

3. How do the teachers perceive the field-based training programme to impact on their teaching practice and professionalism?

4. Are high quality programmes being implemented by teachers who have received training and is children’s learning and development being supported in the way intended by the training programme?

5. What do teachers, administrators, families and community people think of early childhood education?
7. How well does the training programme suit the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographic context?

In this chapter, the data presented describe teacher-participants' perspectives on the impact of the training programme on their professionalism, teaching practice, roles, activities and related issues and processes. The data originate from the translated transcripts of the interviews carried out in pidgin with the early childhood teachers who participated in the present study. All the names used are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants.

The themes presented include: the importance of early childhood education; the value of training for early childhood education teachers; how have teachers gained in confidence, competence and skills; teachers' assessment and evaluation skills; personal skills and ambitions; teacher-child relationship; a holistic early childhood education programme; quality-inclusive programmes; the influence of culture; encouraging gender-inclusive relationships and equitable opportunities; and developing teacher, and parent and community relationships and support. These are discussed in view of the identified research questions.

6.1 Teachers' Perspectives

6.1.1 The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Teachers recognised early childhood education as the foundation for young children's learning. They discussed how at the early childhood level, children learn and acquire crucial attributes, values, abilities, skills, and knowledge that would help prepare them for life as adults. The teachers' perception of children's adulthood was compatible with the perceptions of parents and members of the community. It was suggested, for example, that children should grow to become confident young adults to enable them to face the future with ease. As young adults, children should be able to assist in the development of their communities, society and the country as a whole. Educators recognised that children begin their lifelong education the moment they are born, and that the early years are also associated with helping children to gain confidence, form friendships and to establish cooperation among their peers.
The concept of early childhood is comparatively new in Solomon Islands. However, early childhood education as the foundation for children's learning and education was emphasised by the teacher participants in the study. The importance of children's learning was frequently raised and highlighted. This excerpt relates a teacher's perception of the significance of the early years.

This is a period where age three to six is very important for children, especially when we look at their learning and development. At this stage children learn fast and will learn a lot when [they are] given the right learning environment. Therefore, those of us responsible for children must be serious about our work. I am very interested [to be involved] because children learn things faster at that age and I would like to be able to help children in my care (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Sally and Faith added:

I have learned from my training that children learn useful knowledge, skills and values in the early years. Sometimes, parents delay their children from entering kindergarten because they think that their children are too young to attend. Parents think that children should grow up a little bigger physically before they begin their kindergarten education. I think it's important for children to attend kindergarten at an early age, so that as they move up the different levels in education, they will continue to learn, not missing out on what they should be learning (Sally, Interview: 14-04-99).

Early childhood education is very important for young children who tend to be left out from the mainstream schooling. So, through early childhood programmes children are able to learn and grow in their education. This early childhood programme is also educating the mothers, especially those who are at home and are continuing their best to help out with the children (Faith, Interview: 25-03-99).

Although young children learn by doing things in the Solomon Islands context, early childhood education has played a significant role in children's lifelong learning. In the following passage, Laura explained what she thought could happen if young children did not receive it before moving to the primary level.

Early childhood education is the foundation of learning for young children. In my view, without it, the primary sector will also experience hardship in helping their pupils learn. In the past, children used to start their education in grade One; as there were no kindergartens. Through kindergarten education, children will learn and be ready before moving to the primary level. I believe we are going to see great changes in children who are going through kindergarten when they move to school. Even now, some parents are already talking about changes they have seen in their children's behaviour. For example, young children being able to read and be able to read poems easily and spell words (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).
Early childhood education was highlighted as being critical for young children in Solomon Islands. Molly, for example, explained that the early childhood idea was benefiting the children attending kindergarten education. However, she suggested that the Solomon Islands’ Government looked further into creating more early childhood education centres and training more kindergarten teachers.

Early childhood education is critical for Solomon Islands because it’s helping our children to learn in an ordered way when they’re still very young. Children’s learning process begins very early on in their development. So it is important for us to make sure that children start their education at kindergarten. I stress important because children learn a lot already by age three. They have already understood a lot of things. So if [the] Solomon Islands Government creates more kindergartens for our young children and encourages training for more teachers, I believe Solomon Islands will move forward faster in that field and in helping our children to gain valuable knowledge (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

In the Solomon Islands situation, early education was found to build confidence in and to encourage cooperation and friendship among kindergarten children, regardless of their differences. It has also been reported to encourage cooperation between teachers and parents and members of the community.

I think early childhood education has encouraged the idea of including gender in kindergarten programmes so that boys and girls can have the same chances when they are learning. Also, it has encouraged dealing with disability, where children with disabilities are encouraged to mix with the able children when they attend kindergarten. These children can feel that they are part of the kindergarten community and learning with the other children. Overall, these children [disabled ones] feel they are part of the whole country, and are influencing schools, families and the community with their bubbly attitudes and how they are fitting into the kindergarten community. But for that to continue will depend on us teachers, parents and community people working together as a group. So, the idea of early childhood education has brought useful knowledge for everyone; children, teachers, families, communities and the wider society as a whole (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Early childhood education is concerned with helping children to learn useful values and abilities and to explore their environment with freedom. It has promoted and enhanced people’s cultural values and the different languages spoken within the Solomon Islands’ communities.

In early childhood education, teachers try to encourage children to learn and build skills, knowledge and attitudes, which they will need
for later years. I think the early childhood sector is a real investment for our children, and for the future of Solomon Islands. It promotes our culture and the different languages we have in our country. We value our cultural practices, skills, knowledge and processes such as songs, art, dance, values, practices, beliefs and we recognise and accept our national diversity. Kindergarten children are encouraged to explore their environment freely, which is an important process for young children (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).

Essentially, early childhood education has provided kindergarten educators with ongoing learning, as well as facilitating children’s learning. It has contributed to educators’ professional and personal outlook on change and has encouraged them to think about their care-giving role in a deeper way.

Early education has helped teachers to think seriously about how to teach young children. Teachers interact with children and at the same time, children are learning many useful things that they can take for life. But we, teachers need to be careful because children come from different home backgrounds and face different behaviour and treatments at home. We have to be understanding as well as helping children in their learning. Parents should be made aware of what role they are expected to play in the life of their child to help teachers (Matilda, Interview: 02-04-99).

The impact of early childhood education on young children, families, communities and the wider society was raised as important. Ted, for example, suggested that early childhood education should become a focal point for children and young people, as it took into account people’s cultural values, in an attempt to keep the culture going.

Theorists tell us that children tend to learn fast in the early years, so it is important to help them at this stage. Early childhood education should hold children together with parents, trained teachers and the wider community. It is the basis for the kind of teaching that happens in a kindergarten setting. I think [the] early childhood programme has a greater part in fulfilling the aims of our kindergartens. I also see this programme as being very relevant for us because it takes into account our cultural values. Times are changing; people from other countries would see it as one of our own programmes, because it is trying to keep our culture, beliefs and values going (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

The learning experiences of children attending kindergarten education was constantly enhanced and reinforced by the variety of learning activities teachers were facilitating for them in the centres. The children were exposed to, and encouraged to blend with children with disabilities and others with different characteristics. Helping children to learn and develop was important for kindergarten teachers working in centres throughout the various islands.
The early childhood project provided kindergarten practitioners with informed teaching opportunities and learning experience. The early childhood education programme was accepted as relevant as it suits the local cultural context. Although the programme has been encouraging in many ways, it has not always been a straightforward process. There was evidence showing that some parents did not necessarily perceive the programme as suitable for their local cultural context, for example, some parents had different views of play. However, the teachers’ comments affirmed the positive experience they gained from their field-based training.

6.1.2 The Value of Training for Early Childhood Education Teachers

Data obtained in the present study showed that experiences of the impact of the field-based training programme varied from community to community and from island to island. Participants said they had gained new knowledge on many aspects of early childhood education. Teachers who had gained teaching qualifications in early childhood through the field-based training programme, in particular, made glowing comments about the training programme. Their field-based training had provided them with experience in various aspects of teaching and in caring for and handling kindergarten children. Teachers learned new knowledge and skills in curriculum areas and in planning, implementing and evaluating their kindergarten programmes and in managing their centres.

The field-based training programme had encouraged practitioners to continue learning to gain professional and personal skills, had helped them in their teaching and management roles and had encouraged them to think critically about their work with children. In the wider context, kindergarten teachers perceived early childhood education as playing an important and interactive role for all stakeholders, including children, teachers, parents, families, communities and the nation as a whole. For example, the training programme had encouraged and enhanced a firm bond among young children, teachers, parents, families, the communities and the wider Solomon Islands society. The notion that early childhood education is a special field and that it is therefore important to have appropriate knowledge on how to plan and teach it and to know how to deal with young children was appreciated by practising teachers.
Early childhood education is a new idea in Solomon Islands and it's important that teachers have some kind of training that would help them to learn new knowledge to help them deal with young children. Community people now have a better idea of kindergarten education and are working together with teachers. Parents have a clearer understanding of why field-based training is important for us teachers as we continue to help children under our care (Kelly, Interview: 06-04-99).

It [the field-based training programme] is a basic programme that's helping untrained teachers to get some kind of training in early childhood education. The training programme has helped to educate me step by step. Another thing that field-based training has brought about is changes in our centres. I have learned to think about how best to teach young children and set up my kindergarten and the learning areas. I really enjoyed it because I was also learning about the development theories and putting the ideas into practice while teaching (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

For some teachers, undergoing their field-based training had increased their knowledge of the concept of early childhood education, of how to deal with children, how to teach and how to approach young children in an appropriate manner. Practitioners tried their best to motivate children and encourage them to think for themselves, as well as learning about children's characteristics and their individual learning needs. Teachers' training had also boosted and increased their confidence to a professional level where they were able to comfortably answer parents' questions meaningfully.

My training has given me the confidence to work together with families and the community. I was introduced to the idea of play as a learning tool for young children. We, teachers too began to change to build a good working relationship with children, parents and the community. I was also made aware of the importance of the learning areas, which encouraged me to organise my classroom space to include all them, putting the right toys or materials in the correct places. Our training gave us teachers useful background information on early childhood education. My training has helped to widen my interests to join organisations that deal with children and their interests (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Jane added:

Training for kindergarten teachers is important because it is helping us to learn how to administer and manage our classrooms and centres. For example, keeping and recording of books: log book, visitor's book and other documents. We should learn how to write children’s running records and how to keep them, and how to record teachers, committees and parents' books (Jane, Interview: 25-03-99).
Teachers believed training was a good idea as it had kept them thinking about their work. They were excited about being a kindergarten teacher and were keen to learn more about early childhood education and how to deal with young children. They were growing in confidence in preparing children's learning areas in their kindergarten setting, and were pleased with parents and community people helping to collect teaching resources for the kindergarten centre.

As a kindergarten teacher, you should have a proper training before teaching young children. There is no "house girl business" in kindergarten because many parents think that teachers at kindergarten level are just baby sitters and that's not true at all. Teachers do a lot for children under their care in relation to their learning and development. So training for us, teachers is very important to help us get the right skills, knowledge, attitudes, education and experience to help us deal with teaching young children. As an early childhood teacher, I should keep interacting with children and bring myself down to the level of the children to really help them. I think that is real teaching for teachers at the early childhood education level (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

Doing field-based training was a useful thing for me. It has helped me learn the necessary skills I need to organise my classroom to increase children’s learning. It has also helped me to learn about how children learn at kindergarten level and how to plan for quality programmes. I have gained new knowledge on so many things about early childhood education, which is helping me to assist children to learn in the right way. The training programme has done a good thing for my people, and they can see what it is doing for their children. People are willing and working together to find ways to raise funds to support and improve our centre (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Although there was plenty of important learning about culture and everyday living going on at home, the role teachers played in children’s learning and development was recognised as being appropriate and essential. Teachers’ training was referred to as contributing towards their professional and personal development and teaching experience.

I think this programme is very good because it is making it possible and helping our children to go to school at an earlier age. For example, before young children have to wait until they are six or seven to start their education. I have also taught preparatory class and the change I have seen in children who have gone through kindergarten is excellent, very positive. Children are more outgoing, active and quick to pick up something in class or learn. They are not shy at all when they reach this level (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Early childhood teachers must be trained because training should give us the right kind of skills and knowledge to teach kindergarten children. In our training, we were asked to think about how to interact
with younger children, how to interact with individual children, how to
deal with the different behaviour and attitudes of children. We learned
how to recognise the different levels children are at, in their learning
and their language development. Teachers should also be able to pick
up relevant skills or ways to help them manage their classroom and to
provide the right type of environment that is suitable for children (Jane,
Interview: 25-03-99).

Another outstanding strength of the field-based training programme was
that it has helped early childhood teachers to think seriously about children and
their work with them. It has encouraged them to look beyond and strive for
better improvement within their working environment, in making appropriate
changes and in encouraging and helping children to learn and develop, as
evident in these interview excerpts by Laura and Faith.

Everything changed for me after I did my field-based training. I was
able to plan appropriate activities for children, putting into practice
what I learned at training, because we were training, learning and
teaching at the same time. What I mean is that you are doing all three
while doing your field-based training. The trainers would come out to
observe us at our kindergartens and write reports on their observations.
We got helpful feedback from the trainers where they would suggest
certain things to us, question us and we would discuss areas for
improvement with them. That type of process has helped me to
understand well what things I should be changing and what new
things I should include in my curriculum programmes (Laura,
Interview: 11-05-99).

My new knowledge has helped me to deal better with children’s
learning. I encouraged children to explore for themselves and to use
concrete resources to learn. I started to go down to children’s level
physically, emotionally, socially and culturally. I am confident in
planning activities for and teaching children in my care, and to help
others, especially parents and community people to understand about
the idea behind early childhood education. I am enjoying teaching
young children (Faith, Interview: 25-03-99).

Michelle pointed out that besides gaining other appropriate knowledge
and skills from the programme, her field-based training had also assisted her
personally.

I really enjoyed my field-based training. It helped me to learn new skills
and knowledge to help me organise and run my class, learn child
development, which helped me to learn about children’s different traits
and ways. I also learned how to observe children meaningfully and to
think about what I have observed while planning children’s activities.
My training has also helped me personally. For example, I am still a
single teacher, but if or when I marry, I think I would be confident to
care for my child and teach him or her myself. Parents need to
recognise and fulfil children's needs in every way (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).

Kindergarten teachers' training had helped them to identify areas they needed to improve in their teaching practice and processes.

The training has expanded my knowledge and skills bases and has given me more new ideas about children and how important their learning and development are in relation to the five aspects of development. Also, my training has widened my knowledge base to really understand certain aspects of children's development and to understand how to organise my method of teaching and how to teach children (Alison, Interview: 25-03-99).

My training has changed my behaviour and attitudes, and now I am more tolerant and patient. It has enhanced my understanding about the importance of respecting all people. That every single person is special in his or her own way. That has really helped me to change my outlook in life and about people as a kindergarten teacher. It [field-based training] has also helped me to be able to change to fit into any situation. For example, when I am with children, I behave to suit that situation (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Early childhood teachers spoke of the period before their training when teaching for them was emulating the situation and teaching methods at the primary level and the attitudes prevalent at that level. Training for some kindergarten teachers was a way to think seriously about the teaching process and bring about positive changes, as a confirmation of their new knowledge and skills.

When I was teaching as an untrained teacher, I was sometimes teaching children like older children. For example, sometimes we would ask children to use pencils to write. We would write out numbers for children and then ask them to trace them. Teachers were asking children to do phonic numbers, which was not right. Children were not ready, but we were forcing them to do work beyond their age level. I could see that some children were ready, while others were not ready. We teachers never encouraged children to play. Classroom arrangement was done like primary classroom. Teachers even wrote work for children on the blackboard. Thinking about all those actions now, make me sad (Amy, Interview: 15-04-99).

The data collected in this study showed that the old approaches teachers used with children prior to their training were no longer appropriate after they had completed their training. This suggested that teachers' knowledge had provided them with a new way of viewing teaching at the kindergarten level. Teachers' field-based training had made them more aware of what they ought to be doing for children and to think about how to do it. Teachers were pleased
about their achievements and were enjoying their work. The teachers related how their training had made them aware of how best to work with kindergarten children, as illustrated by Kelly in this subsequent excerpt.

I learned lots of new ideas in my training that helped me realise that what we [teachers] were doing in our kindergartens before, were not appropriate for children’s learning at that level. For example, I learned that children learn through free play and should be encouraged to follow their own interests. And that it’s not right to force children to do things at the level they are not ready for yet. My new knowledge has helped me to realise the importance of making changes to what I experienced with children previously. We were happy to make changes and to our resources for children and our centre. We re-arranged children’s learning areas so that they were free to learn in the different areas (Kelly, Interview: 06-04-99).

According to the practitioners who participated in the study since the field-based training programme was established and kindergarten teachers started training, significant changes had happened and have continued to occur in children attending kindergarten. Children were working cooperatively with others, and interacting more with their peers and teachers.

Children are behaving in a positive way towards other children. They are working cooperatively with one another and respecting each other. The idea of sharing is very much demonstrated by children in the kindergarten environment. Children are open and interacting with other children a lot more. Interaction between teachers and children and between children themselves is very good because children know each other before they started kindergarten as all the children in this kindergarten are from the same region (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).

One change I have seen in children is to do with their growing confidence in class. For example, some of my children were not willing to talk or interact with others in class when they first came to us. They would just sit quiet, and would be playing by themselves. But as the kindergarten term progresses, those children have come out of themselves and are working more with their peers. Those children who used to be shy and say nothing in class are beginning to openly interact with us teachers and other children. They have also made friends with other children around them. I see some children when I am reading a story listening and then drawing what the story is all about. So I can confidently say that children are learning important life skills at kindergarten (Hope, Interview: 25-03-99).

6.1.3 How have Teachers gained in Confidence, Competence and Skills?

There was a strong and genuine effort on the part of teachers to provide appropriate learning experiences for the children under their care. Kindergarten teachers, despite challenging experiences they were encountering in their daily
teaching, were determined to provide children with the kind of learning they deserve. As these teachers explained:

Interaction with children at their level physically and emotionally is very important. Sitting down with children and explaining things to them, providing them with various resources such as shells, pebbles, leaves, water and just talking with children are all important for children’s individual learning and development (Melinda, Interview: 07-04-99).

As a kindergarten teacher you have a big responsibility to ensure you are giving children a lot of learning situations that will encourage them to think for themselves and will prepare them for their own future life (Dolly, Interview: 08-04-99).

Encouraging and enhancing children’s learning within the kindergarten setting and ensuring that children were enjoying their learning was the main focus for teachers. Children were encouraged to take initiatives in their own learning, working at different activities which encouraged them to interact with peers and question their teachers and communicate in the local language. Teachers were creating learning situations for children that fostered creativity, healthy self-concepts and regard for others, and provided holistic experiences. Also, they were integrating play as an integral part of a child’s intellectual, social, emotional, physical, moral and cultural development. As part of their teaching process, teachers were selecting and creating new materials consistent with their stated goals and objectives.

In my teaching, I always try to remind myself that children’s learning should be based on their interests and abilities, and it is something that I try to put into practice in my daily planning of children’s activities. I am clear too that learning activities for children besides other things must encourage children’s mental, emotional, social, physical, moral [development], and creativity, imagination, questioning, or language and communication skills. (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

Kindergarten educators had moved from utilising teacher-centred lecture style methods to child-centred approaches. The child-centred approaches focused on enhancing children’s learning and development holistically, on language and communication skills through participation, interactions, discussion, exploration, role-plays, drama, music, art and creative expression. For these early childhood teachers, self-reflection had promoted individual and personal growth in them.

After completing the management module, my views on the importance of record keeping and planning from those records was reaffirmed. I decided to reorganise my record keeping making it easier
to plan from. I am also keen to work together with parents, colleagues and administrators to help improve my job (Faith, Interview: 25-03-99).

The kindergarten teachers were engaged in critical self-reflection, an ongoing process involving daily, weekly and longer-term reflective thinking and action. The teachers were involved in two aspects of self-reflection: evaluating their teaching practices and reflecting on their professional growth and interests. Training had provided them with new ways of looking at different aspects of their job.

My field-based training has enabled me to gain confidence and knowledge that I have used in my kindergarten job. I also learned management skills that have helped me improve the classroom environment. I am glad to be part of a team of early childhood teachers who are definitely making a difference to the life of young children in their care. The programme has also helped me to be strong in encouraging parents and the community people to be part of our kindergarten community (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

The training programme has encouraged me as a kindergarten teacher to use a child-centred method in my teaching. It has reminded me to practise the idea of gender inclusion. Children are freely interacting with the teachers and with their peers, coming in and sharing their community stories with our kindergarten community. Interestingly, children are no longer scared of teachers, but are free to interact with them. I am more aware now that interaction with children is very important for them. Also integration of all learning areas is very important for teaching young children because while they learn in one area, they are also learning something from another area. For example, when children are hopping, skipping and jumping, they are also learning something (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

The desire to help parents and the wider community understand the meaning of early childhood education and its related issues was evident with some kindergarten teachers doing their part to assist in educating families and the community and to establish a working relationship with them.

The field-based training programme has given me confidence to talk in front of a large crowd, to organise and run workshops for parents and people of the community by myself. For example, contacting provincial officers, chiefs, families, parents and community people, education officers and other teachers and discussing important early childhood issues with them. It has also helped me to pick up ideas on how to approach parents, community people and children under my care appropriately. I am able to contribute my ideas during parent-teacher meetings easily now (Dolly, Interview: 08-04-99).

I am confident now to try working more with parents. Before my training I saw parents as belonging to a different group. I didn’t see
them as an important part of their children’s education. I guess to me then, they were our children’s parents and that was all. I was not even close to the community, or school committee. I saw those groups as being outside from what I was doing as a kindergarten teacher. But since I have done my field-based training, it is clear to me that I am part of them and they are also part of our kindergarten community. I now work very closely with these groups, especially parents (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

6.1.4 Teachers’ Assessment and Evaluation Skills

The skills of assessment and evaluation were to a large degree new concepts for untrained teachers who had yet to do their field-based training. However, for those early childhood teachers who had completed their training, putting into practice what they had learned from their field-based training was paramount.

In my view, all aspects of our teaching programmes must to be evaluated. This evaluation must include the resources we provide for children, our communication and interaction with families and community people, staff attitudes towards children, families and the community, and ways of dealing with unfair and unacceptable behaviour. I believe only when teachers are consistent with their performance of this process, that evaluations could be better used to make improvements to the overall early childhood programme. As a qualified kindergarten teacher, I am keen to put into practice what I have learned about the skill of evaluation (Kelly, Interview: 06-04-99).

While Kelly specifically referred to all aspects of curriculum programmes to illustrate her understanding of evaluation, Molly raised other important and related factors in relation to evaluation skill.

I am more at ease now with planning and evaluating my teaching programmes and resources. In relation to how to deal professionally with other teachers, I think it’s good to discuss with other teachers sometimes to compare notes, before working on your programmes as planning or programming is really important. I am also confident in evaluating children’s work and in keeping records of each individual child. Every information about the child is kept in the records. So evaluation is an important skill and every teacher should know how to do it properly (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Sandie reiterated that she was utilising evaluation strategies.

I am using evaluation methods, such as observations and record keeping, in my attempt to keep records on each child. I am evaluating my daily programmes to make sure they reflect individual children’s learning needs, strengths, challenges and interests. I am assessing our current resources and materials and looking at what we have to do to prepare for the next term (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).
Ted added:

Teachers are assessing and evaluating themselves to see whether they are still doing what they are supposed to do. I think, being able to tell one’s strengths or weakness is a quality asset for me as an early childhood teacher, but it can be hard for untrained teachers. We recognise and understand that our self-evaluation should help us to think deeply about our preparation and planning of curriculum programmes, and how we could organise children’s learning areas in the kindergarten setting (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

6.1.5 Personal Skills and Ambitions

The data showed that kindergarten teachers’ training had boosted their confidence and changed their attitudes so that they viewed themselves as being more than kindergarten teachers to the children who attend their centres. This was illustrated by teachers who stressed the significance of being a role model in their job as kindergarten teachers.

As a kindergarten teacher, I must be a role model to children, for the centre and to parents. I should also be a role model in the way I deal with children, how I carry out practical work and in my behaviour and attitude. I know I have a big responsibility. For example, at the start of a working day, I must be punctual to prepare the classroom before children arrive at kindergarten. There are many other tasks I must do around the centre apart from teaching children (Faith, Interview: 25-03-99).

In a way, I have become a role model for children under my care, especially in guiding children in the area of moral development. Parents and the community expect us [teachers] to be examples to children in that area. I don’t mind really, even though it’s a big responsibility. Children of this country come from different ethnic backgrounds and that can be a challenge sometimes. We, teachers should be able to read children’s moods and be able to discuss their behaviour with their parents if necessary (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Early childhood teachers also expressed that training for them meant equipping themselves with new skills. The training had been helpful in developing skills they had lacked before their training.

The training was helpful in developing new knowledge, as we talked about the relevant theories among other useful ideas. It has been good to see the positive outcome of what I have gained from my field-based training since finishing it. I am presently training at the College, and learning a lot more about children and early childhood education. But I am very pleased with my field-based training because the training programme helped me to extend my knowledge about teaching young children and I am a lot more confident (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).
Some kindergarten teachers, on the other hand, highlighted how they picked up appropriate knowledge and skills, went about solving problems, and learned to think about how to cope with difficulties and deal with problems in their centres.

When I was still teaching as an untrained teacher, I would face difficulties and would take me a long time to solve them or even to ask help from others. As we know, teaching young children is different and dealing with them can be a hard thing if you don’t know what and how to do it. I have to come down to their level to be able to work well with them. My training has greatly helped me to learn how to handle children better and that has made me feel good about working with young children. It is important to explain to children why certain behaviours are not encouraged at kindergarten and teachers should discuss that clearly with children. I believe explaining to children the outcome of their negative behaviour is very helpful to their learning of social, emotional, cultural and moral skills (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

While the following teachers described what they had been able to do after they had completed their training and their increased confidence.

Since I have gone through field-based training, I have grown in confidence in running a kindergarten. I have the responsibility of being in charge of the kindergarten tasks without worrying about it much. I am also responsible for the administrative work that the community expects me to do in addition to my teaching role. I am helping the other teacher here as well, especially in relation to the learning areas and how to plan her programmes. I have also run awareness workshops for parents and of course guiding and helping children has been an enjoyable task overall (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

My field-based training has helped me to grow in confidence to be able to help others understand why early childhood education is important, especially in the villages. Many mothers do ask how they could help teachers by what they are trying to do with their child at home, extending the child’s interests at his or her home environment. I realise that early education is really an important area that mothers and fathers should learn about more. Parents are aware that it is their responsibility to build their children’s learning at home before children start kindergarten, so sometimes all it needs is a little push and encouragement from teachers. I believe children begin to learn as soon as they are born, that’s the reason why I also have a strong urge to help families (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

The need to undertake further staff development had constantly emerged from the interviews. Teachers were eager to share their interest in teaching, as well as stating their personal ambitions. For example, some teachers talked about their intention to upgrade their teaching qualification by undertaking advanced training, after they completed the basic training programme. The
following passages were from certain teachers who had completed their field-based training and were recommended to do their advanced early childhood education training at the national teachers’ training college.

I do have plans, which have encouraged me to attend further training at the College. I have the desire to better myself professionally and that has pushed me to go further. I still have my goals that include learning more about certain areas in early childhood education. I believe this training here at the College will increase my knowledge in the area of early childhood education. If a chance comes up in the future, I would like to do my Diploma in early childhood education teaching (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

After finishing my field-based training, I wanted to do an advance training to learn more about early childhood education and how it affects children. Now I am at the College and learning more here. I also would like to do my Diploma in early childhood education sometime in the future. I feel there is a lot more I could still learn to develop professionally. I am very interested to go back to my own community and try to help my people, other kindergartens and communities. I think today, you need to be qualified to move further in your profession (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

According to the teacher participants in this study, the field-based training programme was meeting the early childhood education requirements of Solomon Islanders. However, they recognised that to be able to advance in their profession, they needed to upgrade their teaching qualifications. Some kindergarten teachers were even considering going abroad to pursue further staff training, development and experience.

As an early childhood teacher, I have viewed further professional development and training as a logical progression from my basic training. However, although I share similar concerns with other teachers, have similar backgrounds, ambitions and education needs, we are also aware of the many challenges such as funding, that Solomon Islands has often faced with, in its overall infrastructure and management of services. My future plans include doing a diploma in early childhood education, and I would like to do it either in New Zealand or Australia. Professional development is important for Solomon Islands’ teachers (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

6.1.6 Teacher-Child Relationship

Children within this age group develop social skills, confidence, motivation, and reasoning patterns that will last through adulthood (Myers, 1995). It is perceived that children who develop to their full potential succeed in school and become integral members of society as adults and leaders of their nation when they and their families receive the support they need. Information
gathered in this study showed that young children in Solomon Islands, regardless of their cultural background, had a lot in common, as well as possessing a variety of differences in their nature to indicate their individual and unique characteristics and differences.

From earlier on in my life, I have always been interested in teaching young children. Since my training, I am more eager in fulfilling my dream. I think I am a lot more sympathetic, loving and caring now. I enjoy interacting with children and encouraging them to interact with other children as well. I am a lot more patient and tolerant of the differences children have (Jane, Interview: 25-03-99).

My field-based training has helped me to learn the right techniques to encourage children to enjoy their learning. Children and teachers work together in harmony here in our centre. I think my friendly approaches have helped children to feel at home and have grown to enjoy being at kindergarten. When a child’s behaviour is in conflict with other children’s, I just ask the child to sit with me and I would explain why what he or she’s doing is not acceptable in kindergarten. Children’s fighting among themselves has disappeared too. We, teachers in a way have become role models for children that we teach at kindergarten (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

In their attempt to better understand children, kindergarten practitioners were working with what was important to the relationship between children and teachers, teachers and families. Essentially, the relationship between teacher and the child was unique because it operated in an environment which determined a reciprocal understanding of what was expected and intended to occur in the teaching and learning settings. As these excerpts indicate:

My relationship with children is really good and is growing. Since I did my field-based training, I have developed a different attitude and have come to realise that young children have rights and are important individuals. It makes me sad that some young children are having difficulty at home, because I can understand what they are feeling. Children are innocent people whose voices are often not heard because most of the time they don’t openly speak up for themselves. It’s also important to remember that generally young children don’t speak with words. So we need to learn to understand them by studying their actions and moods (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

The friendship between teachers and children is good and strong. Teachers and children are happily working together and enjoying it. I think that’s the result of the confidence teachers have gained from doing their field-based training. Teachers are helping each other and working together for the benefits of children. I am happy because in the Solomon Islands we have many children who need help in continuing their education. But there are many untrained teachers and they especially need help. The field-based training programme has done and
continues to help these teachers in order for them to gain useful skills (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

The data showed that teachers and children continued to enjoy a good relationship. With the help of the other teachers, the teacher in charge had worked hard to maintain a strong relationship between teachers and parents and the community. At training, teachers were reminded of the need for members of the community to be involved in the kindergarten work. This was important, as the community could look out for the interests of both children and teachers. The idea was a good one and teachers were trying their best to improve that aspect of their kindergarten community.

In our kindergarten the relationship between children and teachers has been built on mutual trust. We care for these children and they enjoy being part of our small kindergarten community. Our relationship is close, and children are more like brothers and sisters among themselves. We encourage interaction or communication among children and between teachers and children. We would like to think that what we are doing for children now, in the long run will help them to become responsible for themselves, towards each other, towards their families and communities (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Life for children is different and can be hard to deal with if you haven’t had any experience dealing with children. I believe teachers who are kind, honest and love helping children in any way, are likely to change quickly to suit the situation they are in at kindergarten. In kindergarten, life for children is like living in a special home, where children have to learn within a restricted timeframe. So teachers play an important role in making sure the living situation is favourable to cater for everyone, but especially for children. In a way, kindergarten teachers have no choice, but to build good working relationships with children and parents for the sake of children and their learning. Here at our kindergarten we try our best to do that, we have a good working relationship with our children and their families (Sally, Interview: 14-04-99).

6.1.7 A Holistic Early Childhood Education Programme

Early childhood education is concerned with dealing with children’s whole lives. Evidence from this research study showed that people were pleased that the field-based training programme was encouraging the idea of developing the whole child. People considered that aspect to be one of the important attributes of the field-based training programme.

In my view, the training programme stresses looking at a child in a complete way, if you understand what I mean. For example, in child development, there are very important areas teachers should always think about when planning activities for children. These areas include
children’s mental, emotional, social, cultural, physical, moral and language abilities. Children need guidance when they are still not able to make reasonable decisions for themselves and that idea is very much built into this training programme (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).

The field-based training programme had to a large extent challenged kindergarten practitioners to prepare meaningfully for their classroom teaching. It had given teachers another way of thinking about young children and how to prepare appropriate learning experiences for children.

Teacher development should aim at training all untrained teachers so that they are qualified. Helping a child to become a whole child should be the motto for all kindergarten teachers. A whole child means a complete human being in all areas of her or his development. So in my view the idea behind training is for teachers to gain knowledge and skills that will enable them to plan holistic programmes for children in their kindergartens. I think too that their training should help them to influence children they are teaching to grow into young responsible people that teachers, parents and the community expect of children (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

I think the child-centred approach is better than the teacher-centred one because in that method, the importance is placed on and around the child. The interaction, activities, and everything else that the teacher does in class should be around and for the children’s learning and development. The child-centred method brings children and teachers to work side by side in the classroom setting. Teachers should come down to the level of children to help them learn and must think about children’s different levels of development. I think holistic learning for children includes teachers planning activities that contribute to their overall learning. Teachers should think of the different ages of children and children learning at different rates; for example, some learn fast, while others are slow in their learning. This is where teachers’ observation is important to help them plan appropriate programmes for children (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

Melinda, another kindergarten practitioner, mentioned the goals of the Solomon Islands early childhood education sector, which have been restructured into working principles including the holistic approach. She explained that the broad goals and principles of the early childhood education sector were helpful in guiding kindergarten teachers in their work and in planning children’s activities.

We, teachers are guided by the broad goals of the Solomon Islands early childhood education sector. These goals include producing responsible citizens; self-identity and respect for others; being an independent thinker; industriousness; socialisation; creativity and imagination; and valuing culture and language. The goals are further reorganised and made into working principles that cover areas such as child-centred and holistic approaches, gender-inclusive and relevant
programming, culture and use of vernacular languages, health and safety issues and care for the environment. In our situation, the holistic principle also includes a familiarity of resources, activities and people, awareness and recognition of and value by families, community and the government, training of teachers and parent education, and parent and community involvement. My colleagues and I try our best to incorporate these important principles into our curriculum activities to help and enhance children's learning and interests. I am aware that other kindergarten teachers in our country are also trying their best to include them in their programmes (Melinda, Interview: 07-04-99).

6.1.8 Quality-Inclusive Programmes

The field-based training programme was seen as an advocate of quality in children's learning and development and in developing curriculum programmes. According to the participating teachers, quality was concerned with formulating a philosophy reflecting and integrating cultural aspects, training and retaining early childhood teachers, acquiring necessary skills and understanding the other important processes in establishing relationships among the kindergarten community. It was also concerned with developing and encouraging holistic programmes, children's peer socialisation, and developing partnership with parents and the communities. Teachers' insights suggested that they recognised parents were respected in quality programmes and were encouraged to participate in the activities. It was evident in the data collected in this study that practitioners and parents were working together as partners in the learning of their children. It was acknowledged that when parents and teachers shared their knowledge and worked together, children benefit greatly from the shared experience.

Quality early childhood education in the Solomon Islands means kindergarten teachers developing and utilising holistic programmes, encouraging parent and community involvement, adult-child interaction, formulating and using a philosophy and teaching strategies. It's also concerned with reflecting and integrating culture and language, creating local resources, organising and managing the appropriate factors and attributes affecting children's learning and development (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Quality is about encouraging peer stability and harmony, manageable teacher/child ratio, applying gender-inclusive programmes, focusing on individual children's confidence and self-esteem and including children with disabilities. Quality programmes mean encouraging and fostering holistic child experiences in the five development areas as well as cultural, creative and language and communication skills. In a quality programme, adults show respect for children's needs and ideas and should talk with them in caring ways. Adults should work with
children and must respond quickly to children’s communications and help them in other ways (Sally, Interview: 14-04-99).

In specific reference to early childhood teachers’ professional development, quality was concerned with training and maintaining qualified early childhood teachers and staff, fostering positive interaction and relationships among teachers, children, families and the wider community.

Training should help us to become quality teachers. If we want our kindergarten centres to grow and children’s learning needs are to be met appropriately, there should be quality teachers working in kindergarten settings. Quality teachers should be able to know what to do about creating quality learning experiences for children, resources, caring for their whole kindergarten community, especially children, and managing their centres. I think those kinds of teachers will be in a good position to produce and maintain quality kindergarten programmes. In my opinion, maintaining quality programmes means we, teachers are making sure that factors concerning our responsibilities are effectively carried out. For example, developing, revising, updating and evaluating teaching programmes, and facilitating children’s learning in an appropriate manner and liaising with other teachers, parents and the community. Helping to carry out early childhood education awareness programmes in the communities is also important (Jane, Interview: 25-03-99).

Ted felt cooperation and collaboration among the early childhood stakeholders were important indicators of quality programmes.

As a supervisor, my relationship with the teachers is good. We work closely in an attempt to produce quality programmes for our children. Teachers feel confident to come and see me whenever they have something to say. We all agree that working together would contribute greatly to the quality and success of our curriculum programmes and kindergarten. We believe that by doing that, children would take quality learning from our teachers and what we are doing for them. Also, the kindergarten committee, parents and the community have been supporting us greatly here. We work well with parents of the children we teach and we discuss what they would do to contribute to the running of our kindergarten and the learning of their children. For example, fund raising activity for a new building in the kindergarten setting. There is a healthy cooperation increasingly growing among children, teachers, parents, the kindergarten committee members and the community (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Amy, on the other hand, identified training and having qualified kindergarten teachers as important attributes of a quality early childhood education programme.

Training should aim at training all untrained teachers to become qualified so that they can help children better in their learning. This training programme aims to help produce quality learning for children.
This is the reason why stress is placed on untrained teachers being encouraged to do their basic training in early childhood education. All these processes will contribute to giving children quality learning. So the idea behind training is for teachers to get knowledge and skills that will help them influence the children they teach to become responsible as children (Amy, Interview: 15-04-99).

Similarly, Rosa stated:

Similarly, Rosa stated:

This field-based training package stresses quality in the activities for teachers so that we can put into practise what we have learned in our kindergarten classroom. What I mean by quality is that we learn new knowledge that will help us to plan and teach quality curriculum programmes to children. For example, we learn about how children develop, how teachers should work with children, how they should talk to and do things with them, making good teaching or learning resources for children. In my view, a good quality environment is one that is safe, clean and healthy, secure for children and contribute to children’s overall learning and development (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

According to Tracy, operating in the child-centred approach was a better and quality way for kindergarten teachers to teach.

According to Tracy, operating in the child-centred approach was a better and quality way for kindergarten teachers to teach.

The child-centred approach is a better and quality way of teaching young children because it places importance on and around providing quality learning for children. Teachers try to bear that in mind when planning activities for children. The child-centred method of teaching reminds teachers that children are the reason they are teaching at kindergarten level. Children’s differences in abilities are considered when teachers plan their teaching programmes. I am not saying it’s easy; we have structural problems like the other centres, but we try our very best to do whatever is necessary to provide quality learning for the children in our kindergarten (Tracy, Interview: 25-03-99).

6.1.9 The Influence of Culture

Employing a culturally sensitive approach in the training programme was essential. The importance of maintaining the culture of the people of Solomon Islands through the younger generation was a paramount aim of the field-based training programme and teachers were doing their best to fulfil that goal.

The other thing that makes this programme very useful is that it stresses culture. It covers the culture of Solomon Islands, in different places, different communities, tribes, families inside our country. It is a programme that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to the needs of our people and of our country, Solomon Islands as a whole. There is one other important thing we must not forget, that is we must not lose our culture. We must hold on to good things about it. So, that is a good thing this early childhood programme is trying to do for our people, especially for our children (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).
The teachers mentioned that the delivery of teaching in kindergartens was sensitive to the fact that there was a diverse group of children and as a result, they were encouraged to provide cultural learning experiences that encouraged and enhanced children’s cultural values. Faith and Ted explained the role kindergarten educators were expected to play in maintaining and enhancing the cultural values of children in these excerpts.

In the Solomon Islands we have our main culture, but we also have different cultural values from island to island. So I think it is a good thing that the field-based training programme has a module on culture and language. It has catered for all children and teachers are encouraged to adapt aspects of children’s culture and languages in our kindergartens because of the mixed roll of children. We provide cultural learning experiences that encourage children’s cultural values. It’s important that we encourage parents to speak with their child about their culture and encourage the child to learn the local language by speaking it with them at home. Children should be exposed to examples of our artefacts like canoes, spears, different weapons, bows and arrows, and even learn each other’s languages and songs (Faith, Interview: 25-03-99).

I see the training programme as being relevant for us because it takes into account our culture and the differences we have in our culture. Times are changing; people from other countries can see it as one of our own programme that is trying to keep our culture, values and practices going and growing. Children will continue to learn about our own culture. We, teachers are planning our activities to include children’s different cultural values, so that they understand them. The different practices fit into the circle without any trouble on the part of us teachers (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

Sandie added:

Solomon Islanders have different cultural values and languages. The training programme really fits the Solomon Islands because the training modules cover culture and language. The trainers are responsible for changing certain areas of the culture module to suit local cultural values if they see it fit to do so. We also carry out awareness workshops to help parents understand where culture comes in the training programme. Language as a crucial element in children’s development, is especially important at present because most people in urban regions can only speak pidgin. Parents in these situations would usually speak with their children in pidgin, as these parents don’t often use their mother tongue at home. Children in turn communicate with other people and their peers in the same medium [pidgin] (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

Practitioners identified culture as a common element in their relationships with children, families and the community. Cultural identities became reference points for teachers’ kindergarten family and community.
Rosa believed adequate learning of other people’s cultural values was important.

Those of us teachers who have completed our training have benefited from it by our increased confidence in doing what we are supposed to do for children and to help them learn. We are interacting, discussing and sharing with children our cultural values. We especially try to include activities that stress our language differences because we have different languages and customs throughout Solomon Islands. Because we are teaching children from almost every part of our country, it’s important to learn a little bit too about others’ cultural values. This is one way for us teachers to help children who are not from this province (Rosa, Interview: 26-04-99).

Alison pointed out that it was equally important to encourage children to think about their traditions and customs and other features of the culture.

The field-based training programme encourages culture and language at the same time, so it provides for the cultural needs of people from the different provinces and all parts of Solomon Islands. For example, we encourage children to think about their customs, traditions and other aspects that are different from the culture. We early childhood teachers are much better off in terms of what we have learned in our training, including the module on culture and its related areas (Alison, Interview: 25-03-99).

Molly was concerned with preserving Solomon Islanders’ unique culture for future generations.

I think that learning aspects of our culture and languages is really good. It has helped us teachers to enhance our own knowledge of our culture. It has also helped us to try to learn every individual child’s cultural values. It’s important to do, so as to help the village elders who are doing their part in encouraging children to keep and pass on our culture. It gives us pride and strength to remind ourselves that culture is our heritage as citizens of Solomon Islands. I believe people coming into our country from other countries do recognise how unique our culture is and so it should be maintained for future generations of our people (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

The field-based training programme was believed to have worked well in Solomon Islands because of its consideration of the people’s culture and cultural values. It took into account the people’s way of life and other cultural aspects of the Solomon Islands’ communities. The training programme was compatible with the people’s different cultural values, as it had carried a message of hope regarding Solomon Islanders’ unique culture. Lilly, for example, emphasised the role of kindergarten educators in helping children not to forget the culture and its other characteristics.
People see the field-based training programme as working closely with our culture. It is not against and does not spoil our culture. In Solomon Islands, we have many islands with different languages. I think it’s important that we keep our culture and languages. We, teachers are doing our part by encouraging children under our care not to forget their culture by providing them with relevant activities. Solomon Islanders should be proud of their culture and take heed of traditional values and beliefs. So it’s refreshing to know that we can and are accommodating aspects of our individual cultural values in our teaching programmes so that children can learn their culture in an organised way as well (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

6.1.10 Encouraging Gender-Inclusive Relationships and Equitable Opportunities

Gender is a major issue for teachers in Solomon Islands. Generally, there are vast cultural variations in terms of expectations of what boys and girls can do either individually or in mixed groups. Activities that can be done by girls, in particular, vary from island to island as well. For example, in the most eastern part of Solomon Islands, women are the leading people in climbing and harvesting trees such as coconut and breadfruit, whereas in other islands, it is the men who carry out that sort of activity. As children, girls in the eastern islands are taught how to climb edible trees, whereas girls from another island are not given that opportunity as it is against the norm in that particular island.

The issue of climbing for girls is important because not every island encourages or permits girls to do any climbing of any sort. However, teachers recognise the importance of allowing girls to change the status quo and encourage them to explore new grounds and extend their learning experiences, especially in areas where climbing for girls was accepted. Early childhood teachers have supported the notion that girls ought to be allowed to attempt doing activities traditionally restricted to boys, such as climbing. Teachers in the current study strove to encourage gender-inclusive relationships among the children under their care.

It’s really important that little girls learn how to climb like little boys. And I think that’s a real challenge when you try to do things like that, it’s not that easily achieved (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

The whole issue of gender in a different culture is interesting. The study found that the idea of girls and boys playing together in a kindergarten setting fascinated everyone working with children in the various centres. For teachers, it was a huge leap forward to see children actually playing together in the kindergarten setting. The data showed that attitudes relating to gender had
continued to change. Participants hoped that in the long term involving and encouraging girls and boys to play together at kindergarten would become a norm in the kindergarten setting in the Solomon Islands. Evidence from this study further showed that boys and girls attending kindergarten were doing the same activities together. For participants, climbing as a gender issue had been challenging, interesting and a lot of fun as it had generated much discussion and had helped those in leading roles, especially trainers, to think about what boys and girls could do together in a new way. Teachers' tolerance was admirable and commendable. For some teachers, breaking the tradition was challenging as they had previously been treating girls and boys differently. Jane, a kindergarten teacher, for example, explained how she worked hard to break the cycle of treating boys and girls differently in this interview excerpt.

When I first began teaching at kindergarten two years ago, I found it very hard not to treat girls and boys differently. I would plan activities for the children and automatically think, “I will encourage the boys to learn in this activity and that activity, and I will do the same for the girls in this activity.” It was hard at first, but through hard work and will power I changed. I am glad I have changed because I think it is important not to separate girls and boys when they are learning, but to encourage them to learn as young children together. Now I am very happy to help boys and girls learn without restricting them in what they can do together (Jane, Interview: 25-03-99).

Kindergarten teachers were practising equal treatment of both genders within their settings, supported by consistently performing the process. Early childhood practitioners ensured that children in their care were exposed to all learning experiences regardless of their gender. As these passages indicate:

Encouraging gender-inclusive activities is another strength of this training programme. I try hard to encourage boys and girls to work side by side while carrying out class activities. It means boys and girls are free to be involved in any activity without being restricted in what they can do together. But in some parts of our country, that idea is still very sensitive and is still difficult to carry out. For example, boys and girls swimming together is something some people still find it hard to accept yet, especially people from the rural regions. Also, in the area of clothing, people in urban areas seem to have a relaxed attitude towards that, but in rural areas it is still hard for girls to wear any piece of clothing that might bring shame on their brothers. So, including the gender idea in the field-based training programme is encouraging and we [teachers] are doing our part with ease (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Teachers continue to encourage gender-inclusive activities in their centres. It is pleasing to see boys and girls enjoying working together in class activities that would normally be restricted to girls only. For example, today in this centre in one corner of the classroom, a group of
boys and girls sat threading beads using seeds and shells. The reverse process is also true for girls; they are doing activities, such as making headbands which traditionally are done by boys only. Traditionally, headbands are used as decorations in community or societal ceremonies and events (Researcher’s Journal entry: 08-04-99).

Encouraging equitable opportunities for children in their centres has continued to be an ongoing pursuit for kindergarten teachers. Teachers in this study acknowledged that all children regardless of ethnicity, gender or ability have certain rights including the right to education.

Encouraging gender equity and inclusive education was important for Tracy, as she explained in this excerpt.

In our programme, this is where we stress the activities that are based on those areas like gender equity and inclusive education for all. We take in all types of children whether they are handicapped or not. We try to accommodate them within our existing kindergarten environment. We openly talk about including all kinds of children, regardless of gender, ability, belief, ethnicity or physical appearances, and the trainers are aware and supportive of what we are doing. Once children are in, we try our best to build on and expand their strengths (Tracy, Interview: 25-03-99).

Ted pointed out that gender was important in Solomon Islands because traditional beliefs and practices concerning girls and boys was still an issue.

Gender is a very important word in Solomon Islands, because it’s among the traditional societies in the world where traditional beliefs regarding the status of boys and girl is still an issue. Generally, this type of attitude tends to slow down progress for girls or women in many areas. For example, in the area of education, girls or women don’t get as many opportunities as boys do. But girls are most valuable in so many areas and they have a lot to offer to society as well. They must be encouraged to be partners with boys or men in the area of development. It’s happening now in Solomon Islands, but it’s slow. We are really behind in promoting our girls or women. So at kindergarten, it’s important that teachers encourage girls to be part of everything that is going on at the centre right from the beginning. I believe that there should be a balance in the way teachers encourage boys and girls to work together and share in all activities. Our culture tends to make us believe that, boys and girls should work or play separately and we don’t encourage both genders to work together (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

It was important that parents and teachers worked together to understand the implication of gender issues for kindergarten children. Matilda, for example, explained in this excerpt.

At the beginning, teachers found it hard to carry out the gender idea, because of our culture. Traditionally, boys do certain things which girls
are not allowed to do. When we started addressing the issue, teachers, administrators and parents have come to agree and accept that gender is important and parents and teachers should work together to understand its implication for children. Parents realise that the idea of gender is a big issue in a society like Solomon Islands. We, teachers have been good in encouraging children to work together, boys and girls doing activities together in a classroom situation (Matilda, Interview: 02-04-99).

Kelly and Alison, on the other hand, praised the idea of including the gender issue in the field-based training programme for kindergarten educators.

The idea of gender is important to think about more in our country today, because we have so many cultural values that have different interpretations for what boys and girls can or can’t do together. As a kindergarten teacher, I am glad that the field-based training programme has encouraged us to think about that perception from another angle, encouraging teachers to create situations for girls and boys to learn together without pressure. Teachers are encouraging boys and girls to work together in our kindergarten and it’s working out really well. Parents are happy with what we are doing for their children (Kelly, Interview: 06-04-99).

I think the field-based training package is a programme that has helped us to think about the need to be gender inclusive. Our field-based training programme is unique because it is a practical and special programme with the idea of applying gender understanding in our curriculum programmes and in resources. In many ways, we have to ensure that equipment and other resources are provided for the use of both genders (Alison, Interview: 25-03-99).

6.1.11 Developing Teacher, and Parent and Community Relationships and Support

Data collected in the study showed that early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands had increasingly recognised the significance of linkages between the teacher, the family and the wider community contributing to the development and encouragement of good quality within the early childhood setting. Teachers were encouraging families to be part of their activities with the knowledge that their child would benefit from that relationship and partnership.

Ted, Sandie and Lilly, for example, explained why they believed developing and nurturing a relationship with parents and members of the community was important.

My relationship with parents is good and encouraging. Whenever I have some time to spare, I would give awareness talks to parents and community people. These sessions are important for the people, as they are trying to understand the philosophy behind early childhood
education and how it would work in our country. Many parents really like the idea and have even requested me to establish a centre in my village, but I told them that I was not ready. My aim is to start a kindergarten at home in my community. I would like to think that I can place myself as a teaching and learning tool for families and the community people, to help them understand better the idea of early childhood education and how it can contribute to our children’s learning (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

I am interested in helping parents understand the difference between kindergarten and primary education and what children are expected to learn at these different levels. One thing that I try to explain to parents is the mistaken idea that children start to learn how to write at kindergarten level. We don’t give children pencils. It is true that children can scribble, can paint, can break a leaf or can play, but writing- we don’t jump into it straight away. What we do at kindergarten is to initiate for children to work on skills such as large motor and fine motor and hand and eye coordination as these will help in the area of writing later (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

We have built and are continuing to build a good relationship with families and people of the community. The people are increasingly becoming supportive and cooperative, and are pleased with what’s happening at kindergarten and with their children. As we [teachers] are interacting with families and the community more, our relationship with them has improved and our centre is progressing well. Teachers, parents and members of the community are working together for the good of children and the centre itself. Everyone is happy and communication among us is open and respected (Lilly, Interview: 27-04-99).

Parents tended to create different expectations of what they thought their children ought to be doing. To some extent, the attitudes of parents could be disruptive for teachers. However, the data obtained in the present study showed that some kindergarten teachers had carried out teaching sessions with parents and people of their communities in an attempt to increase parents, and members of the community’s understanding of the field-based training programme and its goals.

Parents have different expectations for their children and they are not happy if they think kindergarten teachers are not doing enough for their children. They would always question why children are having free play at kindergarten. But some parents are understanding and when you explain to them how young children should be taught or learn at kindergarten level, they would say, “oh yes, that’s true.” “You teachers should be the ones to lead us parents for you know what you are doing.” Some parents tend to make things hard, but we try to understand and not create any additional problem between parents and teachers. As the supervisor in our centre, I would just encourage our teachers to keep doing their work. This training programme is like a
movement in our country and it’s new. Those of us who have trained understand the programme well and its goals. At this stage, few people in the community would have clear idea about it, but most including primary and secondary school teachers are still trying to learn about it and what it involves. We are doing our part in educating the community about this useful training programme (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

It was the responsibility of the provincial coordinators, with the support of the national coordinator, to organise training workshops on the field-based training programme for people of the communities.

The coordinators are the people who should arrange workshops for school authorities, community people and parents who still don’t understand the early childhood education philosophy, using teachers who have completed their field-based training. I think it’s important to ask primary and secondary school teachers, head teachers and principals to attend these awareness workshops so that they too are aware of what is happening at the kindergarten level. These workshops have to be held separately for each of the two groups [parents and community people, and upper school authorities and teachers] because emphasis on what families need to know would be slightly different from the members of the other group. If this is done consistently, teachers, parents and the community people will have a common understanding of early childhood education and its related issues (Ted, Interview: 27-04-99).

The research showed that partnership between teachers and families in Solomon Islands was encouraging and progressing at the local, provincial and national levels. The relationship between kindergartens and the communities was also growing steadily and teachers were ensuring that families and members of the community understood what roles they could play in the kindergarten setting.

There were frequent and supportive conversations between the teacher and parents about children’s activities and learning. On other occasions, there were parent/teacher conferences where problems affecting children were discussed and solved constructively. Parents were provided with a regular opportunity to give feedback, and where appropriate, the teacher would make changes. Competitive tendencies were re-channelled into cooperative relationships between the parent and teacher.

When I was placed to teach at a local kindergarten run by a church, the first thing I did was to run an awareness workshop for parents and the community. I explained to them that I was not there to carry out changes, but to ask them to support what kindergarten teachers were trying to do for their children. I regard it to be important because apart from teachers, families, community people and the kindergarten
committee are the backbones of the kindergarten centre. This is especially true in the area of funding, because our kindergarten doesn't have much money at the moment. A lot of families have different views about kindergarten. But at the end of the first workshop, many parents expressed that they were able to learn more about kindergarten education and the kind of activities that were supposed to be taught there. Parents were especially happy to learn that free play was one way for children to learn at kindergarten level. A child building her or his muscles through play was a new concept to parents and they admitted that they had disagreed with teachers about their children playing [in kindergarten] in the past because they were not sure of the idea behind play (Sandie, Interview: 04-04-99).

Interestingly, out of the sixteen early childhood teachers interviewed during the research, the following teachers voiced their concern and expressed minimal disappointment with the nature of assistance given to them by some parents and some members of their communities. They admitted that their relationship with the community was not encouraging and fulfilling.

Lilly, for example, put it this way:

We are trying our very best to gain the people’s trust in what we are trying to do in our kindergarten. Our centre is quite new and we are finding it a little hard winning the people’s trust at this point in time. This is happening because I think the community is still not fully sure of what to make of the idea of early childhood education. So their support is not as strong as we would have liked it to be. For example, whenever we ask some parents to help us make resources, they would be making excuses. Members of the community are just unhelpful. It took them a long time to build our classroom building. But mothers have been helpful and supportive of what we are doing for their children. We encourage them to help out so that they can see for themselves what their children are doing at kindergarten (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Sally agreed and explained her own experiences.

Parents are generally helpful in making materials for our kindergarten, but there have been times when we have asked some of them to come in to help make more resources, but nobody would turn up. Sometimes, I am discouraged by those parents’ attitude, but my family has supported and encouraged me to push on with my work. I am disappointed because I believe parents should play some role in whatever task needs to be done in the kindergarten setting. It’s sad really because children are very interested and are enjoying their learning activities. Sometimes even if it’s raining, children would still turn up at kindergarten. Children’s interest in kindergarten education is really high, but it’s those few parents who aren’t so supportive (Sally, Interview: 14-04-99).

Although Michelle also found parents’ support a struggle, she was equally optimistic about what their kindergarten community could achieve together.
I find parents’ support a struggle in our kindergarten. Some parents are genuinely willing to help, but there are a few who are holding back from helping, especially in collecting and making teaching materials. Some mothers would come in during our sessions to wait for their children and we would suggest certain resources they could make for us and they are very willing to help. I am trying to voice our concern through the kindergarten committee. Parents’ support has improved and I am hoping the situation will grow even better. The committee is now educating families about their role in our kindergarten. Slowly parents are realising that they too have a role to play in the education of their children. We also have fathers coming in to help, especially to cut sticks, carry sand and do other heavy tasks. Things are changing for the better and the early childhood programme is getting stronger throughout the country. We are trying to do our bit in the whole process (Michelle, Interview: 25-03-99).

Laura acknowledged that parents and members of the community had been supportive at times, but she was looking forward to an improved relationship with families and the community in the future.

The relationship between teachers and parents and the community needs to be improved. We have a few examples of when parents and members of the community haven’t been supportive. In my view, parents are the nearest helpers of teachers; if they don’t do their part, kindergartens cannot be expected to run effectively. Teachers and parents should work together, for they have one goal based on the education of young children. Parents, teachers and members of the community should work together for the sake of children. I think children will appreciate seeing their parents helping and doing something for their kindergarten. I would like to think every member of our kindergarten community will be operating as one big family as we continue to grow and look forward to enhancing a better working relationship among teachers, parents and the community (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

Some of the quotations show that some communities were more cooperative and forthcoming with assistance than others. However, it is also fair to say that people were being cautious and that the long term survival of early childhood education and the field-based training programme was not significantly undermined by the initial reactions of such groups. Most members of the community, for example, were keen to lend their support once they understood what was happening in the early childhood education sector, including the field-based training programme.

Moreover, in the Solomon Islands situation, the concept of linkage includes the ease with which the early childhood programme has encouraged families to manage their other responsibilities so that they can provide support to the centre or teacher in terms of their child’s learning and development. For
example, data obtained in this study showed that parents and members of the community made themselves available to produce materials and resources for teachers and the centre.

Our kindergarten has worked really hard to establish a good working relationship with parents and the community. Parents, especially mothers would offer their time to help make teaching materials and other resources. The community people have also offered their help in other ways. Also, mothers would ask for guidance from teachers on how they could enhance their children’s learning while they are at home. Parents realise that it’s their responsibility to encourage their child’s learning at home, but sometimes they just don’t know where to start (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

Teachers’ relationship with families was good and they strove to work together for the good of their kindergarten. They also encouraged members of the community to be supportive and relied on their help when it came to carrying out maintenance work around the kindergarten setting. Parents were aware of their responsibility to their children, and were supportive of centre activities, and often offered their time to make teaching resources for teachers. The relationship was built on mutual respect and trust.

Parents and community support for my kindergarten is good, and sometimes their support involves mothers coming in, doing light chores around the classroom, talking with children and helping teachers. Caring for three to five-year-old children is not an easy job. We have to make sure that children are not hurt in any way so parents, especially mothers, have been helpful in caring for the children. Fathers do help a lot too. They would bring the things we need to kindergarten, for example, such things as sago palm leaves and other materials that are needed for building. They also help to keep the school ground clean and tidy. Parents do work together with members of the community and the committee and are happy with what is happening with their children. They have come to understand that they need to work together with teachers for the benefit of children (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

Summary

The findings reported are from the teachers’ perspectives. The sixteen teachers who participated in this study readily shared their perspectives on the influence of early childhood education and the field-based training programme designed for early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands. Teachers discussed how the training programme had affected their teaching practice, professionalism, and their role as kindergarten teachers as well as their personal involvement and their participation in the programme as trainees and qualified teachers.
The kindergarten teachers identified and discussed factors relating to the importance of early childhood education; training for teachers; teacher confidence, competence and skills; assessment and evaluation skills; personal skills and ambitions; teacher-child relationship; holistic learning; quality programmes; the influence of culture; gender issues; and developing teacher, family and community relationships and support.

Training had provided early childhood teachers with an opportunity to train and to obtain their basic teaching qualification in early childhood education, to enhance their professional development and gain their teaching practice skills. Moreover, it had assisted practitioners to gain appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to help them work with kindergarten children, to plan, implement and evaluate curriculum programmes and to manage their kindergarten setting. Teachers’ field-based training experience had also helped them to develop and enhance their confidence and competence to cope with the demands of teaching diverse children in a challenging kindergarten environment in Solomon Islands. The field-based training and the teachers’ subsequent qualification had further motivated them to think about their future, by setting personal goals to upgrade their basic qualification, including undertaking advanced teacher training and development.

Relationships between teachers and children, parents, families and the community were positive, encouraging and generally helpful and supportive. Teachers in this study described close, caring and warm relationships with children, parents and members of the community. In some centres, teachers invited and encouraged families and members of the community to be involved and to participate in kindergarten activities. Meetings were held regularly by all groups to discuss issues affecting children and the centre. These meetings also served as forums for families and members of the community to express their opinions and to ask questions on issues that affected them.

The fact that the training programme covered and incorporated aspects of the culture of Solomon Islands was encouraging for teachers. The teachers also identified other strong assets of the field-based training programme, describing characteristics such as a holistic approach, quality activities and gender-inclusiveness as valuable and critical characteristics of the programme, from the Solomon Islands perspective. The holistic notion had encouraged developing the whole child, with an emphasis on children’s intellectual, physical,
emotional, social, spiritual, language and cultural development. The training programme had also encouraged teachers to plan and implement quality activities for children, bearing in mind children's diversity and cultural differences. Encouraging gender-inclusive programmes for children was another strong factor of the training programme. Teachers were encouraging girls and boys to participate in learning activities together.

The findings on teachers’ perspectives presented in this chapter have only portrayed a positive image of the field-based training programme and its influence on kindergarten educators in Solomon Islands. The data obtained in the current study showed that teachers had largely reflected on positive aspects of the field-based training programme. A possible explanation for this positive and encouraging picture could be attributed to the fact that the field-based training programme is the only one of its kind currently operating in Solomon Islands and teacher participants had only experienced encouraging, helpful and supportive practices, processes and professionalism from their training experiences. However, the teachers’ comments demonstrate their genuine evaluation of the impact of the field-based training programme, their experiences of it and how it had set out to meet their training, teaching, professional, staff development and education needs. The practitioners’ encouraging perspectives seemed to suggest that their experience of field-based training had significantly affected their teaching practice, professionalism and curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation. This further suggests that teachers perceived their commitment to teaching, their professional development, education and experience, the improvement of their teaching practice and early childhood education for young children in Solomon Islands and their relationships with parents and members of the community as significant and worthwhile endeavours.

Nevertheless, some of the teachers explained that they initially had some difficulty convincing some community people to help with the centre activities because they believed the community people concerned were not sure of the roles they were expected to play in the early stages of the early childhood programme. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that although teachers' responses to the field-based training programme were in very favourable terms, they reflected the perspectives primarily of the high-achieving and qualified educators. Other teachers who did not get beyond the field-based training
programme or who failed to complete the field-based training programme were not represented.
CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ON ADMINISTRATORS’ VIEWS OF THE FIELD-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME

This Chapter presents the findings on administrators’ views of the field-based training programme for teachers working in the Solomon Islands kindergartens. The aim of this study can be found in chapter Five. The teachers’ perspectives, viewpoints of members of the community, and the kindergarten observation outcomes are presented in chapters Six, Eight and Nine respectively. The subsequent four questions are the only ones (from the seven key research questions) dealt with in this chapter.

4. Are high quality programmes being implemented by teachers who have received training and is children’s learning and development being supported in the way intended by the training programme?

5. What do teachers, administrators, parents, families and community people think of early childhood education?

6. How do administrators, parents and members of the community view the field-based training programme and is it perceived to have had any impact on kindergartens, families and communities?

7. How well does the training programme suit the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographical context?

The findings on the administrators’ views on the impact of the field-based training programme on teachers’ professionalism, teaching practice, roles, activities and related issues and processes are presented in this chapter. The data arise from the translated transcripts of the interviews carried out in pidgin with the early childhood administrators who participated in this study. All the names used are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants.

In this chapter, the categories include: developing a sensitive philosophy; the partnership between Solomon Islands and New Zealand; valuing autonomy and ownership; professional roles and responsibilities of teachers as perceived
by administrators; and constraints. These categories are discussed in respect of the appropriate research questions.

7.1 Administrators’ Views

7.1.1 Developing a Sensitive Philosophy

Developing and maintaining a sensitive and workable philosophy was recognised by administrators, as well as by teachers and other professionals, as a significant aspect of any early childhood setting. According to the administrators who participated in this study, the philosophy of the Solomon Islands-based early childhood education programme had played a paramount role in ensuring that teachers were achieving their working goals, and those of their centres. On a wider scale, administrators viewed the philosophy behind teachers’ training as a reservoir to equipping them with appropriate knowledge, skills, professionalism and experience that teachers could use as an overall guiding tool in their work with children. Administrators further saw the value of training as a way for teachers to develop appropriate attitudes in preparation for their involvement with children in their centres. Whichever way kindergarten teachers independently and personally viewed the philosophy behind their training, administrators were confident that it was in the best interests of young children in the Solomon Islands, their families and the people of the nation as a whole. Solomon Islanders were quite clear on what they thought should be included in the goals of the early childhood education project, and the field-based training programme for early childhood teachers right at the beginning of the early childhood education project.

The philosophy has come up and included something that meets the needs of Solomon Islanders. Those of us involved with the project right from the beginning would ask questions when we come across things that are different from our culture. We would ask, what of this, is it appropriate to us? So as Solomon Islanders, we wanted something for Solomon Islands and something that would work for our people. We want children to be taught like Solomon Islanders. We want our children to think like Solomon Islanders (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

Administrators were beginning to feel that people were no longer thinking like Solomon Islanders. For example, it was felt that the values of Solomon Islanders were starting to be diluted by the influence of other cultures. Solomon Islanders had this concept of quality, and those who were involved in
initiating, planning and developing the project tried to identify what that meant in the Solomon Islands context. It was considered to be a good concept to pursue, but initiators and designers of the programme needed to know what Solomon Islanders defined as quality, and it became one of the main goals. From the point of view of the people, quality had to be related to being “child-centred conscious” or being aware of what it meant to facilitate child-centred activities for children, and for play being the vehicle by which learning occurred, in turn enabling child-centred experiences for children to occur. It was also related to forming a good relationship between the teacher and children, where mutual respect and a loving relationship would encourage peaceful learning for children. They felt it was important to develop a learning environment that demonstrated a caring attitude and love for one another. One of the underlying aspects of the philosophy involves being sensitive to and incorporating Solomon Islanders’ culture and children’s cultural values and enhancing their vernacular languages. One of the underlying aspects of the philosophy was its sensitivity to the Solomon Islands’ culture.

A loving relationship that’s related to culture, to local culture and that was what we also wanted to recognise [right from the start]. As you are aware [nodding to the researcher] wherever you go to different parts of the Solomon Islands, the culture differs, the music differs, the dances differ, the art differs. The interactions, the social structures differ, and the philosophy wanted to recognise that. It’s to do with wanting to recognise the language of the people and recognising that in Solomon Islands there are a whole lot of languages. And to encourage the use of local language, whereas education in the past had always had this philosophy that it must be done in English. This is done in English, it’s done in Pidgin, and in the vernacular language, the Mother Tongue of the community that the kindergarten is in and all of them are accepted by the people (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

Also, encouraging children to talk, question and discuss freely and openly in front of adults is paramount in the early childhood education philosophy. In the Solomon Islands, young children are socialised to listen more and say little in the presence of their elders, adults or people who are highly regarded in society, an important aspect of culture encouraging respect in young children. Teachers are perceived to be among professional groups that are granted high status within the Solomon Islands communities. Thus, the notion of talking in front of and with teachers for the first time can initially create problems for young children. It is an area that kindergarten teachers and other caregivers have to sensitively deal with in their professional and teaching roles. Gradually,
teachers are succeeding as the following statement by an administrator who was accompanying a visiting international early childhood group to a kindergarten centre recalled and highlighted.

Adults are talking to children all right, but seeing and hearing children talking back is something that’s almost nil. But this one time, we went into a kindergarten classroom and the teacher was sitting on the floor with the children and they were talking about their Kindy [Kindergarten] rules or guidelines. The children were participating in the discussion and I said this is just so exciting, my dream has come true. Children are discussing things with their teacher. So I think it’s also good for the group, for us to see that children are going to be able to participate and are actually participating in classroom discussion (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

Encouraging young children to be able to communicate with their teacher is a positive and significant change for Solomon Islands’ children. Although to non-Solomon Islanders the process may appear to contradict some cultural practices, such as showing respect and encouraging children to think like Solomon Islanders, it is still encouraging children to show respect, but in another way. In Solomon Islands, for example, the school environment (including kindergarten) has always been treated with respect as the teacher’s domain with his or her expertise and prestige. As teachers are responsible for children’s learning in the early childhood setting, community people still expect children to respect their teachers, but in the context of the kindergarten centre dynamics. Administrators, (particularly the national coordinator) believe that rather than letting them to be passive learners, children should be encouraged to switch their way of thinking to accommodate the context of the kindergarten and its philosophy to benefit them. It is believed that this process would still enable children to adhere to their cultural value of showing respect to their elders and/or people of status, including the teacher. Thus, encouraging children to speak with their teacher is one way they can still practise how to show respect in the kindergarten environment. In other words, in Solomon Islands, cultural values have to be considered contextually, for the sake of Solomon Islands’ young children.

Developing the philosophy proved successful. Achieving those broad goals of the overall philosophy was a persistent and ongoing goal of the national coordinator and her team of provincial coordinators. The broad goals of the field-based training package served as a way of ensuring that teachers undergoing their field-based training were assured of being exposed to these
agreed aspects of a Solomon Islands influenced philosophy. Arlene explained what it meant to have a philosophy influenced by the societal context.

We have a vision, something that we believe in. Solomon Islands is a diverse society, so it is important to think about that aspect in our philosophy. We want to help our young children to think about their culture, for they will become leaders of the future. We have to look at what we value and believe and these values and beliefs become bases for what we want our early childhood programme to help develop and encourage. For example, we would like to help our children to think like Solomon Islanders, to have self-confidence, have a solid identity, and to respect all people despite our differences. We would like them to be independent and deep thinkers, to be creative, imaginative, to re-socialise and accept every person. Respect others, our culture and language and to help others. Also, we would like our people to work hard and participate in what we are doing and in how we are going about developing our early childhood education sector and to be self-supporting (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

While Susan and Lola described other vital characteristics of the philosophy.

Promoting and encouraging the use of local materials and resources, to cater for all children’s learning, regardless of whether they are disabled or able children, or children of different cultures, religions or nationalities. Also, to promote partnership with families and the community and provide children with the type of education that will help them to discover their world and the environment in which they live. As well as promoting a safe and healthy environment for children, reflecting their culture and the language of the people and society they live. The focus is on the child, children’s learning and development, attending to their full potential (Susan, Interview: 18-05-99).

The philosophy behind the teachers’ field-based training reflects our culture and children’s cultural values and language. It promotes children’s learning and leans towards the development of the whole child, bearing in mind those important areas of child development, physical, cognitive, emotional, social, moral/spiritual, cultural, language and communication abilities. Children should be exposed to an environment that is healthy and safe, and encourages their learning and development requirements (Lola, Interview: 24-05-99).

The philosophy behind the field-based training for kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands reflects Solomon Islanders’ culture and the cultural values perceived to be important for children and their learning and development. It sustains relevant guidelines that kindergarten teachers can utilise in their early childhood settings.
7.1.2 The Partnership between Solomon Islands and New Zealand

One significant aspect of the field-based training project was the initial decision to invite the New Zealand Government to be a partner in it, a decision which Solomon Islanders described as an effective way to deal with such a cross-national project. The involvement and financial support of the New Zealand Government and consultants in the initial planning stage, and in the establishment of the field-based training programme in the Solomon Islands inspired the people of Solomon Islands. Administrators and other people who participated in this study spoke highly of and commended the New Zealand Government for the part it played in the project, particularly for its funding assistance. Bob, for example, explained the advantage of this partnership relationship over the commonly utilised counterpart approach in this excerpt.

I am very happy with the New Zealand Government for establishing a partnership approach as a basis to work with Solomon Islands and its people. I favour this partnership approach because it is different from the common way of establishing a counterpart working relationship. I feel there is little respect really in an arrangement like that. In this type of arrangement people are encouraged to participate and have a 'say' in the whole process right from the beginning and in my view this way is culturally sensitive (Bob, Interview: 19-03-99).

Expressing appreciation for the funding assistance, Rosita commented:

I am very grateful to the New Zealand Government for taking part and becoming a partner in this useful project. I am especially grateful for the money it has given Solomon Islands to fund the early childhood education training project, other types of help it has provided and the major role it has played at the initial stage and continues to play in the whole process (Rosita, Interview: 20-04-99).

The people of Solomon Islands saw the appointment of the two New Zealand consultants for the project as a positive step. This technical assistance was seen as special and unique as the persons appointed came in with specialist knowledge and skills needed to assist the national and provincial coordinators with their coordinating roles. Also, the way these officers had demonstrated deep understanding and respect for the people and their culture was commended and appreciated by Solomon Islanders, particularly the early childhood trainers or coordinators. The following statements, for example, were typical of emerging comments from the interviews carried out with the administrators who took part in the research in Solomon Islands.
I am really pleased that the New Zealand Government appointed [names of the NZ officers] them as consultants because they are the right people for the job. What I mean is that they have a different style of working with us, not like other consultants. For example, at the beginning they were determined to establish a mutual working relationship with us. Right from the start until now, they do not come in and ask us to do it their way. They work with us and we work with them. They ask us what we think and how we feel about certain important issues to enable the process to progress. They ask lots of vital questions to make us think. They are respectful and mindful of our culture, values and our cultural heritage and differences. They are very understanding, friendly and caring. We work together and other times they act as our advisors. We work in harmony. Importantly, they are our friends (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

I really enjoy working with the New Zealand team because I am aware they have the right knowledge to help us start field-based training for our kindergarten teachers. They have experience in the field of early childhood education, and their approach and style is very good and different. They respect our culture, teachers and coordinators, and everybody. They [names of the officers] are very special people and very understanding as well. They are really considerate and look at our cultural values and they try to understand us from our perspective. The thing I like most is their understanding of and respect for how we want the training to be, to do it in the interest of Solomon Islanders (Helen, Interview: 22-03-99).

According to Arlene and Peter, the New Zealand consultants' style of working was unique. The officers believed in team building and partnership.

I appreciate the coming in of these experts from New Zealand and I thank them very much and thank the New Zealand Government for the work they have been doing for our country. I have worked with a couple of other consultants in the past, but I find these two people quite unique in the way they have gone about how to work with us and their way of questioning us. They don't spoon feed us, they ask us questions and we answer them in our own way. They would sum up things their way, but would help us to think about how we would sum them up our way. For example, when we come together for the training workshops, they would just give us guidelines and ask questions to make us think. They don't impose their own thoughts on teachers or on us trainers, but they give us the space to think for ourselves and then decide on what to do. As advisors, they would tell us what they think before we make final decisions on what is suitable for our situation in Solomon Islands (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

I find these consultants helpful with expertise in the area of early childhood education. They give us professional support in implementing the field-based training programme in our own provinces and regions. Whenever they [names of the NZ officers] come in, they come with ideas that are useful to Solomon Islanders. That's how to me, they are different and special. They have a lot of skills and
knowledge to offer us, and yet they are very humble people as well (Peter, Interview: 22-03-99).

Administrators in Solomon Islands felt pleased and proud to have worked with the New Zealand consultants. They acknowledged that if it was not for them, the field-based training programme would not have spread swiftly throughout Solomon Islands, the way it had. The two officers took a real interest in working with the trainers, being very helpful, supportive and understanding. They made sure that the trainers understood fully what they were supposed to do and encouraged them to think about things in the way, which was right for Solomon Islanders. The officers developed a close working relationship with the trainers, trying their best to know each person they were working with, even though their travels to Solomon Islands were spread over a series of short trips.

These two officers [names of consultants] have done a great job, and they have done it very well too. It is clear from the training package that these two officers and the first trainers who were involved with it, were working together in an understanding way, suggesting and questioning the trainers to make them think more about local things. So in my view, the training package is just right for the training needs of our kindergarten teachers. I think because of the nature of their work, dealing with children, teachers, professionals, academics, parents and other kinds of people, they [names of NZ officers] have worked well with people of Solomon Islands (Rosita, Interview: 20-04-99).

Through their [names of NZ consultants] hard work, help and belief, the field-based training programme has come a long way and it is succeeding. Their work and contribution has been excellent and outstanding. The officers are hard working people, and I believe that their love and care for us Solomon Islanders, have somehow contributed to how fast and well the training programme has turned out and spread in the islands. Personally, I am very grateful for all the work they have done, for their help and support. It is great that they have come in to help us set up and spread the idea of field-based training within our country (Helen, Interview: 22-03-99).

The people who have come in to help know that early childhood education is important for our young children. They have done a lot of work to help, especially in making sure that the idea continues to spread in the islands, and for trainers to continue training kindergarten teachers. They [consultants] and the Solomon Islands Government expect us to spread it until the whole Solomon Islands is covered or kindergarten centres are established where they are needed. So, I think it is important to keep working hard to continue the work, and keep educating families and the communities about the importance of early childhood education in our nation (Bob, Interview: 19-03-99).
Although the assistance provided by the New Zealand Government through its consultants was acknowledged and greatly appreciated by the people, Amanda, an early childhood administrator, raised an important issue in this excerpt.

Although I am really thankful to [names of NZ officers] them and appreciate their help, support and hard work in the project, I am also very sad because we still need people with their expertise around. This programme is new and we don't yet have any local people with that kind of expertise, especially at this time. But I am happy that the Solomon Islands Government is helping to train people like [name of the researcher]. In the future when our own professional people are able to do that type of work, we can work with them and do a lot more for our young children. The emphasis set by these New Zealand experts will continue as we move forward to help our children through training of our kindergarten teachers. We are thankful for the work the New Zealand people have done to help and hopefully, our continuing link with them will enable them to support us until such time when we have the right people from our own to carry on the work (Amanda, Interview: 17-04-99).

7.1.3 Valuing Autonomy and Ownership

The decision to get Solomon Islanders involved in the planning stage of the field-based training project was a positive step on the part of both governments. Data collected in this study showed that the people of the Solomon Islands were encouraged by their opinions being sought right from the initial phase of the field-based training programme. People's views were sought and cultural values and differences were considered as well as people being asked crucial questions that set the basis for appropriate issues that were considered in designing the field-based training programme. These passages illustrate how administrators perceived this ownership.

We feel an ownership of the field-based training programme because we were involved with it right from the start. Our opinions were sought and what we thought was good for our children were incorporated in the writing of the training package (Arlene, Interview: 18-03-99).

The training programme has also encouraged cooperation, trust, partnership, sharing, and listening to each other amongst the people. It has to some extent reinforced and enhanced community spirit and oneness. The training programme has become a point of reference for all people at the village level, that is all members of the community regardless of age, status or position, know they have something in common (Bob, Interview: 19-03-99).
Our people are happy and willing to help out in any way they can at the village level. We regard this kindergarten programme as ours and it is working for the sake of our young children. The people of this village are trying their best to help finish resourcing the centre. The building is new and teachers have few materials and resources to use with children. But we are behind teachers, supporting them in what they are doing for our children (Amanda, Interview: 17-04-99).

As far as the people were concerned, this ownership was further enhanced by the choice of a Solomon Islander carrying out the evaluative research of the field-based training project for early childhood teachers.

It is great that you are doing the research (addressing the researcher), a Solomon Islander, one of us. I think it is good that someone from Solomon Islands is doing the reviewing of the field-based training programme (Susan, Interview: 18-05-99).

As part of the project, the trainers who ultimately increased in number were to take a ‘look and learn’ trip to New Zealand. The purpose was for the trainers to see the idea of early childhood education in other contexts. While in New Zealand, the trainers visited centres showing the different components of early childhood education being practised, as well as visiting mainstream kindergartens. These passages outline what the trainers were expected to gain from their New Zealand visit.

The national coordinator was quite clear that the trainers weren’t to take back to the Solomon Islands the New Zealand way; there are varieties of ways here. That they weren’t to take back part of the New Zealand way and say that’s what we are going to do. They were to look at what was happening, what things were being done in New Zealand and ask, is this appropriate for us or not, which things are, which things aren’t, how could we use some of those ideas in the Solomon Islands way? So, they weren’t to take back to Solomon Islands Pacific Islands language nests [for example]. They were here to think about the experiences they’ve had, ask questions and think about what ideas they could use when they return to Solomon Islands (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

The [early childhood education] trainers went back to Solomon Islands with the notion of what early childhood education is like elsewhere, [in this case in a certain part of New Zealand]. The experience gave the trainers the knowledge, inspiration, encouragement and motivation to press on with the task they had been assigned to do with [the] help [of the New Zealand team]. The first group of trainers were also instrumental in the concept, practical and final development process of the field-based training programme in Solomon Islands (Diana, Interview: 23-12-99).
7.1.4 Professional Roles and Responsibilities of Kindergarten Teachers as perceived by Administrators

The main roles and responsibilities of teachers as perceived by administrators involved facilitating kindergarten children’s learning, planning curriculum programmes, evaluating their programmes, preparing materials, and working with parents and members of the community and managing their centre activities and setting.

Apart from expecting them to teach our children, kindergarten teachers also have many other responsibilities to do. They have to plan teaching programmes, organise resources and do administrative work of their centre. As qualified teachers, they continue to work at the same centres where they were teaching as untrained teachers prior to their training. The teachers' roles also involve assisting potential untrained teachers who are keen to pursue their basic training and become qualified kindergarten teachers. In addition, kindergarten teachers have become resource people within their villages, communities and provinces (Amanda, Interview: 17-04-99).

Early childhood education teachers are many things, besides being a teacher. They have to prepare before they can teach or help children learn. Their other responsibilities include wearing different hats, depending on what is happening at the centre during working hours. For example, at the kindergarten setting, teachers can also act as health workers, police officers, government workers, church leaders and represent parents while children are at kindergarten. Some of the female teachers are quite young and could easily be mistaken for children’s bigger sisters. But these teachers are capable of what they are doing with and for children, and are doing their job well (Ray, Interview: 04-05-99).

Susan highlighted the interactions and relationship dynamics operating among early childhood staff, parents, and members of the community.

Teachers also liaise with parents, early childhood education staff, and community people. They evaluate children's work and their own work, write reports and liaise with their provincial coordinator. Some teachers are also visiting other kindergarten teachers to observe and share what they are doing in their own kindergarten setting. This is one way of keeping themselves informed of what other teachers are doing and learning from them, because teachers know that the early childhood education idea is new to everyone (Susan, Interview: 18-05-99).

Ray, on the other hand, praised the kindergarten teachers for the work and the extra tasks they were doing at their centres, in addition to their training commitments.

The roles of kindergarten teachers are not that easy to carry out. They are dealing with big numbers of young children each day the kindergarten centres are open. At the moment, a group of teachers on
this island, who have started their field-based training are doing well and are about to graduate. These teachers have been working really hard, as they have to carry out their training activities, in addition to their usual job of teaching children and other activities they have to prepare for their teaching, but teachers are enjoying their job. Many people in the community would like new kindergarten centres in their villages as they like what they are seeing happening in the early childhood education sector (Ray, Interview: 04-05-99).

In some situations, teachers in close vicinities were working together to discuss mutual roles and issues that could benefit their respective kindergartens and enhance their relationships with families and the communities.

Positively, many kindergarten teachers in this region are working together. Teachers from nearby kindergartens come together to form a kindergarten teachers’ group. They hold parents and community meetings, visit villages and give awareness workshops to other communities as well as their own communities. Sometimes, these teachers face hardships, but it does not stop them from doing these extra curricular activities and our people are thankful for what they are doing to help us understand better what early childhood education really and practically means (Susan, Interview: 18-05-99).

In one of the bigger centres in addition to class teachers, a supervisor was appointed to be the lead teacher and was responsible for most roles and issues concerning the management of the kindergarten. As Ray explained:

We have a big community kindergarten centre in this part of our province, with a class roll of over a hundred children. We have six teachers including a supervisor. Two teachers are responsible for each group and there are three groups altogether. In each group, there are forty-four children altogether. We have about a hundred and thirty-two children altogether. The supervisor works closely with his teachers, the families, the kindergarten authority and children. He is also responsible for any issues to do with their centre and represents it in any important outside event. Teachers have their own teacher committee in their centre and being the chairman, the supervising teacher also arranges dates for their meetings (Ray, Interview: 04-05-99).

Kindergarten teachers were dedicated to their teaching and professional roles and responsibilities. They also undertook several other responsibilities to ensure children were exposed to a variety of learning opportunities and experiences.

7.1.5 Constraints

The scattered islands and atolls of Solomon Islands are dispersed over numerous square kilometres of sea. In addition, inadequate travelling facilities, insufficient co-workers and lack of funds were some areas of concern for people
who were responsible for spreading the concept of early childhood education throughout the country. These ongoing difficulties are reflected in the following excerpts:

One challenge that children, teachers and parents have to tackle is to do with the distance children have to travel to kindergarten each week. You see we don’t live in the same village or on the same islands. Children have to paddle across from the surrounding islands to come to kindergarten. The teacher is the only person who lives on this island and walks to kindergarten. But every child paddles from her or his village [on other small islands] to attend kindergarten. But the thing that has encouraged the teacher is that parents are very willing and interested in what their children are doing at kindergarten. For example, it does not bother parents whether it is raining or windy, or whether the sea is rough, they are still willing to bring their young child to kindergarten so that he or she can continue to learn (Amanda, Interview: 17-04-99).

I find my job a bit tough in the sense that there are problems we have to deal with. For example, we have transport difficulty, but I try hard to carry on with my work. My area of responsibility covers a large region and to get to these areas would need at times all types of travelling – air, canoe and/or truck. But that hasn’t stopped me from going out and giving awareness talks to communities, especially the communities that welcome and are willing to spread the idea of early childhood education and have established kindergarten centres. I do experience some hardships especially [with] transportation, but people really like this idea of early childhood education to spread to their areas (Ray, Interview: 04-05-99).

There is so much work for me to do that I feel some aspects of my work are being neglected. My province is one of the biggest and it is getting harder to do it alone. Transportation is a problem for me and I am sure for many of my colleagues as well. At times, it is hard for me to visit and communicate with people of other islands. This is because the only means of travelling for me is by canoe. But my Division doesn’t have a canoe and an engine. Money is another problem for me. In some parts of my province, the concept of early childhood education is just catching on now and village people want more awareness workshops to introduce and spread the idea. The [village] people have been working hard to improve their kindergarten centres and they deserve some support from those of us at the provincial office. I am willing to go out to the communities, but there is nobody else helping me to look after this province and it is a big region. If I were given another helper, I would train this person to carry out field-based training for teachers on the other islands. That should give me more time to help the communities that want to build new kindergarten centres (Amanda, Interview: 17-04-99).
To some extent, the female trainers felt less confident when they were first appointed as coordinators, and viewed their gender as a challenge as well. As Diana explained:

The way the women assessed themselves at the beginning of the project, in some respect was also a challenge. In the early days, it was worrying for them just because they were women. They saw themselves as of lesser quality, comparing themselves to some of the other education officers in their provinces. They were not willing to push themselves forward, they sort of held back until they grew in confidence. In a way, they created problems for themselves, but once their confidence grew and were comfortable in what they were doing, they were away (Diana, Interview: 23-12-98).

Another constraint obvious at the initial phase was the conservative attitudes of some of the head teachers of the original centres. These teachers had been managing their centres without external interruptions prior to the introduction of the early childhood education project, and they were not keen to change their routines to accommodate the new project. The following passages highlight this conservative attitude.

At the beginning, some of the old head teachers who have been in the main centres over a period of time were not pleased to change. They have been running these centres in a structured way, putting a stress on literacy and numeral programmes. They were not prepared to look at this new way of learning for young children. The trainers were less confident to approach them about the new programme or to explain that the children were learning the same things in the new programme, but they were learning them in a different way (Diana, Interview: 23-12-98).

Another challenging thing for us is to do with stubborn attitudes of some people who do not want to change. Let me explain what I mean by that; people are not stubborn about accepting the early childhood education programme, but these people are stubborn because they are just not interested in accepting change and/or changing their way of looking at things. For example, the people concerned sometimes think the way they are living now is good and are trying not to get involved in anything else that is happening around them. The other problem with these kinds of people is ignorance on their part. It means that they are so cut off in their own perceived isolated communities that they fail to see the good things that are happening in the area of early childhood education and how it is positively influencing children, families, villages, communities and the wider society (Susan, Interview: 18-05-99).

Another challenge was identified in the form of a misunderstanding on the part of members of the community, other leaders and families. The people were pressured to implement literacy programmes brought in by foreign
consultants. Initially, for example, some parents thought that introducing literacy programmes was the answer to their young children’s early education as illustrated in this passage.

There was another problem happening [in another province]. An overseas aid group has been talking to the people, trying to discourage them from leaning towards the kindergarten idea. The group told them that what they need was a structured literacy programme. The people [of this particular province] are confident in making up their own minds about what is right for them, and their kindergartens are community-based, very much reflecting their culture. Some of the other communities have managed to withstand that sort of pressure (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

To a certain extent, the success of the field-based training programme in Solomon Islands had become a challenge, as perceived by some people. This passage explains how:

I think another potential problem is the success of the training programme. That may sound ironic, but the programme has been very successful. It has been successful wherever it has been implemented. There are some really good things going on in the villages, spread over parts of Solomon Islands. More and more people all over the country, are saying, “we want it.” The demand for this quality field-based training programme has been far greater than the ability to meet the demand, because a big number of kindergartens have been established. The communities are building new kindergartens, but we haven’t got the ability to train their potential teachers. So there are kindergartens being built and there are not enough personnel to train their kindergarten teachers and that’s a challenge to the success. But obviously, the notion of early childhood education programme has been successful, people like it, they see its value, and are opting to build more new kindergartens. The [Solomon Islands] Government can’t deliver, because we can’t put more trainers in place at this stage. We haven’t got the resources to do more training, so to a certain extent it’s a barrier to itself (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

Generally, constraints appeared in various degrees and types. There were other small potential challenges that people involved in the early childhood project had to face in their respective tasks. Besides financial and geographical challenges as previously noted, professional, academic, structural and cultural challenges were and continue to be faced by both teachers and trainers, but particularly the trainers responsible for overseeing large regions alone. As these passages illustrate:

I think another small, but potential barrier in terms of consistent growth and expansion is to do with some trainers shifting locations at times. There is a need to employ another person to help out with tasks that need to be done, especially at the maintenance phase. It could be easy to
lose one's enthusiasm in a situation like that and fight back. I think one of the key points is that; the trainers are appearing in the villages and going into kindergartens. They have been able to inspire teachers and are influencing other teachers who are part of the teaching team (Diana, Interview: 23-12-98).

Cultural barriers did cause concern at the beginning. People were opting for formal training, but they did not fully understand how to go about the child-centred approach. There is a cultural difference in sitting and talking with kids the way the [name of] national coordinator and her team wanted, which is successful to the traditional way of dealing with things and is happening now. But this cultural misunderstanding was resolved through holding awareness workshops where the trainers, volunteers and community leaders talked about the method, kindergartens and about early childhood education. In this process, they established an understanding with the parents and members of the community (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

On a cross-national level, gender became a challenging issue, particularly at the proposal and planning stages of the early childhood education project in Solomon Islands. As the other developing partner in and as a funding agent for this project, the New Zealand Government proposed a set of working parameters that included addressing gender issues and women in development in Solomon Islands.

As part of the project, one of the New Zealand Government's aid parameters is that we address gender issues and women in development. It included providing opportunities for women and this project has done it better than any other project because we are dealing almost inclusively with women. Women who have created all sorts of opportunities for learning for other women and young children, and so this early childhood project has got a big tick from NZODA [New Zealand Official Development Assistance] from that point of view. But, they also want to make sure that gender issues are addressed in the curriculum we teach the teachers. Now, while we don't disagree with that, there are major cultural issues there. You cannot go in and lay a Western philosophy of gender on to a community in the deepest areas of the country and say, “this is what you should do”, because the success of that society is dependent on its cultural and social structure. For outsiders to come in and say, “no you got it all wrong, this is how you should behave” is not going to win you any friends and is not I believe an ethical thing to do. But we still have to raise issues related to gender to make sure that girls and women get the opportunity, and there were gender issues which also raised ethical and moral issues. But not only ethical in the sense of human rights, but ethical in the sense of what right has one country to tell another country how to behave. At the same time, we had to think about good things we had to do for all children and that was a major problem and challenge for all of us to begin with. The first group of trainers, especially the senior ones helped to work through that dilemma and the experience helped them as well to work through the dilemma. How we addressed the issue was quite
interesting, and we think we handled it pretty well (Simon, Interview: 23-12-98).

It is acknowledged that in the long term, these different constraints could become serious and threatening in respect to the ongoing survival of early childhood education and its component of the field-based training programme. It was obvious from the administrators’ comments that although they were trying their best, it was not easy to undertake their tasks, particularly those working with people living in the provinces consisting of several small islands.

Summary

Administrators interviewed in the study raised a range of fundamental issues in relation to the field-based training programme and the concept of early childhood education in Solomon Islands. They described the philosophy of the programme as sensitive and contextual in nature, suggesting that it took into account the aspects of the local, provincial and national environments and the diverse nature of the people of Solomon Islands. It encourages a holistic approach in view of the people’s values, practices and beliefs reflecting the lifestyle and needs of the people.

A significant aspect of the field-based training project was the partnership established between the Solomon Islands and the New Zealand Governments. Administrators described it as commendable, relevant and powerful. The New Zealand Government assisted the Solomon Islands Government by providing funding for the early childhood education project and the two consultants, who worked with the coordinators. The officers initiated and designed the field-based training package with the help of the Solomon Islands national coordinator and her team of provincial coordinators. They worked with the Solomon Islands early childhood trainers in encouraging the idea of early childhood education being introduced throughout the country.

The people felt an ownership of the field-based training programme right from the commencement of the project. This resulted from the decision to include people of Solomon Islands in the decisions concerning the project from the initial phase. Within the communities, the programme has reinforced and enhanced community spirit and belonging and working together as one societal group.
The administrators applauded the professionalism exhibited by the early childhood teachers despite the ongoing challenges they faced in their job. These challenges and trying circumstances included dealing with huge numbers of children at their kindergarten setting, encouraging parents to assist with making resources and materials, and coping with the fact that some children had to travel far to get to kindergarten. On a wider perspective, the challenges included lack of funds, insufficient co-workers and inadequate travelling facilities. Although these ongoing constraints particularly affected administrators and teachers, they were also felt by families, the communities and the wider Solomon Islands society.

The participating administrators showed faith in the field-based training programme and in the people who had worked hard to bring the project to the level it had reached to date, particularly the main players in the project, the New Zealand and the Solomon Islands Governments, and the key personnel, consisting of the New Zealand consultants and their Solomon Islands partners, the national and provincial coordinators.
CHAPTER EIGHT

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON COMMUNITY PEOPLE’S VIEWPOINTS OF THE FIELD-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME

This Chapter presents the findings on members of the community’s viewpoints on the field-based training programme for early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands. As noted in chapters Six and Seven, the aim of this research study can be found in chapter Five. The perspectives of teachers, administrators, and the participant observation outcomes are examined in chapters six, seven and nine respectively. The following research questions are the only ones (of the seven key research questions) that are dealt with in this chapter.

4. Are high quality programmes being implemented by teachers who have received training and is children’s learning and development being supported in the way intended by the training programme?

5. What do teachers, administrators, parents, families and community people think of early childhood education?

6. How do parents and members of the community view the field-based training programme and is it perceived to have had any impact on kindergartens, families and communities?

In this chapter, the viewpoints of members of the community who were spoken to individually about the field-based training programme and how it had affected kindergarten teachers’ professionalism, teaching practice, roles, activities and processes are presented. The data emerge from the translated transcripts of the interviews carried out in pidgin with the participating members of the community in this study. All the names used are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants. Other data originate from the journal kept by the researcher.

In chapter eight, the themes include: family and community participation, involvement and support; benefits for children, families and the community;
how kindergarten children have behaved; and the moral and spiritual dimension.

8.1 Community People’s Viewpoints

8.1.1 Family and Community Participation, Involvement and Support

The community members were keen to help the people responsible for spreading early childhood education in the communities. It was believed that by ensuring parents and members of the community understood what was happening, they would be in a better position to offer their help and support to teachers and the centres.

In a way, people will understand and should find it easier to be supportive and offer their help with the running of the programme. Because without the support of the community, it will be hard to proceed with the programme and it will not be effective. But at the same time I know that once [the] community people understand what’s going on and learn more about how children learn, they will be helpful because everyone has the same goal for their children, that’s to attend education. But not unless they fully understand what is going on (Community 4 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

We, parents must work together with teachers. Parents’ support and help are a must if we are to expect our kindergarten to grow and continue to improve for the sake of our children. Kindergarten is still at its baby stage and it’s only this year [1999] that it has shown much improvement and success. So my forecast is that our community through our children will benefit from this kindergarten in the future. The people of this community are united in making sure the centre performs well and grows. I think, without unity nothing good will happen. People’s moral support is very high as we work together to improve our kindergarten setting (Community 2 male representative 1, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

People often carried out tasks, such as constructing buildings for centres under trying circumstances and difficult financial situations.

Our community has monetary problems, but we have tried our best to build a permanent building to house our kindergarten. I try my best to encourage our community and to think about what we can do to support our children’s early education. When the early childhood project was introduced to us, we had just finished building a house for the primary school. So, much of the community money has gone to the primary project. By the time the kindergarten project came along, we didn’t have enough money to build the centre straight away. But being the builder, I decided to build it free of charge. We will continue to help because our children today will be the people to take over the
development of our community in the future (Community 2 male representative 2, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

The support of mothers for their child's kindergarten education was encouraging all around. Mothers with significantly younger children were also helping and genuinely keen and prepared to bring their children to the centres and remained until the end of the official kindergarten hours. The community women’s assistance and support to kindergarten teachers was commended and acknowledged by community leaders.

I know that it’s the women who are really keen and interested to help in kindergartens. It’s the same everywhere you go in this province. For example, in a certain village, the women are responsible for managing their kindergarten with minimal support from their men. It’s the same situation in two other villages in this region. It’s encouraging to see women showing leadership in their endeavour to help teachers and the kindergarten centres. The majority of the committee members are women. Women are the backbone of the early childhood education sector and the field-based training project in Solomon Islands (Community 2 male representative 2, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

Women are freer to bring their children to school these days. Many women are preparing their children to come to kindergarten and are very interested in what’s happening with their children at kindergarten. Some of us women are helping teachers make resources and materials, but not on a big scale. We would have liked to do more, but sometimes we don’t have the right tools to work with. I think our kindergarten is going to grow into a good centre and become an important kindergarten in the future (Community 4 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

The support and involvement of fathers in the communities was evident and encouraging overall. However, in a few cases, the support of fathers was minimal. Women were taking charge of kindergarten activities, but voiced their disappointment.

Regarding support we women tend to struggle alone to support this kindergarten. Our husbands don’t seem to recognise what we are trying to do for our young children. We [women] do marketing and organise bring and buy functions to raise funds. Our community kindergarten is only three years old. This year we have struggled hard to think about how we can support it so that it can have a permanent building that our children can use as their centre. Some of the fathers and other people in the community seem less interested to take part. It looks as though the community people think this kindergarten project belongs to the women only. Sometimes, we become discouraged; other times we are down hearted about the fact that we are the only ones struggling to think about how we can better care for our kindergarten centre. You see, fathers’ support in this community is there, but not strong enough to help in kindergarten when they are needed.
Sometimes we are confused by their attitude (Community 1 female representative, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).

Specifically, men and fathers’ involvement and support were sought in terms of implementing physical work and tasks surrounding the early childhood settings. Fathers were responsible for planning and organising buildings in which centres were housed. Initially, the importance of involving men in the negotiating stage of the field-based training programme was expressed and highlighted by most people spoken to during the research fieldwork, particularly those people who were directly involved in the early childhood education project. As one administrator explained, “the field-based training programme is successful because certain unique factors have contributed to that success. One outstanding one is that men were involved in the initial stage of the programme. I think that was important as it makes a difference to how the programme was seen from the start. Solomon Islands is a patriarchal society. For example, the permanent secretary (male) to the Ministry of Education at the time was instrumental in ensuring that the idea of establishing early childhood education in Solomon Islands became a reality during early discussions on the project. The national coordinator has made sure that we have male trainers and now we have three male trainers among the team of female trainers.”

8.1.2 Benefits for Children, Families and the Community

The benefits and importance of incorporating the traditional ways of stimulating children with the new techniques that enrich and reinforce children’s integrated development was appreciated by parents. While to those who were responsible for implementing the field-based training programme, besides focusing on long-term effects, success occurred when parents were able to observe changes in children. As these comments in the following passages show:

Since the kindergarten programme started here in our community, I have seen children very interested in their kindergarten education. Even younger children are also interested. In the past it was different; for example, sometimes children would reach six or seven years of age before they start their education. Another change is to do with children’s behaviour and attitudes. Children are respectful when they are attending important events like a church service. So the influence of kindergarten on our children has been very good. I am confident that our children’s kindergarten education will prepare them to go as high
as they could go through the education system. I am very happy with what’s happening and looking to the future with confidence (Community 1 male representative 2, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).

How I see it here is that our children aren’t only those attending kindergarten, but also those children or students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels as well. We treat them as our community’s children, that is, every child is treated as a child of the community. Parents do try their best to treat all children respectfully. Because children are innocent, parents must change to fit into children’s style and speak words of encouragement to them instead of negative ones. In my view, this will help to encourage our children to learn and strive for the best in school. In return it should help our children to fit into the village life and the wider community. Individual families and the community will benefit from both children’s education and in other areas of their lives as well in the future (Community 2 male representative 5, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

According to members of the community, the early childhood education initiative had brought about a variety of changes in their communities. Change for the people meant different things. Individuals spoke of the early childhood education project as a positive agent of change for their children, families, villages and communities.

I see positive changes in the behaviour and attitudes of our people since the idea of early education for our children was first discussed in our community. I am glad to see the attitudinal change in people to welcome this new idea. The idea of kindergarten education has made it possible for the people to have a different way of thinking about their children’s education. The harmony and cooperation in our community has been good, with people working together when it comes to dealing with things for our kindergarten. It is pleasing to hear parents, but especially mothers talking about how pleased they are with children’s general behaviour and attitudes. Children are more serious with attending school and with their learning. Children are no longer staying away from school; instead they are interested in learning and going to kindergarten every day (Community 4 female representative 6, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

The programme was only introduced in 1996, but we are already seeing positive change in the attitudes of children, differences in the villages or communities, changes in the homes and in the islands. People are recognising the benefits that are in turn motivating them to consider building new kindergarten centres or promoting various ways to raise funds that would go towards building new centres or improving the existing kindergartens. The training programme has encouraged cooperation, partnership, sharing, listening to each other among the people. It has to some extent reinforced and enhanced community spirit and oneness. In that it has become a point of reference for all people at the village level. For example, old people, young people, children, parents, chiefs, women, politicians, church workers, teachers and
government workers feel they have something in common (Community 2 male representative 2, Informal Interview: 31-03-99). Members of the community often expressed the idea that children’s kindergarten education would help them in the long term. They discussed changes they had seen with children. Some children were no longer afraid to go to kindergarten, and were not scared to speak to other people around them. Overall, children were enjoying playing with other children both at kindergarten and in the village. These members of the community described their perceptions of change.

There are some good changes happening in our kindergarten. Teachers are more organised and know what they are doing with children and how to run their kindergarten. Parents and the community people are very supportive too. Also, this programme has brought good changes to children. Children are more serious with their schooling and attend kindergarten faithfully every day unless they are sick. Children are talking and asking a lot of questions without feeling afraid of adults (Community 2 male representative 4, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

The field-based training programme is geared towards teachers helping and encouraging children to learn things for and by themselves. Children are being helped to explore, investigate things on their own with the help of their teachers. Teachers and children are interacting with each other while activities are going on. I can see that the programme is really good for children. They are not depending too much on their teacher, once learning activities are set up for them by the teacher (Community 2 male representative 5, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

While these members of the community described the changes they had observed in the following excerpts.

I see the importance of children attending kindergarten from seeing mothers being very willing to take their children to kindergarten. In the past, mothers never bothered to take their children to school themselves. Now mothers are taking a big interest in their children’s education and getting involved as well. The fathers too are very helpful and supportive when it comes to doing things for our kindergarten, and have become interested in what is happening with their children at kindergarten. Mothers and fathers are helping teachers to make resources for their kindergarten (Community 2 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 01-04-99).

I am the chairperson of the kindergarten committee. What I am seeing happening with young children here in this community is very good. It’s not like before, when we did not have a kindergarten, parents struggled to send their children to school. But this time, things have picked up in that area. The kindergarten idea is making a difference to children’s learning. Last year, the preparatory teacher thanked the
kindergarten teachers because she has seen changes in the attitudes of children who moved from kindergarten to preparatory class. So in my opinion, kindergarten is very important for children and they should attend it first before they move to preparatory. Education for young children is very important, so we should manage our kindergarten well to help young children to learn well and prepare themselves for the future (Community 1 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 30-03-99).

Moreover, once parents realised how important their role had become in supporting their child’s learning, there was change in the parent’s behaviour and attitudes, particularly in terms of their interactions with their children. However, change often was not easy as this parent commented, noted by the researcher in the journal.

I should say things were really tough at first. I found it hard to change and listen to my children and practise what I have learned from awareness workshops I attended, organised by the coordinator for this province. But more and more, I have learned to do it with the best of my ability (Researcher’s Journal entry: 10-06-99).

Meanwhile, as children gained more confidence and became more outgoing, they became increasingly involved in village activities as well as classroom activities.

In the village, children’s behaviour seems like the old days when I was a child. They are taking part more in church and village activities, which is really good. Preparatory teachers are reporting back to the community the changes they have seen in children who have gone from kindergarten level. For example, teachers are saying children are easy to teach and they [children] want to learn and they tune in and pick up quickly. So we realise that kindergarten education is very important for our children and is helping them to change from past bad habits. Our people are happy and are interested to help improve our kindergarten and help it grow for our current and next generation of young children. People are willing to help teachers with any activities that they want to be done (Community 2 male representative 4, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

Essentially, parents felt honoured, realising how invaluable cultural practices were, in relation to supporting children’s development. As parents, they also realised they had an impact on their child’s development and learning.

I didn’t realise before that I was doing so much to help my daughter grow up strong and bright. In the past, I was trying my best to do things to help her without fully understanding how those small deeds would help her down the line. Now I know I can really help her have chances I never had in relation to education (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).
Some community people were optimistic, appreciative and predicted constructive and positive outcomes for their children as a result of their kindergarten education.

As a result of the current kindergarten teacher undergoing her field-based training, I foresee our community seeing big improvements. What I mean by big improvements is that for the last four years, our average intake or number of our children entering form one at secondary school has not been that great. But I believe pupils who will have done kindergarten first are likely to have a better chance of progressing to primary and then on to secondary schools. Hopefully, in the future, the drop-out average rate for our children in standard six will go down. I believe it will come about because trained teachers would be teaching children at the kindergarten level, before children move to preparatory level. In fact, the preparatory teacher has been saying that she is happy with children who have come from kindergarten to preparatory because children are more alert and pick up quickly in class (Community 2 male representative 3, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

I am happy with the early childhood education programme and I support it willingly. There are changes happening in the lives of children and people here as a result of what our kindergarten is doing for our children. I have seen parents who are educated being role models for children. Some mothers are trying hard to support their children with whatever they need. There are improvements showing already and these changes will increase in the future. For children’s health and wellbeing, mothers are encouraging and helping each other to understand to balance areas such as cleanliness, and why it is important for them to feed their children before they go to kindergarten (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

Community people considered the teacher’s training as a necessary tool in her or his role as an early childhood educator for young children.

Teachers should be trained because untrained teachers could find it hard to run a kindergarten successfully. What I mean is that the kindergarten programme is a special one and teachers need to know how to plan such a programme. Also teachers should learn how to handle very young children in their kindergarten. I have seen differences between teachers who have been trained and those who have not been trained. Trained teachers are close to children and know how to interact with children at their level. These teachers also know how to care for children at that age even though they [teachers] are young themselves (Community 2 male representative 3, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

I think some of these young women want to be early childhood teachers because they genuinely love being with children. Some are interested because they would like to learn how to care for children and help them learn and grow. I can see that they are finding their work with young
children more interesting now that they have done their field-based training. It’s interesting to observe our kindergarten teacher planning child-centred activities and teaching the programmes to children. She’s interested to continue her training to upgrade her teaching qualification and to get more experience (Community 2 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 01-04-99).

Children must be prepared with necessary skills and knowledge that will help them for their life in the community. This study found that this was a belief widely shared by Solomon Islanders and kindergarten teachers were encouraged to do their part in ensuring that the belief was put into practice at the kindergarten setting.

I know that education is to do with dealing with the whole being of a child. One pioneer educationalist in our country gave the meaning of education when he asked, “Education for what?” And he answered that question by saying, “Education for Life.” In this province, that idea is yet to be realised. Children here only think that education is for intellectual, academic achievement. That idea is not quite true. I think that the idea of education for life should be encouraged and done properly, beginning at kindergarten level. We have to train our teachers to help children to learn and develop, and to prepare them for their own life in the future. Children should be taught to understand that education covers more than just academic matters. So I think at kindergarten and at primary levels, that idea should be stressed strongly and in the overall education system of the Solomon Islands (Community 2 male representative 5, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

Kindergarten teachers had benefited from being involved and from teaching in the early childhood education sector. Members of the community saw teachers as unique, as dealing with young children often involved different styles of teaching. The members of the community recognised the benefits of having qualified teachers and endeavoured to do their part in addressing the issue of untrained teachers. People expressed their appreciation of teachers and for what they were doing in the early childhood education sector and for children. Parents spoken to in this study expressed that they were increasingly being encouraged by what teachers were doing in their centres.

Parents were generally satisfied that the education of their children was in the hands of capable teaching staff, but were concerned about the issue of untrained teachers, as shown in the interview excerpts below. It appeared that although the field-based training programme was meeting the training needs of some teachers, the number of teachers who had qualified through the programme was not sufficient to supply every kindergarten centre in the country with trained and qualified early childhood teachers.
Our problem at our kindergarten is that we don’t have any trained teacher yet. So that’s why we have decided to send one teacher up to the College to do her training. This present teacher is not trained, so when the other teacher graduates next year [2000], this present untrained teacher will start her training next. Our aim is to have trained teachers teaching our young children. You see we have many children here, but we only have one teacher (Community 1 female representative 4, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).

Children are having some kind of ongoing education within their family environment. But for those children entering kindergarten, if the teacher is not trained, the only one available to teach them is an untrained teacher. As somebody has said, “early childhood education is one very important idea in our community.” We want our children to learn and become the kind of adults who can play their role in community life. So, we want our teachers to be trained and we need more trained ones to teach our young children. These teachers should gain more experience from their training, which should in turn help them with their teaching and how to work with young children. There is a very strong community support for our kindergarten to have two or three teachers and we would like that to happen for the sake of our young children (Community 1 female representative 3, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).

This parent expressed her opinion on the issue of untrained teachers this way.

At the moment we only have an untrained teacher looking after our kindergarten. Sometimes it’s hard for her and tends to find it difficult to communicate with parents. She has only attended one training workshop so far. Sometimes I think children are not happy to attend kindergarten because they are bored. Maybe, children are tired of playing or using the same items over and over again. Therefore, the kindergarten committee and members of the community have been good to get behind the teacher, as she needs our help and support (Community 1 female representative 4, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).

Employing untrained teachers with higher secondary education was more favoured by the people.

I am interested in recruiting form five leavers for our kindergarten. Any form five leaver who is willing to be a kindergarten teacher and willing to do teacher training at the college or start her or his field-based training here. We would be happy to have her or him. I am very happy with the present four female untrained teachers, but I would like at least one of our kindergarten teachers to have a higher secondary education background. I think these teachers would be better equipped to deal and cope with young children they are caring for, as well as managing the centre. So far, the present teacher who is doing her field-based training has taken in four young women with secondary education background and they seem keen to become kindergarten teachers (Community 2 male representative 4, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).
Recognising that young children needed a lot of physical space to carry out their learning activities, some communities had erected suitable kindergarten settings for children attending kindergarten.

Communities have realised that children need lots of space as children need to move around, and they need a lot of spaces in the learning areas and for their learning resources. The communities are starting to build ideal classrooms that are suitable for kindergarten children's learning needs and development. Community people are also helping with fund-raising activities to help meet cost of improving the inside and outside setting of the classroom. Some of the money will also go towards materials and resources for our kindergarten centre that cannot be made from bush materials; for example, such items as books and paper (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

The data collected in this study showed that mothers who were members of the kindergarten committee talked about the benefits of being involved in their kindergarten events. These mothers were not trained teachers, but based on their open attitude, and the way they had handled children, their contributions were very encouraging. They were experienced mothers who had brought into the kindergarten setting valuable experiences. These community women were talking about changes they had seen since the field-based training programme was introduced in their community. Changes occurring with children, teachers, parents or families, the Church and community.

I find the early childhood education programme very helpful and good for our children and their education. We have not always been supportive of teachers, but now we have seen lots of good things happening with our young children, we will try our best to help our children and the kindergarten. I would like to say that I have seen a big difference in our two children who are attending kindergarten now. They [children] are active and love coming to kindergarten. My children are learning a lot and so I see the importance of early childhood education. So this time we [parents and community women] try to encourage ourselves to help the teachers and kindergarten more (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

I am a member of the kindergarten committee. I have seen both good and bad things happening to children. But I am very happy with what's happening here in our kindergarten and I am happy to contribute new ideas and provide my support to improving our kindergarten. We are trying our best to improve it to benefit our children (Community 1 female representative 2, Informal Interview: 29-03-99).
Traditional and Western education was also comparatively discussed by members of the community and gave examples of changes they perceived came about as a result of young children attending kindergarten.

In the olden days, children were trained or taught our culture to help them prepare for life and their future before they leave the community. For example, for a boy if his father is a hunter, he must learn how to hunt to carry on the tradition. So our culture is important to maintain in the life of our children. It is true too that today, in my view, things have changed and it is time for things to change as well. Times have changed and we need to move with today's time. Children must do something suitable in the way they learn and develop today. This is especially true for their academic learning. This kindergarten programme is helping our children. For example, the programme is helping children to think about things for themselves, but its success depends to a large extent on help and support of parents and members of the community (Community 4 male representative 2, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

Since this early childhood programme was introduced in our community, I have seen some positive changes among our children. For example, it is clear to us village people that children not only learn academic matters, but they should also learn important skills for life in this world. I believe this programme has bonded children together. Another thing too is that children are listening quietly, obeying their parents without questioning and respecting each other and other people. Something of our culture and very commonly practised all over the country, but with today's influences, it can be difficult for children. I believe that children will benefit greatly from attending kindergarten education, and can develop in three important areas: in mind, in reasoning and in spirit. In the long run, children will gain a lot in their mind and in their reasoning ability. Kindergarten education can give children the chance to exercise "oneness", staying together and sharing knowledge they have learned individually with one another. In my view, it means that children are practising what they have learned at kindergarten in their everyday life (Community 2 male representative 3, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).

While this parent added:

I have seen children bringing home what they have learned at kindergarten. What I mean is that when my children have finished for the day at kindergarten, they would come home and redo some of the kind of activities that they have been doing that day at our house. I am very happy with that change because children are finding time to organise their own play at home. My children are engaging in the type of play that is educational for them at home. That is a good thing because it shows that children understand what they are learning at kindergarten and then try to do these activities again on their own without the teachers being present (Community 2 male representative 5, Informal Interview: 31-03-99).
8.1.3 How Kindergarten Children have behaved

Although the field-based training programme was not introduced that long ago, people were already seeing a positive change in the attitudes of children, as well as an attitudinal change on the part of people and society as a whole. Recognising the benefits of the training programme, people were motivated to build new kindergartens or were promoting various ways of raising funds to go towards building new ones or improving existing centres. Teachers, administrators and members of the community who participated in this study discussed changes they had seen in children that they believed had come about as a result of what trained teachers had learned in their field-based training and were doing and encouraging in their kindergarten setting and community.

I see that children are beginning to play freely with each other more. Another thing that is clear too is how children use their language. How they talk, how they answer people and how they talk about things that they have been doing when teachers go around to ask them. It's clear that children are becoming more open and confident to talk in front of others and they do it a lot more. Also, I see some very clear pictures in different centres where even children who are only three years old are doing advanced activities with four or five year olds. Well, in their own way these children [three-year olds] tend to build things, their building seems to reflect the stage they are at in their development. But at least I see that younger children are also doing things at kindergarten. Children are a lot more willing to come to kindergarten and are enjoying activities there. They are active and interacting with teachers and peers a lot more (Community 2 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 01-04-99).

Children are using their reasoning abilities and making sense of their world; for example, when children pour [liquid or sand], when they are testing things in water or using sand to make things. They are expressing things in different ways for example, using coconut shells in the sand and saying they are baking buns using sand. I mean children are also working together and not fighting each other or not grabbing things or being selfish at that age. We see very few cases every now and then (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

Generally, people of the Solomon Islands were pleased, excited, enthusiastic and optimistic about the concept of early childhood education and its establishment within the communities. The people, as well as teachers who were interviewed in the present study, were eager and readily expressed how they had seen positive changes in children's attitudes and behaviour. The positive influence of the field-based training programme on the local communities and the wider society was also often raised and expressed.
There is a big difference now in children who are attending the village kindergartens. The training that rural teachers have gained from field-based training has in turn helped children at those kindergarten settings. Children are really happy and excited to be part of their kindergartens because nowadays children do a lot of cultural activities and local activities with their teachers. They live among these cultural items, not like the children who are living in urban areas. Teachers use a lot of resources and materials made locally to work with and help children learn. Children are showing to their families what they are learning at kindergarten when they return home. Parents are happy because they are seeing the positive outcomes of [the] field-based training programme. Children are changing all the time and are showing positive results all around and enjoying what they are learning at kindergarten (Community 4 female representative 6, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

I have noticed children enjoying kindergarten more and seem excited to be at kindergarten while doing various activities. Children are enjoying using a variety of materials to play with at kindergarten. Teachers too are freer to help kindergarten children learn. Parents and community people are also supporting what is happening in kindergarten. Support is also received from one expatriate person who has sent children’s books and other resources for our kindergarten. The atmosphere in our kindergarten has turned out best for our children, teachers and families. In the best interests of children, cooperation has been important among the children, teachers, parents and the community (Community 3 female representative 1, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

Meanwhile, these parents brought up other important ideas.

Respecting elders of our families, tribes, village or community has always been part of our culture. But, I believe because of what children are learning at kindergarten in the area of culture, children’s learning of the culture and their cultural values has been enhanced greatly, especially in relation to their elders and in terms of helping parents, especially mothers, with chores around the home. Children’s positive behaviour has definitely been enhanced by the influence of the field-based training programme through the skills and competence of trained teachers (Community 4 female representative 6, Informal Interview: 15-04-99).

I see a big difference between those children who are attending kindergarten and children who have not attended kindergarten at all. Children who are attending kindergarten are more open with people, not shy to communicate and socialise with friends, peers and adults. They are more exposed, are not afraid and are free to ask questions in continuing to explore their small world. Children are also helping with chores more at home. That is clear to me because each morning when children come to kindergarten, they would tell us what they have done to help their parents. It’s good to know that children’s kindergarten education is helping in making a difference to each child’s everyday life (Community 1 female representative 1, [A mother who frequently assisted in the community kindergarten] Informal Interview: 30-03-99).
The church has an important influence on many aspects of life in Solomon Islands’ society. It is highly regarded as an essential force to integrate and guide the general and spiritual wellbeing of the people of the communities. Besides being involved in the education and health sectors, the different churches are active in several other community projects and participate in development programmes and initiatives. For example, the church has played and continues to play an important role in helping to implement the early childhood education programme at the village level. The succeeding passages illustrate the people’s dependence on the church and the church’s influence on factors affecting children and the people.

I am a member of this community and the kindergarten committee. We people in this community depend on our church organisation for all the activities we do here. The Church Body is concerned with two things: prayer and communal work—working together. Unity is a very big thing in this village and people appreciate working together. We are happy to do whatever our leaders ask us to do towards our kindergarten because children’s education is far too important. The Church cares for all people in our community, but it takes seriously the things that affect children and their learning and development (Community 3 male representative, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

In various ways, the people’s beliefs are greatly influenced by their family Church. Thus, you hear families making sure that their child is still keeping in tune with their beliefs while attending kindergarten, but at the same time, being mindful of other children’s beliefs and values. For example, a self-concept consisting of a set of beliefs, attitudes and feelings that an individual has about her or himself. For many people in our society, these attributes are taught and enhanced by their family or community Church as a self-concept is learned and needs to be developed and nurtured in early childhood years (Community 1 male representative, Informal Interview: 30-03-99).

The different churches are also active in helping families to understand ways to guide their children’s moral development.

The Church has been faithful in helping parents to understand ways to guide and develop their children’s moral development. The beliefs children have about themselves will not only affect what they can do, but also how they interact with others in their community. If children behave consistently with the way they see themselves, their belief about whether they can or cannot do things will influence how they approach new situations. This way of thinking has been one area that the teachings of the Church have been clearly connected to a real life experience of our young children (Community 4 male representative, Informal Interview: 15-03-99).
I am glad that children’s moral or spiritual development is catered for in the early childhood programme. We need to help children develop their social abilities in the community, and also their moral development. This is an area where both teachers and parents can help children to develop and grow. We will also encourage parents to be role models for their children in this area. This is important, because as people of Solomon Islands, our belief in God is strong (Community 3 male representative 3, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

Children’s participation in church activities was encouraged and enhanced, as explained in this entry in the researcher’s journal.

The children of this kindergarten sing beautifully and also enjoy doing it. The lead teacher in the village kindergarten told me earlier today that the Church plays a greater part in encouraging children’s singing talents and skills. It has organised a special choir just for the village children. These very young children sing like adults and have no trouble singing different parts and making beautiful music. Children are encouraged to start learning to sing or be part of the children’s choir at the age of two. It has been amazing and wonderful to see how children sing at the top of their voices just like the adult people singing at the Church service (Researcher’s Journal entry: 15-04-99).

Summary

Members of the community were encouraged by the field-based training project, and shared their viewpoints on issues relating to early childhood education, teachers, children’s kindergarten education and related issues. The community people who participated in the present study raised important factors affecting early childhood teachers and children, which they believed had come about as a result of teachers’ training and implementing what they had learned through helping children learn. The programme had affected the lives of the village people and the communities in encouraging ways, which had inspired the members of the community to get involved in helping with the various activities planned for kindergarten children. Community people acknowledged the importance of their support and participation in the activities of the kindergarten centres by working and collaborating with teachers. They believed that by helping and supporting teachers, the field-based training and early childhood education programmes, they were contributing to ensuring learning continued for their children at kindergarten.

In relation to outcomes for children, the people identified and discussed some of the changes they had seen in and with children attending kindergarten, describing children’s attitudes and behaviour both in class and outside the
kindergarten environment to be increasingly improved. They attributed the changes to the influence of the field-based training programme on kindergarten teachers. Children were developing firm friendships among themselves. For the members of the community, it was encouraging to see children respecting each other and adults. It encouraged parents to help their children when they returned home from kindergarten, to enhance their own interest in understanding what their children were learning at kindergarten, suggesting that parents were listening and appreciating their children more. This suggests an existence of a strong partnership between teachers and the communities.
CHAPTER NINE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ON KINDERGARTEN OBSERVATION OUTCOMES

This Chapter focuses on and presents the findings on the participant observations carried out in two kindergarten centres during the research fieldwork. The two centres are referred to in this chapter and in the discussions as Kindergarten A and Kindergarten B (see chapter ten, part four).

In this chapter, the data emerge from the translated transcripts of the participant observation outcomes based on the recordings of observations of teachers and children at work, interactions between teachers and children, teachers and researcher, children and researcher; some interviews with the kindergarten teachers; notes from the researcher's journal; and copies of teachers' work, planning and children's work. The interactions and interviews were carried out in pidgin. All the names used are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants. The kindergarten observations were influenced by the research questions outlined in the methodology (refer to chapter five).

Setting the Scene for the Presentation of the Kindergarten Observation Outcomes

The physical environment of the kindergartens in the Solomon Islands displayed the level of support and degree of assistance whether financial and/or human resource, that teachers received from parents, members of the community and the communities. It also depended on the size of the community responsible for the kindergartens. The more communities pooled their resources together, the easier it was for them to decide how best to help the kindergartens. Some centres, for example, were housed in partial permanent buildings, while other kindergartens were operating in buildings built purely from materials from the forests. Some centres had big spaces, while others did not. Generally, attention was paid to aspects such as ventilation, noise, furniture, storage, shelving, resources and materials to enable the teacher
and children to function in the physical setting as smoothly as possible. Every kindergarten appeared to have a committee, while in some areas, a single committee was formed to oversee the needs of both the kindergarten and the primary school in the region.

The social environment of the kindergartens conveyed messages about how children and people were valued and about the ways members of the kindergarten setting were expected to behave. The social setting of the centres was warm and friendly, and visitors were made welcome and comfortable. Members of the community, early childhood educators and children viewed their kindergartens as places where they could live together and work harmoniously. Thus the physical and social environment of the Solomon Islands kindergartens was pleasant as well as a challenging place for all stakeholders.

In Kindergarten A, I started my participant observation on the fifth and completed it on the eighth of April, 1999. For a week, I spent two hours observing and participating in the centre’s activities, as kindergarten A was only operating for two hours each day. The sessions ran for two hours in the four days in a week that the kindergarten was operating. There were 3 early childhood teachers in this centre and 39 children altogether.

The centre had plenty of physical space both indoors and outdoors, with adequate shelves and a storage room for their resources. The kindergarten was housed in a permanent building with two classrooms adjacent to one another, separated only by a wall and access to each classroom was through an interior door in the wall. It was reasonably equipped with resources and other materials for both teachers and children to use. The social climate was warm and pleasant, and the staff and children were friendly and helpful throughout my stay at their centre. The children were shy at first; however, as time elapsed they relaxed and communicated more with the researcher. In relation to its geographic environment, kindergarten A was a community early childhood centre situated on an island with a population of about three hundred people. Children residing on the nearby islands had to paddle to the island to attend kindergarten.

Kindergarten B had 2 teachers and 25 children. I began my visit at kindergarten B on the thirteenth and it ended on the sixteenth of April 1999. The sessions ran for two hours, four days a week and during my visit I made
use of the allotted duration and the available days. The physical environment of the indoor section of the centre was systematically set out, with built-in shelves and some drawer-like boxes to store resources and materials. The centre was well resourced and there were plenty of materials for teachers and children. Kindergarten B was housed in a semi-permanent building beautifully erected on stilts at the side of a hill. The design of the building was impressive, with traditional designs and patterns sparsely placed in different parts of the building. The outdoor space was organised appropriately for children to use, although most of the outdoor activities were performed indoors. As in Kindergarten A, the social environment was warm, welcoming and pleasant. Teachers, children and mothers who were helping in the week I visited were friendly, helpful and supportive. The classroom displayed messages about valuing children, people and a variety of organised and new experiences to guide children. In terms of its geographic environment, kindergarten B was situated on a large island, catering for children of the several communities scattered on the island.
teacher-child ratio; play as a learning tool for young children; encouraging creativity and advance learning skills in children; developing peer relationships and friendships; and dealing with discipline issues.

9.1 Kindergarten Observation Outcomes

9.1.1 Teachers' Administrative, Leadership, Planning, Implementation and Management Skills

Early childhood teachers in kindergartens where participant observation took place, were all familiar with the planning, implementation and management skills. However, a child-centred approach where children are seen as having control over their actions and initiate their own play activities, was the most used by the teachers in the two centres. Teachers’ planning notes showed an adequate degree of understanding on their part. However, teachers recognised and remarked that the completion of their training was just the beginning of their professional journey.

Essentially, kindergarten teachers planned and implemented their curriculum programmes and managed their classes well. They enjoyed their children and putting their training into practice. They facilitated learning experiences, provided assistance and challenges when appropriate and experimented with new concepts. The following excerpts from a dialogue I had with teachers in one of the observation kindergarten centres highlight these ideas and how kindergarten teachers perceived them. Another school day had ended for Kindergarten B, children and teachers. The last child had left with her mother. The two teachers approached me and indicated they would like to talk about their administrative and management roles. The educators shared their perceptions on planning, implementation and management skills, in response to my prompt.

Sally: Another way to ensure that planning incorporates all children’s interests over time is to plan for small group experiences, where the interests of more than one child can be catered for in the one experience. While objectives for each child may be met in individual plans, it’s also possible to meet these same objectives in small group plans. I am learning through experimenting that there are a number of ways that individual objectives for a group of children can be met in the one experience, while these experiences can be initiated by either the child or by the teacher or adult. I believe when teachers or adults are aware of the learning potential of experiences across individual children’s developmental areas and interests, they can then plan to
accommodate both approaches to cater for the interests of a number of children at once (Interview: 14-04-99).

Amy: I think another way to meet an individual child’s learning needs is to plan experiences across the whole day, including the indoor and outdoor programme, routine times and transitions. All activities during the day can be learning experiences for children. For young children, much of their day may be taken up with routines. These routine times can be used in ways that help children to meet individual objectives set by the teacher (Interview: 15-04-99).

Also, for kindergarten teachers, managing activities for children involved encouraging members of the community to assist in preparing teaching resources and materials for their centres. This practice was another way to encourage members of the community to see what the centres were doing for children. As Sally continued:

Sally: We have invited some parents to come in after school today to help us make some more resources for our kindergarten. I am not sure how many people will turn up, but we’ll wait and see. The last time we organised one, a good number came. I think they had a good time too. We were also happy with their help. For our centre, it’s one way of letting families in to see what we are actually trying to do here to educate the children (Interview: 14-04-99).

The teachers in the observation kindergarten centres ensured that their planning recognised and valued individual differences in young children. They had developed leadership qualities and management skills important in the administration of their individual curriculum programmes. In recognising children were unique, teachers were dedicated to providing children with appropriate, challenging and meaningful learning experiences. They familiarised themselves with community resources both physical and human, utilising them to benefit children. Practitioners carried out their work with caring and loving diligence and took their jobs seriously. They were confident and enjoyed working with children, despite the challenges they encountered in their everyday teaching. In Kindergarten A, I asked the teachers to share their understanding of planning and management skills.

Molly: I am getting there with my classroom management skills, but it’s not easy. There are certain areas that I still need help with, especially in the area of grouping children. I am happy with everything else and looking forward to my next training workshop, because I have a few questions that need answering in the area of management (Interview: 07-04-99).
Lilly: We try our best here at our kindergarten. We try to plan well and use children’s interests as a focus for planning our curriculum programmes. For example, we observe children and then we create teaching and/or learning goals from our observation records as a basis to plan activities for children (Interview: 07-04-99).

Teachers and children listening to a visiting early childhood education professional.
Photograph by Joanna Daiwo (1999)

A comment made by Amanda, one of the coordinators, indicated that for a small number of kindergarten educators, their educational background was influencing how well they understood and coped with certain modules such as the management module of the field-based training package.

**Amanda:** Most teachers are managing their planning very well. Only a small number is still not so confident about how to plan their teaching programmes properly. The difficulty I think is to do with understanding the instructions. These teachers are all right once they have asked for help, but on the other hand, they are very good at their actual teaching, often planning their curriculum programmes in their heads. What I mean is that teachers do plan, but they do it in their minds and do not bother about writing down or recording anything on paper. Interesting! Teachers do know how to evaluate themselves and observe and evaluate children they are teaching (Interview: 17-04-99).

The issue raised by Amanda in the above passage was not observed with teachers in the two kindergarten centres where participant observation took
place. The teachers concerned were confident and strong in their planning, implementation and management skills. However, while visiting a centre in another province, the following was observed. One of the two teachers in this particular kindergarten was attempting to persuade a child in a group of children who were playing in the sandpit to share the containers he was using with the other children without success. Some of the children were upset and the other teacher had to step in to bring the situation under control.

Teacher 2: [Name of child 1], you are using many containers there, a tin, four coconut shells, and five seashells. Why don’t you give [Names of child 2 and 3] two of your coconut shells so that they too can have something to play with?

Child 1: [Looked up and shook his head]

Teacher 2: Can you explain to me, why not?

Child 1: [Without talking to the teacher, child 1 collected up all the different containers and placed them under him and sat on them].

Child 2: No [Racing over to child 1 and trying to pull one of the coconut shells from under him without success].

Child 3: They are not yours [addressing child 1]. They belong to us, the whole class.

Child 4: That’s right, they’re not yours.

Child 5: Yea, they’re not yours.

Child 6: Yea [He started pulling child 1 away from the containers, with much resistance from child 1] (4 to 5 year old children)

The other children in the group started yelling and clapping their hands. The other teacher came over and asked what was happening. After hearing what had happened, she spoke with child 1 who happily started sharing the containers with the other children in the sandpit. The teacher who was with the children initially could only look on helplessly. The occurrence demonstrated that a few teachers, particularly the younger ones were still less confident to deal with complicated situations affecting children on their own.
9.1.2 Teaching Hours, Class Roll and Teacher-Child Ratio

The policy on early childhood education was adopted to provide a broad direction for the early childhood education programme, reflecting its overall philosophy. It was expected to incorporate collective mandates or guidelines for educators, in particular teachers working in kindergartens throughout the Solomon Islands. The policy was to include details of steps, strategies, actions and other relevant information of significance to children, teachers and other stakeholders.

However, at the time of the research fieldwork in Solomon Islands, kindergarten centres were operating on a two-hour teaching duration. Besides the two-hour option, early childhood teachers were also provided with a four-hour alternative to select from, subject to the endorsement of the teachers’ choice by the early childhood education coordinators. The reasons supplied for the preferred choice differed in the various centres, islands and provinces. In some regions, members of the community had maximum input into the selection of the two-hour preference. As the kindergarten centres were owned by the communities, they assumed the responsibility for paying teachers’
salaries. In some parts of the country where new kindergarten centres had recently been established, teachers' salaries would occasionally be delayed for about two weeks due to lack of or insufficient funds in the community.

Although the problem with teachers' salaries was common, it did not affect teachers in such a way it impacted on their work with children. This was because educators did not have to rely on their wages to buy food. It was explained to the researcher, for example, that local teachers grew their own food, while the community people would care for kindergarten educators from other provinces teaching in their village by providing them with food. This practice of helping teachers with food was common to all the regions visited during the research fieldwork.

Working full-time, and despite the challenges they faced, teachers ensured that the kindergarten programmes continued with the help of families and members of the community. In some respects, kindergarten teachers considered their teaching appointment to be a privilege as the selection criteria were often intensive in most provinces. As a result, there was mutual respect and loyalty among teachers, families and members of the community.

Teaching hours and class size are stipulated in the early childhood education policy (Solomon Islands Government, 1999). I asked Sally what she thought about the two-hour teaching duration.

Sally: We [kindergarten teachers] have been advised of the current approved duration of teaching hours and the number of children that can attend a single class. The government has approved two options, a two-hour teaching period and a four-hour programme. However, teachers have opted for two hours of teaching and coordinators have endorsed the selected option. One reason for choosing two hours is that kindergarten education is new and we are trying to establish ourselves. So, at the moment we favour two hours of kindergarten teaching each day. But teachers are expected to spend at least another extra two hours preparing their programme, resources and activities for the next day, after children have gone home before they finish for the day. All in all, four hours are allocated for children and kindergarten teachers in a week, but the community must also decide on what's best for their community kindergarten. We have compromised with them at times, because the centres in this region are yet to be properly equipped with relevant materials and tools (Interview: 14-04-99).

Existing kindergartens were officially operating for only two hours for four days a week, beginning at eight o'clock and finishing at ten. Reasons given for this arrangement varied from kindergarten to kindergarten, from island to island and from province to province. The Government distributed two
possible timetables, one displaying two hours and the other four hours
duration. On the advice of coordinators, practitioners in the different provinces
were using the two-hour option. Kelly explained what she thought about the
allocated two hours of teaching.

Kelly: We are also opting for two hours because some teachers are still
less confident in their own skills to operate on a full timetable or to
manage longer hours of teaching. But teachers are still advised and
expected to remain for another two hours after school to plan and
prepare programmes for the next day. The community people own the
kindergarten centres, and they are responsible for paying teachers' salaries or wages. As a result, the people help decide on how many
days a week their kindergarten should open for children to attend
(Interview: 06-04-99).

Sally, the lead teacher in Kindergarten B, explained their kindergarten
community’s choice.

Sally: In our kindergarten timetable operates for four days a week for
two hours, beginning on Tuesday. Children usually begin arriving long
before eight o’clock. During the break, children are encouraged to be
together and have their snacks. Parents help prepare fresh local fruit for
children and other local food. The snack time is often followed by story
telling and singing time (Interview: 14-04-99).

Individual early childhood teachers raised certain fundamental issues that
were also important in relation to their work as kindergarten teachers,
particularly in relation to the teacher-child ratio. The huge number of children
that teachers had to deal with at their centres was a concern for teachers and
coordinators. Molly explained their kindergarten roll.

Molly: There are thirty-nine children in our kindergarten. When you
think seriously about that number, we are talking about thirty-nine
parents with totally different backgrounds. Even with this small
number compared with the class roll of other kindergartens, it can be
hard to manage the children in the best possible way sometimes. That is
why I think it is very important that the ratio between child to teacher is
realistic and manageable in all the kindergartens in Solomon Islands. In
our country, even though we are short of qualified early childhood
teachers, I think a good arrangement should be fifteen children to a
teacher. A big class roll will definitely have a big influence on
disciplinary issues (Interview: 07-04-99).
9.1.3 Play as a Learning Tool for Young Children

In the kindergarten centres where the participant observation took place, I noted that play of any kind, while educationally valuable, could be made more so by some degree of adult involvement, which may involve participation and initiation. In this regard, participation involved playing either with or alongside the children, while initiation means developing an existing play situation or devising a fresh one (Curtis, 1994), identifying problems or weaknesses, and advising about possible ways of finding solutions. This concept is demonstrated in this scene, at Kindergarten B.

I walked over to the sandpit. Initially I decided to focus my attention on a child playing alone, pouring sand into a container. One of the teachers moved in nearby and provided some more empty containers of different sizes, providing an opportunity to talk about size and the concept of ‘half-full’ with the child. Another child on the other side of the sand hole was pretending to make cakes from moist sand. The other teacher was helping her to develop the idea of making different types of ‘cakes.’ A mother was using this opportunity
to help the child to acquire counting skills by seeing and counting how many
cakes of different kinds had been made.

**Teacher 1:** Do you want some more tins? [Addressing child 1]

**Child 1:** Yea.

**Teacher 1:** Let’s fill some more tins with sand.

**Researcher:** The child and teacher individually filled their tin
containers.

**Teacher 1:** [To child] May I see how much sand you have put in your
bin?

**Child 1:** Here [lifting the container towards the teacher].

**Teacher 1:** The tin isn’t full, it’s ‘half full.’

**Child 1:** Yea, [there is] not much sand in it.

**Researcher:** I walked over to another child [being helped by the second
teacher] on the other side of the sandpit. I asked her, “what are you
making?”

**Child 2:** I’m making ‘cakes.’

**Teacher 2:** How many types of cakes have you made?

**Child 2:** [pauses].

**Teacher 2:** Can you count them for me?

**Child 2:** One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, night, ten, eleven,

**Child 2:** Fifteen cakes [Giggling].

**Teacher 2:** How do the cakes look like?

**Child 2:** Some cakes are small, one big cake, some are long, some are
round. [4.5 year old girls]

At the start of the early childhood education project, both administrators
and teachers encountered difficulty in their attempt to educate and convince
some parents about play being a medium of learning for young children. They
saw play as a time-wasting medium and not a way for children to learn.
Families accept their young children play, but few of them really think that it is
their child’s way of learning.
Lilly and Molly, two of the three early childhood teachers in Kindergarten A, approached me one day to say that they would like to talk about the idea of play.

**Researcher:** What do you say to parents who ask you to explain why teachers encourage children's play at kindergarten?

**Lilly:** Mothers are helpful and supportive of what we ask them to do. We welcome them into our centre, so that they can understand what we are trying to do to help their children learn and for them to see what we are using to teach children, especially play. This is important because some mothers think free play is a waste of their children’s time. They think play is no good and they complain that they don’t want their child to just play. They want their child to learn to read and write. The community people too, think they are wasting their money where it seems, children are just playing. Then one day we decided to hold a meeting for the community people and we explain what we are doing and what children are learning in kindergarten and the idea behind early childhood education. From then onwards, the parents and the community people have been supportive and understanding about the idea of children learning through play (Interview: 07-04-99).

**Molly:** When parents ask me about play, I tell them that play is very important for kindergarten children. Through play, children are able to learn different skills, for example, language development, where children learn how to communicate and interact with other children
and adults. Children are also developing social and socialisation skills through play. The teacher is there to help and facilitate children’s play. Play is crucial for young children, as they enjoy it and it helps shape their attitude. Play contributes positively to their whole learning and helps children to reach their potential in all areas of learning. That is it benefits the whole child in many ways (Interview: 07-04-99).

The importance of play for young children was readily recognised by kindergarten teachers and personnel. It has been recognised that for young children, play is a tool for learning. According to Moyles (1994), educators who “acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction and intervention in children’s play ensure progression, differentiation and relevance in the curriculum” (p.6). The sense of children actively seeking to construct their own view of the world and the contribution of quality interactions with others, both adults and children has been widely accepted as a suitable approach to the early childhood curriculum. At Kindergarten B, the two centre teachers shared their views on the idea of play. I asked them what they thought children learn through play.

**Sally:** Children can learn a lot of issues through play when we [teachers] interact with them during their activities and through the various resources children are encouraged to use to learn new skills. Water play provides children with many types of skills; therefore, it is important for teachers to keep meeting children’s various learning needs and development. Talking to children about the uses of water, for example. Water is useful to people; we can drink it, use it to shower, it makes us clean. If our environment is not clean, children are likely to fall sick in the long run. If people do not use water to clean themselves, they will get ill because water is life (Interview: 14-04-99).

**Amy:** Play for children means receiving different useful skills. It means that while children are playing, they are learning many skills such as discovering, observing, touching and feeling things, and in order for children to learn these concepts, play, as a learning tool must be encouraged at kindergarten. Children using play, as learning tool does not mean that children must go around destroying things; kicking blocks, for example, is not the way. But rather children must handle them or play with them according to their way of thinking. For example, thinking about how to build the blocks, whether they [children] pack them up or put them as villages, beaches or roads. That is the kind of play that is meaningful to the child. If you interact or ask a child a question, she or he will tell you what exactly he or she is doing with the blocks. Whereas for us adults we might not see immediately what they are doing or may think the child is not learning anything. It is important for parents to understand that their child is not wasting time when she or he is moving around and handling different materials or resources. The play that children at kindergarten are involved with is
a [kind] of play that develops the basic skills in children that will help them in their formal education (Interview: 15-04-99).

Sally and Amy continued:

**Sally:** Play is the life-blood of young children and that is how they learn life skills and about people around them. Through play children learn to be creative, to think, to compromise, and to socialise. All these skills, they learn through play, especially in the area of early childhood education. Play is highly valued in Solomon Islands context, but some parents still cannot see how it can be used as a tool for children’s learning in a classroom environment. Teachers and coordinators have a duty to educate parents about play in the kindergarten setting. Traditionally, our children have always been encouraged to socialise through free play (Interview: 14-04-99).

**Amy:** In early childhood education, children use play to learn something new. In the past, teachers did not think of play as being an important tool for children’s learning. Through play, children find answers and questions on so many issues that they are faced with every day. When children play with objects, they are dealing with real things, holding, feeling, tasting and are using their five senses to explore and learn from their environment. At kindergarten too children use play to reach their learning goals, set for them by their teachers (Interview: 15-04-99).

In Kindergarten A, one of the teachers was working with four children who were using some coloured seeds to produce interesting patterns.

**Teacher 2:** Who, [Name of Child 1], that’s a beautiful pattern. Well done, good work.

**Teacher 2:** What is it?

**Child 1:** It’s a ...um...a house. [Turning her head to think].

**Teacher 2:** What sort of house, is it?

**Child 1:** It’s my grandma’s house.

**Teacher 2:** Alright. I’m sure she’d love to hear about it. Would you tell her about it later?

**Child 1:** Yea

**Teacher 2:** Oh, here’s another beautiful one. Whose pattern is it?

**Child 2:** Mine. It’s a tree.

**Teacher 2:** Think about what other patterns you can make using seeds.

**Child 3:** Yea.

**Teacher 2:** [Name of child 3], what are you making?

**Child 3:** A bird trying to catch a small fish.
Teacher 2: That's a good idea, well done. What about you [Name of child 4]?  
Child 4: I'm making a mat.  
Teacher 2: What sort of mat?  
Child 4: A sleeping mat.  

In another part of the classroom, the other centre teacher was working with several children. They created a cave by placing some small grass mats onto an already-made frame of cardboard pieces. When it was completed, children began crawling in and out of it, taking turns while others watched and waited. Children enjoyed the activity and had a lot of fun.

9.1.4 Encouraging Creativity and Advance Learning skills in Children

Kindergarten educators acknowledged that effective early childhood programmes provided learning opportunities for children to explore a range of creative experiences. As part of teachers' desire to encourage children to think for themselves and be creative, activities for children were planned with elements of challenge and critical thinking embedded in the programmes.

Strengthening the cultural identity through singing and making music, and using locally made instruments. Photograph by Joanna Daiwo (1999)
In addition to trying to encourage children’s creativity, imagination and curiosity, kindergarten educators also tried to cater for children’s social, emotional and moral skills and attitudes. For example, they organised play experiences as ways for children to explore, experiment and to express their creativity. They organised activities around familiar themes, situations and objects that children could recognise instantly, in the areas of dance, music, art, drama and culture through self-expression and awareness, and imaginative play.

It was another working day at Kindergarten B. The teachers were busy helping children and everybody was busy. I spoke with the teachers after the children had left the centre and asked them to share with me how they had gone about planning challenging programmes.

Lilly: Here at our kindergarten, I have seen young children building something different and being creative in dramatic play with the guidance of teachers. We try to plan and organise learning experiences for children by being role models for the activities we have organised for them. We would talk about situations which could lead to creativity, answer children’s questions and interests openly, and listen to their ideas and suggestions, as a way of encouraging their creativity (Interview: 08-04-99).

Molly: As early childhood teachers, we must continue to include areas such as art, dance, drama, music and cultural expression into all aspects of children’s learning experiences. This is important, so we must allow children time, provide resources and facilitate children’s interaction with the learning environment to develop their creative and imaginative ideas (Interview: 08-04-99).

Cultural differences in doing things also encouraged creativity in kindergarten children. This concept was integrated in the teachers’ training package. The use of the English language was also encouraged in the daily activities. Teachers prepared poems in English and then translated them into the local language. Thus, children were exposed to both their Mother Tongue and a second foreign language. Stories written in the English language are translated into the local vernacular language, as well as new tales being written and read in the local language. In addition, children and teachers sang songs in English, Pidgin and in the local vernacular. The children’s singing was beautiful and flowed with lovely melody and harmony.

Good examples of traditional and cultural ways of doing and looking at things, for example, included children being used to seeing open fires around them. Families have traditional open ovens because they have to cook food for
the family and their children. The village children have been brought up with fires around them all their lives. As part of their play equipment, young male children learn how to make bows and arrows and how to use them properly. In Western culture, you may be reprimanded for letting children do dangerous things of that nature. But in Solomon Islands, these items are play equipment for the children and they add to children's creative endeavours. The other area where children's creativity is encouraged is in the art of learning how to paddle a canoe from as early as age four. Children learning important cultural skills, knowledge and attitudes are encouraged to showcase their cultural and traditional creativity and imagination.

In one corner of the classroom, one of the teachers was reading a story about a hen and her lost chicks to a group of children who were listening and watching the pictures quietly. The story was written in the local vernacular language. In addition to reading, the teacher was also asking questions as she read different sections of the story. The story was illustrated with attractive and appropriate pictures and labelled in the children's local language.

Teacher: Would you like to hear a story?
Children: Yes. [In chorus]
Teacher: All right, but I need you to stop talking too, so that you can hear me.
Child 1: What is the story about?
Teacher: It's about a mother hen and her lost chicks [holding up the first page of the book for the children to see]. [The teacher began reading]. On an island far away, there was once lived a mother hen and her six little chicks. One day...... [After the teacher finished reading the story, and another child had asked her a question, she asked the children some questions on the story].
Child 2: Is the island in [Name of the province]?
Teacher: That's a good question, [Name of child]. Would anyone like to answer her question first? [One child raised his hand, to signal his interest in answering the question].
Teacher: Yes, [Name of child 3].
Child 3: No, not really, because in the story it says, far, far way.
Teacher: Good work, [Name of child]. Your answer confirms what the story says, about the island. [The teacher then asked the children some questions] How many chicks did mother hen have?
Child 4: Six baby chicks.
Teacher: Good work, [Name of child]. Why do you think mother hen was sad?
Child 5: She was sad because she lost one of her chicks.
Teacher: That’s right. What happened in the end, did she find the one chick she lost?
Children: Yes. [In chorus] (4 to 5 year old children)

In another part of the classroom, two girls were playing mothers and making two separate stone ovens, using pebbles, seeds, bowls and sticks. These girls were imitating their mothers and/or older sisters cooking food for the family in traditional stone oven. They were emulating their home environment and working together as a team, sharing and interacting with each other. At the same time, a four-year old boy was beating a small bamboo drum making a clear, loud and beautiful sound, obviously enjoying himself. I went over to the two girls first, asked them what they were doing and recorded our interactions.

Child 1: I am preparing to bake some potatoes for my family tonight. (4.5-year-old girl)
Child 2: I am going to bake some yam and fish, later. But first, I have to go out and collect some firewood. (5-year-old girl)
Child 1: I think I have enough wood, you can have some if you want to.
Child 2: Thank you very much, I think I would because I am running a little late.

I took some photographs of the two girls and walked over to the boy beating the bamboo drum. I took a couple of photographs of him while he continued beating the drum. When he stopped playing I asked him, “Who taught you how to play music on the bamboo drum?

Child: My grandfather mostly, but sometimes my father and older brother were able to work with me as well.
Researcher: You are very impressive, and I think you are very good.
Child: Thank you. (Smiling) I enjoy playing it here at kindergarten. (4-year-old boy)
In Kindergarten B, six girls were playing family in the home corner. One girl had taken the role of a leader and had decided whom they should have in the family. Other girls offered their views as well. Later, one of the teachers joined them and asked the girls what they were doing. Each of the girls told the teacher the different roles they were assuming.

**Child 1:** We need one baby, one sister, big sister, and a mother. Oh, we need a boy to be a dad.

**Child 2:** I'll be the baby.

**Child 3:** I'll be the sister.

**Child 4:** I'll be the dad.

**Child 5:** I'll be the big sister.

**Child 6:** I'll be a granddaughter.

**Child 1:** I'll be the mother.

**Teacher 2:** Oh my, everyone is busy.

**Child 2:** I'm the baby.

**Child 3:** I'm the baby's sister.

**Child 4:** I'm the dad.

**Child 5:** I'm the big sister.

**Child 6:** I'm the granddaughter.

**Child 1:** I'm the mother ...and this is my granddaughter. [Touching the shoulder of child 6].

**Teacher 2:** So, if she's your granddaughter, you must be the grandmother.

**Child 1:** Oh no, I'm the mother.

**Teacher 2:** Well, did you say she's your granddaughter?

**Child 1:** Yea, but I'm the mother. [Teacher 2 and researcher looked at each other and smiled]. (4 to 5 year old girls)

In Kindergarten B, four children were working at the sandpit. One of them was pouring water over a container of fine sand. The other children picked up small portions of the sand, pressed them together and put them aside. Teacher One walked over and asked the group what they were doing.

**Child 1:** We are making meatballs. I like eating meatballs. My mother likes cooking meatballs. Would you like one?

**Teacher 1:** Yes, please.
Child 1: Here, this is yours [handing over to teacher 1, a ball of sand].
Teacher 1: Thank you. That’s very kind.
Child 2: I like eating meat, other types of meat too.
Teacher 1: What other types of meat do you like?
Child 2: Meat from pork.
Child 3: I like eating fish a lot. I think fish is good for me.
Teacher 1: That’s right. Fish is good for us. What about you [Name of child 4]?
Child 4: I like fish too. My family loves eating fish. (5 year old children)

In the jigsaw corner of Kindergarten A, two girls were working on two different puzzles. As of the teachers approached them, they looked up at her and smiled. The teacher kneeled down and began asking them questions on the different shapes of the puzzle pieces.

Child 1: This is round like a ball [holding up a piece to teacher 2].
Teacher 2: That’s right. It is round. What else does it remind you of?
Child 2: A round stone.
Teacher 2: Well done. That’s right. We have a lot of small round stones outside our kindy [kindergarten].
Child 1: I have many round stones outside my house.
Child 2: I have many round stones outside my house too.
Teacher 2: What about this piece [holding up an oval one]?
Child 2: It’s like a pigeon egg.
Child 1: Yea, or a hen egg. (4 year old girls)

In the sandpit of Kindergarten A, three boys were working by themselves. One of the boys yelled out to one of the teachers, telling her they were making ring buns. Teacher 1 walked over and sat down.

Teacher 1: What are you going to do with your ring buns? Eating them?
Child 1: No.
Child 2: Yea.
Teacher 1: What kinds of food do you like eating?
Child 1: Panna and yam.
Child 3: Potato, ‘space’ potato.
Teacher 1: What is ‘space’ potato? I don’t know that.
Child 3: It is “smashed” potato.
Teacher 1: Oh, mashed potato.
Child 3: Yea. (4 year old boys)

Children were exposed to different activities to express their creativity. The teachers’ teaching programmes provided children with opportunities to explore a range of learning experiences.

Appreciating culture: Making a traditional musical sound using a locally made instrument. Photograph by Joanna Daiwo (1999)

Teachers allowed children time, provided resources and facilitated children’s interaction with the environment in order to develop their creative expression. Teachers were also responsive to children’s ideas, assisted children to express their thoughts and ideas and supported the development of the skills required for creative learning.

Besides creating resources from materials collected locally, teachers used dead shells, leaves, sticks, timber pieces, wood, bamboo, flowers and lots more. In addition, elders in the communities with weaving and art skills were encouraged to participate in kindergarten activities in the hope that they would pass on to children their knowledge and skills. Parents were also encouraged to
donate their cultural skills towards making resources for kindergartens as well as actually going into the Kindergartens to offer their assistance. This teacher in Kindergarten B explained:

Amy: And we’ve had at times people who are not even parents sitting, weaving and teaching these wee kids to learn all those sort of things. That way we meet by encouraging those sort of cultural things, we meet in different cultural situations to meet different cultural and the geographic differences between places in the Solomon Islands (Interview: 15-04-99).

Children’s creativity, individual thinking processes, imagination and self-expression were fostered by interactions with expressive materials. At Kindergarten A, I observed and recorded this scene where two children were managing a market stall using real food crops and interacting with the teacher while emulating a real bargaining situation. Children were using small pebbles as cash and were buying food (real food types) from their market. While this process of transaction was going on, the children and teacher were talking, counting, pricing the goods and questioning.

Teacher: What are you doing with these small pebbles?
Child 1: We are using them as money to buy food from the market.
Child 2: We are buying egg plant, five-star fruit, cassava, nuts, yam, kumara, panna, and coconut.

Teacher: How much is this yam (picking up one)?
Child 2: That one is ten cents.
Child 1: This coconut is twenty cents.

Teacher: How much money have you got (name of child 1)?
Child 1: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, ...cents, eleven cents. (4 and 4.5-year-old girls)

Researcher: Why aren’t you using real money coins? (To teacher)
Teacher: In the village it’s hard to find enough coins or money generally for that matter.

Kindergarten teachers encouraged and enhanced children’s creative expressions by facilitating situations where children were exposed to advanced learning skills. These were demonstrated where children were creating activities influenced by their sociocultural environments, which involved careful mental planning and execution on their part.
Children exercising their intellectual, physical, social, creative, language and critical thinking abilities: Building a model of Noro, a fish cannery town in the vicinity. Photograph by Joanna Daiwo (1999)

This scene illustrated an example of an advance group activity in Kindergarten A. An interesting group activity was taking place in one part of this classroom. A group of children were busy building Noro town, (a township purposely built for the employees of an international fish cannery operating in this part of the Solomon Islands) using tin lids. As the activity progressed, more children joined in. Soon most of the children and two of the three teachers (Molly and Lilly) were busy putting lids in various parts of the model. An interesting shape took place and it expanded and used up most of the classroom floor. Children were obviously enjoying the activity and having fun. There was much talking, interacting, sharing, discussing and laughing going on all around. I asked a group of seven children working on a segment of the model of the town what they were doing.

Child 1: This is Noro, these are the houses (pointing to sprinkles of tin lids placed in a series of neat rows).
Researcher: Whose houses are they?
Child 2: The houses belong to the people who work at the [fish] cannery.
Child 3: My uncle and aunt work there.

Researcher: Is that right? Can you show me where their house is, in your diagram?

Child 3: This is where they live (leading me to another segment of the model and pointing to an area full of objects representing more residential houses). (4 to 5-year-old children)

I left this group and went over to another group of children, working with Molly, one of the two teachers working with the children.

Child 1: Teacher, we have no more lids.

Molly: Get some more from the shelf [Name of child].

Child 2: I have some here.

Molly: It’s alright [Name of child 2], we need some more in addition to those with you.

Researcher: The child sent to get more tin lids, returned with them.

Molly: What else can we do here to improve this part of the model?

Child 3: I know the people at Noro plant tapioca gardens beside their houses.

Molly: What an excellent idea [Name of child 3]. Let’s add some food gardens.

Researcher: All the children in the group bent down and began working with Molly.

Child 4: I am going to plant a coconut tree here (pointing to an area on the floor). (4 to 6-year-old children)

In the two centres visited other examples of advanced and creative activities showed children threading seeds, shells and small pieces of bamboo. Boys and girls playing fishermen and women were using sticks as rods and strings and fish created from the soft interior part of the sago palm branch. In Kindergarten B, a group of children were actively keeping busy in the sandpit that had been built indoors in this kindergarten. Children were building sand dunes using coconut shells in addition to sand, and were decorating the structures they had completed with flowers and leaves. I asked a four-year old boy what he was doing.

Child: This is my house right on the top of the hill (and pointing to another section of his creation, he said), this is where my mother and my father sleep at night. (4-year-old boy)
Several mothers in Kindergarten B, some with very young babies and toddlers, came in to offer their assistance. Thus on certain days there were babies, toddlers and older children attending kindergarten together. The kindergarten children were serious in their learning and teachers were facilitating activities for children and conversing with children in their own local vernacular language. Mothers would care for the younger children. Teachers, children and parents, particularly mothers, were actively helping and working side by side harmoniously. There was much interaction all around and children were enjoying their learning and the activities they were doing at the various learning areas.

A four-year old boy was pushing a canoe on the surface with three large seeds lined on top of the canoe. I asked him why he has put three seeds on top of his small canoe. He explained what was happening.

Child: These seeds on top of the canoe are three people, they are paddling to the next island to collect some food and firewood. (4-year-old boy)

At the blocks corner, two sisters were enjoying building different structures using various materials made locally such as pieces of bamboo, timber and wood. At the sand area, another group of children were busy at work, building houses and sand dunes. In one end of the pit, three children were creating an island. There was a lot of interaction going on. Such skills as working as a team, sharing, caring, respect, tolerance, turning turns, communication, cooperation and helping others were clearly being illustrated here. For example, a four-year old boy pointed to a tin on the shelf and asked another boy standing nearest to the shelf, to hand him the tin. He handed it over and he in turn said thank you. I asked the three boys what they were doing.

Child 1: We are building an island. These tins [pointing] are tanks for water. Child 2: We have to make sure we have enough water to drink and for washing our clothes here on the island.
Child 3: It can be hard sometimes, especially when it has not rained for a long time. (5 to 6-year-old boys)
9.1.5 Developing Peer Relationships and Friendships

Practitioners in Kindergartens A and B shared their perspectives on children developing peer friendships and relationships at kindergarten. They believed that children developed special relationships, including friendships when they got acquainted with other children. Some children were more popular than others and were sought out as playmates or friends more than others.

**Researcher:** How do you find children forming friendships at kindergarten?

**Sally:** Children who are not very shy tend to make friends easily and are quietly confident to get to know other children around them. These kinds of children are talkative and tend to be the leaders among their friends or peers. They are also very protective of their shy friends and always seem to have many friends (Interview: 14-04-99).

Kindergarten children’s friends were important to them and often sought out children from their village and/or island as friends. Girls from the same villages were often seen grouping together at kindergarten. They tended to form their own small group, although kindergarten educators were organising activities in such a way that should encourage girls to work with others, but it appeared not to always work. One of the centre teachers said that she had not
seen any boy from their villages joining the girls at any time they were at kindergarten. Generally, children were finding acceptable ways to join group friendships within the kindergarten setting.

**Researcher:** What do you think the children at your centre think of their friends?

**Kelly:** Children in our kindergarten think of their friends as very important. It's interesting that generally, children from the same village or island have no interest to befriend children from other islands. I guess that makes sense since these children grow up together. Children who are friends do have their own special language too. What I mean is that, sometimes they make up words whose meanings are known only by members of their friendship group. I have noticed some children who refuse to go home immediately after school because they still want to play with their friends. Children enjoy playing with friends more, as well as trying to find ways to comfort them when needed (Interview: 08-04-99).

**Molly:** Sometimes here in our centre, we [teachers] would step in to help children who are shy to make friends easily and finding it hard to join group plays or participation. For example, helping a child identify a particular role that might be accepted within the play for her or him. Once, the child is in, she or he becomes a new member of that friendship group (Interview: 08-04-99).
9.1.6 Dealing with Discipline Issues

Discipline is a sensitive term for kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands. However, culture and the Church have considerable influence on the values and practices about discipline in kindergarten setting. Teachers adopted and used concrete images, situations and real stories to illustrate the negative impact of misbehaviour on other children and the need to create and maintain peace and harmony among people.

The findings showed that kindergarten teachers had managed classrooms in ways that built children’s personal commitment to acceptable behaviour, and chose attempts that would balance the need for order with the need to maintain the child’s bonds to other children. Teachers talked and explained to children why a certain action was not appropriate in the classroom and would suggest positive ways to correct negative behaviours.

In contrast to how discipline is managed at the primary and secondary levels, the discipline approaches used by teachers at kindergarten do make a difference to restoring order within the kindergarten setting and among individuals and groups of children. However, teachers were cautious that their behaviour and attitudes were not contributing to and reinforcing children’s misbehaviour. They realised that dealing with discipline issues should also be carried out with compassion and care, so as to minimise the temptation to reprimand children in an authoritarian manner, which may cause further discontent and withdrawal in children.

Kindergarten teachers in the centres (Kindergarten A and B) where the participant observations were carried out spoke of how they perceived dealing with discipline issues. They pointed out that discipline was a delicate issue with teachers and parents of young children in the Solomon Islands kindergartens. This was because in some cases, parents had totally different views about discipline and how their children should be disciplined. This meant that how teachers handled the issue of discipline was essential for children’s understanding of its impact on them and other people.

**Researcher:** What do you think about disciplining young children such as kindergarten children?

**Amy:** Discipline at kindergarten level should be geared to fit children at this level. Teachers should discipline children in the way that fits young children. For example, whipping must not be an option and mustn’t be carried out with children. Talking and explaining to children are more
favoured ways of correcting unacceptable behaviour among young children. For example, if a child fights another child, the teacher must explain to the child who has started the fight, why fighting is not a good thing to do at kindergarten, because it will cause more problems, divisions and other conflicts with other children. It is important to encourage children to forgive each other and say sorry to one another if they need to (Interview: 15-04-99).

**Sally:** As early childhood teachers, we are against whipping of children. Instead, we must find positive ways to help children to change or correct their negative behaviour, with love and care. Sometimes, children's unacceptable behaviour comes about because they do not get what they are asking for from their parents, and other times it is because their parents do not spend enough time with them to do something together. When dealing with children, we try to speak kindly, but firmly to them and explain why for example, certain behaviours are not acceptable in kindergarten (Interview: 14-04-99).

Early childhood educators often used stories from the Bible as an analogy to illustrate to the children the negative impact of fighting one another and hurting others. Kelly, the lead teacher in Kindergarten A, explained how they tried to help their children to understand what might happen if people fight each other. She utilised the Bible story of the two brothers, Cain and Abel to illustrate her point.

**Kelly:** One way we try to teach and distract children from fighting each other is to tell relevant stories to them to illustrate why fighting another person is not right and can be hurtful. The popular story we often tell children is the Bible story about Cain and his brother Abel. The two brothers did not respect the other, they fought each other and one of them was killed. In this way, we are able to help children to think about the bad and hurtful things that can happen to people who fight each other. The story of Cain and Abel also teaches children that they should love their brothers, sisters and friends and care for each. Explaining to children that fighting is not a good thing is important; for the Church and culture talk against it for the sake of peace and harmony among people. Also at kindergarten we have guidelines with one of them saying, “we must not fight and hurt each other.” So our kindergarten teachers do discipline children when need to, but only through words (Interview: 07-04-99).

A comparison was made between the difference between discipline styles used in a kindergarten setting with those that are used at the primary or secondary levels. Molly emphasised this point and pointed out the importance of understanding discipline from the perspective of children.

**Molly:** How to deal with discipline at the kindergarten level is very different from how it is done at primary or secondary levels where teachers can carry out punishment. Sometimes it is those of us dealing
with children [teachers and parents] that may actually cause problems for children because we misunderstand them. In my view, no child is naughty, but children are just being normal and being kids. It is probably true to say that sometimes it is mothers and fathers who do not understand how to approach and talk to their children in an appropriate way. So, teachers and parents should work together and help one another in this important issue (Interview: 07-04-99).

Lilly thought it was essential for teachers to be patient with children, and should endeavour not to be affected easily by children's behaviour.

**Lilly:** We [early childhood teachers] should learn to be patient and learn to show more respect to children we teach. Children are clever; if the teacher is a little hard to understand, children will know and that may push them to be restless in class. Children can also show their frustration by not liking that particular teacher and any teacher who is rough with children will never be popular at kindergarten. All kindergarten teachers should have a soft heart for all children and understand children from their perspective (Interview: 07-04-99).

Molly and Kelly (Kindergarten A teachers) discussed in the subsequent excerpts why children should be made aware of the importance of being accountable and responsible for one's actions or behaviour, and of helping children to understand the value of forgiveness and respect among people.

**Molly:** Concerning disciplining children, what I do is that when for example, two children quarrelled with one another, I would call them into another room, sit them down and ask them questions about what has happened. Find out exactly what happened, by asking each child to tell his or her side of the story. When that's finished, I would encourage them to say sorry to each other. We would normally end by saying a prayer, followed by the two children shaking hands (Interview: 08-04-99).

**Kelly:** Disciplining children is good if there is a need to discipline a child. In disciplining children, adults are trying to teach children or help children to think about the differences between acceptable behaviour and negative behaviour, which can affect others. I think setting down rules for young children is good if these guidelines are there as some form of reminders, but they have to be realistic to suit kindergarten children. I think children learn good manners, respect, acceptable behaviour and attitudes from being corrected (Interview: 08-04-99).

Amy (Kindergarten B) on the other hand, explained why she believed disciplining young children is a two-way learning action.

**Amy:** Disciplining kindergarten children in the right way is important. I think disciplining children is a two-way thing. We must discipline children not in a negative way, but discipline them in a way that will teach children to understand what they have done is not an unacceptable action. At the same time, children should learn something
from what is happening so that they will hopefully not repeat it next time. Explaining and giving encouragement to children is important for them to learn why some thing or behaviour is not acceptable in the kindergarten environment. Parents and teachers should discipline children to help children develop their moral behaviour within their own families, village and the community (Interview: 15-04-99).

The findings suggest that Solomon Islands’ parents and teachers should share a responsibility to assist children to learn to be responsible as young children. One of the important discipline issues for Solomon Islands’ young children is their behaviour toward their peers. It is important that children are encouraged to learn how to build healthy relationships with others of their own age. However, if a toddler, for example, sometimes behaves aggressively toward other children, teachers should not overly concerned that he or she is a “bully”. Grabbing, pinching and similar behaviours are natural in young children (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Death, 1996). I believe that Solomon Islands’ educators can help children under their care to outgrow these behaviours by encouraging them to talk about their feelings and by explaining to children the effects of their actions on others. Kindergarten teachers should show children peaceful ways to express themselves, for example, by practising giving and taking toys gently and without grabbing. I believe young children should be taught to say, ‘May I have a banana or can I play with that?’ Essentially, teachers should model good behaviour. Children learn by imitating their parents, teachers and other adults. Educators need to ensure children they are working with see them acting peacefully with others, and explain to children the way they intend them to talk to others. The process should involve practitioners encouraging children to ask adults for help when it is needed, and ensuring children know they can approach the teacher for help. It may prevent children from behaving aggressively or being bullied. Being consistent is significant, as disciplining young children in my view is much more difficult if they receive mixed messages about behaviour. It is suggested that educators can assist children to develop an understanding of discipline issues by providing opportunities for peer interaction, and by encouraging children to discuss and negotiate issues of concern among themselves. Negotiation, in particular, encourages children to adopt the perspectives of others (Arthur, et al., 1996) and enhances children’s ability to solve problems through their consideration of these perspectives. Adults also need to be clear about the expectations they have of children, and of the models they provide.
Within the Solomon Islands’ communities, there is a high sense of discipline due to the obligation of behaving according to the expectations of the community and the need to conform to cultural norms and values. Inter-family support in times of difficulty is still strong, as there is consultation and advice given both within the family (nuclear and extended) and within the community. People within the community do take care of one another in different ways, enhancing relationships between families.

Summary

The observations and the teachers’ comments in this chapter show that the teacher’s training had made a difference to what was happening in kindergartens throughout the Solomon Islands. Educators believed that not only had their training provided them with new knowledge and skills, but it had also helped them to be analytic, sensitive and patient. Early childhood teachers in the centres (Kindergartens A and B) showed competence, dedication and commitment to their work. They carried out their work with caring and loving diligence and took their job seriously. They were confident and enjoyed working with children despite the challenges they encountered in their teaching. The teachers planned well and used children’s interests as a focus for planning their curriculum programmes. For example, they observed children and then created teaching/learning goals from their observation records.

As the relationship between teachers and children developed, there was mutual respect between children and their teachers. Families were encouraged by teachers to get involved in the kindergarten education of their children. Mothers, in particular, readily assisted and supported the teachers and also helped with centre tasks and activities.

Educators encouraged children’s creativity and curiosity, as well as trying to cater for their social, emotional and moral skills and attitudes. For example, play experiences were organised as ways for children to explore, experiment and to express their creativity. Children’s activities were organised around themes, areas, situations and/or objects which children were familiar with and could recognise straight away, in dance, music, art, drama and culture through self-expression and awareness, and imaginative play. The cultures of the kindergarten appeared to adopt values that originated from the culture of local
children, creating settings that were friendly, warm, pleasant and welcoming to stakeholders and visitors alike.

Children were developing strong friendships among themselves. The children's friendship groups were extended to the community where once kindergarten was over for the day, children would converge on a certain place in the village to play or sing together. Children's peer friendship groups were important to them, both in kindergarten and in the community.

Early childhood practitioners believed that the values and practices about discipline in the Solomon Islands kindergartens were suitable guidelines to utilise in helping children learn about the importance of respect, tolerance, forgiveness, good manners, appreciation, accountability, responsibility and moral behaviour and development. The discipline process was suggested as a two-way process, involving both children and the teacher. It was understood that parents and teachers must work together to assist children to learn to respect and appreciate behaviour within children’s families, village and the community. Children should be respected at all times and be included in any negotiation episodes that concern them. In this context, Solomon Islands’ families, teachers and members of the community have a fundamental role in promoting and enhancing children’s moral and social development and learning.

Although substantial examples of teachers’ interactions with children have been documented in this chapter, it is acknowledged that more examples of teachers’ interactions with children would have further reinforced the evidence base of the thesis. Thus, the evaluation might have further been strengthened by extension of the methods used.
CHAPTER TEN

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Chapter will interpret the research findings to bring out the significance of the data that have been presented, in terms of the research questions.

The chapter focuses on teachers’ perspectives in part one; administrators’ views in part two; members of the community’s viewpoints in part three; and kindergarten participant observation outcomes in part four. The discussions emerge from the findings presented in chapters six, seven, eight and nine. The conclusions, recommendations and the postscript are presented in part five.

Part One: Discussion of Findings on Teachers’ Perspectives of the Influence of the Field-based Training Programme

10.1 Teachers’ Perspectives

It is worth recalling that the number of early childhood centres in the Solomon Islands has increased significantly since the training project was initially established in 1996. Prior to their employment as kindergarten teachers, early childhood teachers were untrained, with minimal early childhood teaching experience.

In part one of this chapter, teachers’ experiences of their field-based training are discussed in respect of these themes: the advantages of training; transformations in education being brought by early childhood education; the value of a holistic early childhood education programme, and quality inclusive curriculum programmes; the value of being culturally sensitive; the value of gender-inclusiveness; and the benefits of strong family and community relationships.
10.1.1 The Advantages of Training

Training is necessary to enable an understanding of early childhood education, which should be shared with families, community people and other early childhood educators. The participating early childhood teachers provided their views on the impact of the field-based training programme, and on the training process; the programme’s influence on their teaching practice and professionalism; and the value of the training programme for kindergarten educators in Solomon Islands. The teachers raised factors highlighting the importance of teacher training for them. They recognised the special nature of the early childhood education field and acknowledged the significance of preparing and retaining high quality teachers. They believed in their professional roles and responsibilities, and the range of other roles teachers were expected to assume within the early childhood education setting. They emphasised that they had acquired staff development, education, professionalism, and gained appropriate knowledge from their field-based training to make their work with kindergarten children satisfying. The present study confirmed that teachers believed their training experiences signify the importance of their work with children and helped them learn appropriate teaching methods.

The teachers suggested that they now recognised the unique nature of early childhood education, and that by obtaining their early childhood education qualification, they were in a better position to help children under their care to learn. Teachers’ new knowledge meant a lot to them as they encountered difficulty in getting reference books in their job. The teachers acknowledged their understanding of the fact that teacher preparation and retention of quality teachers are essential to improving education at all levels, but particularly at the kindergarten level. This study supports Rhodes and Hennessy (2000), who emphasise that employing quality teachers contributes to improving education at the early childhood education level.

As teachers of young children, in addition to their other professional tasks, and despite trying circumstances, early childhood teachers were serious and critical about their responsibility of helping children to learn. They were keen to understand child development, learn subject content, and appropriate teaching strategies. These issues were important to them as early childhood educators
facing challenges affecting all teachers in the education system. The lack of supply of trained teachers is an ongoing area of concern in Solomon Islands. It has negative effects on the quality of schooling and on the expansion of school opportunities for children. It is both a cause and sign of the generally low level of educational attainment throughout the country. The national and provincial coordinators and other professionals recognised that early childhood teachers need to be trained for their teaching role to ensure that young children were provided with quality programmes. They believed that the training programme has the necessary attributes to accommodate the breadth of interests of young children in a diverse society like the Solomon Islands.

Teachers made positive comments about the training programme and shared their impression of its positive outcome. The practitioners’ training had influenced them in significant ways. It had helped educators to learn and gain the necessary knowledge to teach and interact successfully with children. It had also equipped kindergarten teachers with administrative and management skills to help them run their centres. Teachers took their roles and responsibilities seriously and with pride, knowing that they were making a difference in children’s learning and lives.

Early childhood educators are faced with many challenges in their work with children. For example, gaining access to relevant reference texts and books on child development theories is rare for teachers, and out of their personal, professional and financial reach. Hence, teachers’ field-based training is a reliable source of relevant material on child development and other appropriate early childhood education knowledge. Teachers do not enjoy substantial salaries and there are no adequate bookshops that could order books on early childhood education. The implication for teachers before their training was that they felt less confident in fully understanding how to go about dealing with children. Teachers viewed their training as successful as it had helped them to understand how to plan and implement meaningful curriculum programmes for children at kindergarten. Teachers had experienced positive change that had enhanced their good working relationships with children, coordinators, families and members of the community. The educators’ training had enabled them to initiate positive changes to their centres to improve children’s learning and to create a harmonious working environment. For example, teachers learned how to set up their kindergarten and learning areas, as expressed by teachers (on
Armed with their increased confidence, kindergarten teachers carried out critical self-analysis of their own previous teaching practices before they undertook field-based training.

The implication for potential training programme initiators, teacher trainers and early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands and other neighbouring countries of the Pacific is that it is important to take into account the people’s needs and the local context when planning and designing such programmes. It is not necessarily the case that other programmes will be as successful as this Solomon Islands’ field-based training programme. However, the principles underlying the development of the training programme have worked very well in the areas I studied and it is currently the only field-based training programme in Solomon Islands. Although we have many characteristics in common, we also have significant differences. Solomon Islands is an island nation with a diverse people from many subcultures and speaking many different languages. The field-based training programme was adapted to suit the local context and designed within an appropriate framework that considers children’s diverse contexts in view of their learning and development. The programme is an example of what Woodhead (1996) refers to in saying:

There is considerable scope for negotiation about what is contextually appropriate for young children. This applies as much to principles of child development and child care practice as to beliefs about children’s needs. While scientific research offers some universal principles that can inform developmentally appropriate practices, much that is taken to be ‘developmentally appropriate’ is based on the particular cultural niche in which dominant, expert early child development knowledge has been generated. An alternative framework emphasises that practice should be PACED, that is, that it should be appropriate to the context of early development. To put the point another way, the quality of young children’s care and education is not just a by-product of resource availability, but reflects the very widely differing social contexts into which early childhood programmes are embedded. Child rearing traditions, family networks, school systems and especially parental belief systems shape what is valuable for early childhood and how it can be achieved (Woodhead, 1996, pp. 91-92).

The study suggests that where feasible, educators in Solomon Islands should be encouraged to develop inter-centre networks and working relationships with teachers in a close vicinity. These professional networks are significant as they encourage relaxing and informal sharing, discussing and
questioning. The massive workload often experienced in centres can be alleviated by the sharing of roles and responsibilities by teachers.

The value attributed to the education, and training experiences of early childhood teachers in the Solomon Islands are consistent with what existing literature states about the importance of training for early childhood staff (e.g. Moss, 1998; Gould, 1998; Day, 1999; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). Rhodes and Hennessy (2000), for example, have suggested that employing trained early childhood education teachers in early childhood services for young children produces positive outcomes to all involved. Teacher preparation is an integral part of any meaningful early childhood education programme. Training and education have increasingly become major issues within the early childhood profession (Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Meade, et al., 1998; Moss, 1998; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000).

10.1.2 Transformations in Education being brought by Early Childhood Education

The changing social context for young children in the Solomon Islands, and the new views of early childhood education are having a major impact. A considerable proportion of the teacher participants in this study emphasised the importance of early childhood education for young children and why they perceived it to be an asset to Solomon Islands and its people. The idea was significantly acknowledged as the foundation for children’s education and for its crucial role in promoting children’s development.

The early childhood education training programme has resulted in the questioning of a widely held view that the contents and methods of learning and teaching used in primary schools are appropriate for children younger than school age. The people’s recognition of the benefits of quality early childhood education has inspired interest in educational, political, social, cultural and spiritual spheres throughout the country. Early childhood teachers, trainers, administrators, families and members of the community were satisfied with the early childhood education programme and raised a series of factors highlighting why they thought the programme was important for Solomon Islanders. For example, early childhood education is helping young children to learn and explore their social and physical environments. Teachers felt that
young children were learning through their early childhood experiences, and that it was important for children to attend kindergarten.

The field-based training programme can be viewed as a bridging programme for children's learning and educational experiences through their kindergarten teachers. It is a medium of building confidence, cooperation and friendship among children, despite their ethnic, physical and cultural differences. For example, the early childhood education programme has encouraged children with disabilities to attend the mainstream education system beginning at kindergarten. The data also showed that the programme had influenced teachers, families and the communities to find out more about how young children learn. The teachers and members of the community showed a growing understanding that quality early childhood education can make a difference, and that for children's learning to take place, a more informal play-based approach where educators and children can interact together spontaneously over meaningful activities is necessary.

The early childhood programme has important implications for Solomon Islands and its population. The programme has the potential to help produce long term dividends within the Solomon Islands education system and in other areas by alleviating illiteracy, for example (Clay, 1993; McNaughton, 1995; Roskos & Christie, 2000). The illiteracy issue is an area of concern for policy makers, professionals, teachers and parents in Solomon Islands. However, it has accentuated the urgency to address the crises affecting education, particularly early childhood and primary education. Since its introduction in Solomon Islands, the early childhood education programme has played its part in spreading early literacy for young children attending kindergarten education in its curriculum for children and through children's daily activities.

The significance of investing in early childhood education programmes, particularly in majority countries, has also been widely supported by research (Landers, 1991; Myers, 1992; Evans, 1994; Woodhead, 1996). The early years provide the basis for learning life skills and attitudes (Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). Early childhood and family education programmes planned for and implemented in most majority countries include activities and interventions that address the needs of young children and help strengthen the situations in which they are attached (Landers, 1991; Myers, 1992). The success of the field-
based training programme in the Solomon Islands reinforces the findings of this research.

**10.1.3 The Value of a Holistic Early Childhood Education Programme, and Quality-Inclusive Curriculum Programmes**

A holistic early childhood education programme, and quality-inclusive curriculum programmes should be valued. Many early childhood educators in this study had developed an understanding of the importance of providing children with holistic and quality learning experiences and programmes. Providing children with holistic experiences that allowed educators to be creative and imaginative in their curriculum approach was an important outcome of the training programme. Teacher participants discussed the need to develop the whole child and agreed that one feature that made the field-based training programme important and useful was that it looked at the child in all areas of development. The teachers’ insights appeared to suggest that they were able to engage in critical thinking to ascertain their teaching practices in support of the holistic idea and in how they could effectively apply it in their programmes.

In respect of quality, most teachers believed the training programme had also accentuated their determination to develop appropriate curriculum programmes and teaching resources and materials. A critical feature of the training programme was its emphasis on providing quality opportunities for children, teachers planning quality curriculum programmes, dealing appropriately with children, and ensuring that safe, clean, healthy and quality learning environments were organised.

In the context of Solomon Islands’ early childhood education, quality is perceived differently in different communities, and it covers a broad spectrum of teacher-initiated tasks. Teachers associated quality with encouraging peer stability and harmony, manageable teacher-child ratio, practising gender-inclusive programmes, including children with disabilities, and focusing on and enhancing children’s confidence and self-esteem (refer to page 117). Also, encouraging and fostering holistic child experiences in consideration of the five development areas, as well as cultural, creative, language and communication skills and how they managed their curriculum programmes.
In particular reference to kindergarten staff’s professional development and education, the teacher participants argued that quality was about training and maintaining qualified early childhood teachers and staff, fostering positive relationships and interactions among teachers, children, families, the kindergarten committee and the wider community. This suggested that there was mutual trust and respect among these stakeholders, as the community had readily cooperated with and had given their support to kindergarten teachers for the improvement of their kindergarten. The issue of meeting the training needs of untrained teachers was a concern for all involved in the kindergarten movement in Solomon Islands. It was believed that children’s learning could be maintained at quality level if teachers were trained and had gone through the necessary training processes, where they could readily receive maximum assistance and professional support.

The child-centred approach was acknowledged as an indicator of quality in teaching young children at kindergarten level. The findings of this study showed that the Solomon Islands educators’ emphasis was on children’s learning and reminded themselves to be critical in planning children’s activities. Thus it can be argued that kindergarten teachers have taken these experiences as part of their initiative to build, maintain and reinforce dynamic and interconnected social and professional processes (Woodhead, 1996), which generally contribute to quality working relationships among the kindergarten community.

How do Solomon Islands teachers’ perspectives of quality compare with what the literature says? The present study supports and builds on research that has found positive effects of training on early childhood teachers. According to Woodhead (1996), “quality in early childhood programmes highlights perspectives on what constitutes good quality in early childhood education and any early childhood programme is a complicated human system that involves individuals and interest groups” (p. 37). Staff training and supervision are important components of quality and are essential to improving quality in early childhood education and care services and programmes (Moss, 1998; Woodhead, 1999; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000).
10.1.4 The Value of being Culturally Sensitive

Children are born into some version of culture and its activities. In many domains children develop culturally specific ways of acting that they do not explicitly set out to learn and that no one explicitly sets out to teach them; they simply participate in forms of activity structured by the culture and learn some ways of behaving and thinking as a result (Kruger & Tomasello, 1998, p. 370).

Respect for and adherence to local cultural beliefs and practices in the implementation of the new field-based training programme was an important aspect of its success. Most of the early childhood teachers who participated in this study talked about the value of retaining cultural beliefs and practices in the field-based training programme. Kindergarten educators gave their opinions on what they thought of the idea of including culture in the training programme and the role teachers played in enhancing children’s local culture. They acknowledged that including the concept of culture and language in the field-based training modules was significant and beneficial for all citizens of the Solomon Islands. The teachers’ perceptions highlight the urgency that the people have for the survival of the culture and its ongoing existence. This is crucial because Solomon Islands, as a growing majority nation, is at the stage where the endurance and concentrated form of its culture is constantly being tested by the influence of and to some extent by the competition from foreign cultural beliefs and practices. As a result, our culture is vulnerable and is in danger of being diluted by aspects of other cultures.

Kindergarten educators invited village elders, both women and men, to the centre to tell traditional stories to children as well as teaching other aspects of culture. The Solomon Islands early childhood teachers showed cultural sensitivity and appreciation in their teaching practice. Practitioners organised cultural sessions where children were encouraged to share their own subculture and learn other children’s subcultures. The interactions between teachers and children showed teachers’ cultural sensitivity and respect for children’s cultural differences. The involvement of village chiefs and elders was important as it enhanced the understanding, trust and relationships that teachers strove to create with the communities. Solomon Islanders regard their culture to be an essential element of their societal existence and development. In the kindergarten setting, cultural differences showed up in how teachers interacted...
with and related to children, which acknowledged the importance of being culturally sensitive in the presence of young children.

Solomon Islanders are diverse at the deeper levels of culture, in their values and activities. People, for example, hold different child rearing philosophies, cultural values, religious beliefs, symbols and signs, even though they may appear to be similar to non-Solomon Islanders at the outset. One way that the values of the Solomon Islands’ culture are reflected is through child rearing practices. My perspective on the cultural values for early childhood associated with the field-based training programme is that cultural aspects being included in kindergarten programmes should not only be defined by language practices and cultural materials.

One way this could be achieved is to set up and use a cultural work force in collaboration with people of the community and create an ongoing dialogue between it and educators, parents and members of the community to ensure the cultural value and content of kindergarten programmes are enhanced. Members of the cultural work force should include families, teachers, village and church elders, and other professionals. It is important that children’s prior exposure to their cultural values is further enhanced at kindergarten before they progress through the school system. Working with teachers will also benefit Solomon Islands’ parents in reminding them of the difference in children’s development over time. This should help families to identify learning situations at home through daily activities; recognise the human and material resources in the home environment; and help stimulate children while attending to daily work. Kindergarten settings should aim to maintain and strengthen the skills and experiences that children bring from home. The key also is to ensure that the cultural focuses are developed with the local people whose practices and beliefs are being studied, ensuring that the content is truly grounded in local practice, attitudes and beliefs. Parental participation is important, as they are the primary determinants of the environment within which their children are raised, particularly during children’s earliest years. It is important to note that although we all have a culture, we acquire our culture from our family as we are taught what is accepted and valued within our family, and then within the wider community. I believe the early education programme and families can work together to afford children every opportunity to learn and become effective, functioning members of society. It
will be best achieved when young children feel supported, nurtured, and connected not only to their home communities, but also to the teachers and the educational setting.

The early childhood education programme has been important for its critical role in reminding families and the community people of the need to appreciate the ongoing existence of culture and its values, beliefs, traditions, customs, norms and language in people's lives. These attributes are important in the life of Solomon Islanders, as culture has always been associated with one's tribal and societal inheritance. Practising cultural sensitivity in the kindergarten setting is in line with the perspective of the sociocultural model (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990; Rosenthal, 1999), which supports that children's learning and development is impacted by their social and cultural activities. Children's competence can be enhanced by such experiences. Overall, the Solomon Islands' early childhood field-based training programme was perceived to enhance cultural and spiritual development and moral values of children. Essentially, the programme had fulfilled the high expectations of the educational, political, church and village leaders, parents, communities and the wider society.

10.1.5 The Value of Gender Inclusiveness

Recognising the value of a more gender inclusive approach to education and learning was an important outcome of the field-based training programme. Gender is another powerful aspect of the Solomon Islands' culture. Teachers recognised gender as a major issue for them, and for its influence in the wider Solomon Islands' society. As a result, teachers had endeavoured to encourage and nurture gender-inclusive relationships among the kindergarten children under their care. As noted earlier, although there are similarities across the main culture, there are also cultural variations and differences in the expectations placed on the kind of activities, roles and responsibilities that girls and boys can mutually participate in, in mixed groups. In particular, roles that can be performed by girls vary from island to island also, as a result of the cultural differences and the potential for their different interpretations of cultural behaviour associated with both girls and boys. The significance of encouraging and supporting girls to explore new grounds and extend their cultural learning experiences was important. In the example of climbing,
encouraging girls, especially in regions where climbing for them is not frowned upon, is useful and sensitive to the individual and cultural identity of young children concerned.

Teachers were initiating gender-inclusive roles and activities, where girls and boys were encouraged and supported to work alongside each other while working on class activities. This provided children with an environment where they were able to work at the activities freely and without any boundaries set between them as girls and boys. However, it must be noted that despite teachers’ efforts in encouraging gender-inclusive experiences, the idea of encouraging boys and girls to participate in mixed groups in outside activities is still difficult and sensitive throughout Solomon Islands. In the rural regions where cultural practices and norms are still firmly entrenched and rigidly observed, mixed gender groups of girls and boys swimming together in the sea for example, is frowned upon, not encouraged and is not accepted. Despite cultural differences, this study found that early childhood teachers had continued to encourage equitable opportunities for all children in their kindergartens, regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability or belief. They planned and implemented activities that encouraged gender equity and inclusive education for all children under their care.

Although the teachers’ gender related activities for children might suggest tension between encouraging gender flexibility and respecting cultural traditions, there was consensus and support for teachers planning and encouraging gender experiences for children at kindergarten. Practitioners were pleased that they had learned valuable information on gender issues at their field-based training. Teachers supported the idea of girls being allowed to attempt roles traditionally restricted only to boys or vice versa. Culturally specified gender roles and requirements tend to be used by some areas with cultural differences within Solomon Islands to explain and reinforce the roles expected of each gender to perform.

The teachers’ reflections on gender suggest that their training had helped them to be imaginative and innovative to create situations for girls and boys to learn together at kindergarten. Data obtained in this study, for example, showed that teachers encouraged the use of playground space by boys and girls together, to help them understand and challenge gender-stereotyped behaviours. The fact that girls and boys could, and were, jointly playing in a
kindergarten setting was in itself an achievement and a huge leap forward in dealing with the whole issue of gender in Solomon Islands. The participating educators had worked hard in partnership with families and members of the community to develop and enhance gender harmony in the kindergarten setting to benefit both girls and boys.

The early childhood education programme can help reduce gender inequalities and inequities in Solomon Islands. There are marked differences in the participation of males and females within and among provinces and at all levels of education in Solomon Islands. Recent statistics on primary school access and completion rates, and literacy and education in Solomon Islands for example, reveal that more boys than girls enrol in primary education. The literacy rate for women is 20%, in contrast to 39% for men (Oxfam New Zealand Report, 2001). This imbalance, with few exceptions, grows at each level in the education system. As noted earlier, kindergarten teachers were encouraged to be gender inclusive in their curriculum activities for children. Ensuring females have access to early childhood education, for example, is a powerful means of facilitating social and economic development in the Solomon Islands context.

In general, women in Solomon Islands’ experience inequalities at every level and in every aspect of society, as hinted in chapter two. They are underrepresented in political life and their participation in education and other sectors of development is hindered by traditional cultural norms, including those concerning the division of labour between women and men. In the formal employment sector, women represent the suppressed portion of the workforce, being largely relegated to junior positions. These problems, in varying degrees, affect all Solomon Islands’ women. However, the Solomon Islands Government has made efforts, through legislation, to alleviate some of these problems, and women’s organisations have actively campaigned for female rights.

In my opinion, although the Solomon Islands’ women’s roles and status are now undertaking rapid change, there is still some reluctance among the women themselves to abandon tradition entirely. It is also apparent that education, employment and the availability of cash are among the principal factors generating change. Education and employment have not only taken women away from home, but they have also exposed them to the new values and ideas of contemporary society, in which women expect equality in all aspects of social life, from domestic to national.
The implication is that, with the increasing involvement of women in education and employment and increasing male acceptance of female participation in areas traditionally denied to them, the old division of labour based on gender will gradually be undermined. I believe the Solomon Islands society is in the process of adapting to a new system of economic relationships that are based on cash. Therefore, new social, political and cultural values are slowly being defined, to which these Solomon Islands women (and men) will have to adjust. In other words, change is inevitable, however much some women and men seek to cling to old ways and traditional ideas.

Research (e.g. Berk, 1994; Alloway, 1995) supports the important role of teachers in helping children to develop an awareness of their own gender, and in providing an environment where gender stereotypes are challenged. Providing access to a wide range of experiences is an important first step in this process. Equally important is the encouragement by teachers for children to participate in experiences that may challenge traditional gender boundaries. The findings of this study are consistent with such an emphasis.

10.1.6 The Benefits of Strong Family and Community Relationships

The benefits of developing and maintaining supportive relationships and positive linkages with parents and community people are immense. The field-based training programme has been a catalyst for forging cooperative linkages between teachers and children, families and members of the community. A substantial number of early childhood teachers who participated in the present study raised the importance and benefits of them developing relationships and support with parents and the community people in the best interests of the children. Teachers recognised the value of family and community participation in early childhood centre activities and linkages between the kindergarten and the community. The teachers’ recognition of every setting as a source of learning for young children, with the home acknowledged as a particularly powerful influence, highlights the importance of maintaining open communication and consultation among teachers and parents. Kindergarten educators’ response to families and children was exhibited through supportive home, school and community interactions and meetings. These were essential means to bridge the gap between families, members of the community and the kindergarten settings. Also, such interactions provided a context to discuss
families' expectations of their child's early education and for parents to gain an insight into what teachers were doing for children at kindergarten and their child's progress. Families increasingly participated and got involved in the activities contributing to children's learning and assisted with kindergarten activities such as making equipment, and providing resources. The idea of forming and maintaining linkages included the ease with which teachers discussed with families how they would provide support to the centre and/or the teacher in anticipation of contributing to their child's learning.

Families and members of the community had increasingly become supportive and cooperative, particularly in helping to build and maintain the kindergarten centres. Building positive relationships among the stakeholders of the Solomon Islands' early childhood education programme is important for the concept to spread to all areas of Solomon Islands. Thus, besides their other professional roles, teachers were also fostering ongoing and mutual relationships with parents and members of the community.

The kindergarten community established by educators with the help of children, parents and members of the community showed features of a family as ascertained by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of a microsystem. In this context, the microsystem involved a set of roles, activities and relationships between teachers and children, between teachers and parents and families, community and children. Bronfenbrenner, for example, argues that when childcare centres create and enhance the power of the family, the child will benefit from that relationship. The idea is supported by Vygotsky (1978), who argues that children are capable of a greater level of competence in a supportive context. Developing and maintaining relationships is fundamental to the human condition, as well as to the helping process. Daniel, Wassell & Gilligan (1999) state that knowledge about the nature of relationships is critical in two ways, in terms of the children, and in respect of the teachers' working relationships with children and their families.

Summary

The discussion was based on teachers' perspectives of the impact of the field-based training programme. It was suggested that the training programme was successful, as it had empowered kindergarten teachers and helped them to develop a new perspective on their work with children. Educators developed
an awareness of the lifelong importance of early childhood education which enhanced their professional status, their understanding of a socioculturally-based philosophy of early childhood education, and the quality of their work with children. The training programme also helped the teachers to work more closely with parents and the community and develop networks of support within local communities and with other teachers. This had value for the children because of closer connection between kindergarten and home, and for the kindergartens in increased support and practical assistance for the work of the teacher. Parents were also supportive because of their excitement about children’s learning and ability to build on this in home activities. Hence the training programme had an effect of increasing the richness of the roles, activities and relationships in the microsystem of kindergarten. It also strengthened the mesosystem between kindergarten and home, and enhanced warm, reciprocal relationships among teachers, parents and members of the community. Mesosystems of support between different kindergartens were also strengthened, which eased the pressure on teachers in their busy lives.

The incorporation of components that value local knowledge and cultural values within the field-based training programme was important in its success. The inclusion of the diverse cultural values and traditions from children’s family backgrounds, into the kindergarten programme not only made it relevant to the children, but it also encouraged sensitivity and appreciation of other cultural traditions within Solomon Islands. While the training programme was respectful and inclusive of tradition, it also challenged some practices, such as gender stereotyping, which are not particularly appropriate to the current changing context of Solomon Islands life. The effect of encouraging young Solomon Island boys and girls to develop their potential and competence in many areas regardless of gender, is likely to strengthen the capacity of the community to solve the social, economic and political problems currently faced by the people of Solomon Islands.

Although kindergarten work was adapted to local context and culture, it was not a straightforward operation as complexities existed between the goals of cultural sensitivity and goals of the child-centred curriculum. According to an administrator, for example, children from Solomon Islands were expected to think like Solomon Islanders, which was linked to a child-centred philosophy incorporating local materials, languages and customs. While this is an aspect of
culture, child-centred approaches challenge traditional practices where children are expected to remain silent in the presence of those of higher status. This might appear like a contradiction, but it is important to acknowledge that when children respectfully behave in such a manner, they are thinking like Solomon Islanders. In other words, expectations of children status and role are just as much part of culture as expectations about their vernacular language and traditional games.

Thus, the tensions between the culture of early education and traditional cultural practices recognise the competing visions of what it means to be a young child in Solomon Islands’ communities in all their diversity, regarding the past, present and the future. The kind of questions that should further be asked may include ‘where does the early childhood education philosophy fit?’ and ‘where does the philosophy not fit?’ Thus, the distinction between some cultural differences that called for being culturally sensitive and contextual and others that required ‘persuading and educating’ parents and community people towards a different understanding of the child needs to be further explored. It also applied to issues around play, gender and discipline, where cultural practices in the kindergarten conflicted with cultural practices in the community.
Part Two: Discussion of Findings on Administrators’ Views of the Impact of the Field-based Training Programme

10.2 Administrators’ Views

A key goal of this research study was to evaluate the influence of the field-based training programme, as explained in chapter five.

In this section, administrators’ views of teachers’ field-based training experiences are discussed under these themes: developing a sensitive philosophy; the Solomon Islands and New Zealand partnership; maintaining ownership of the field-based training programme; and constraints.

10.2.1 Developing a Sensitive Philosophy

Most of the early childhood administrators who participated in this study acknowledged the importance of working within a philosophical framework in the field of early childhood education. Administrators recognised that being guided by a working philosophy was critical for establishing and maintaining quality learning environments for young children. The study found that it also helped teachers to ensure that a safe and healthy environment and an inclusive education for kindergarten children were adhered to and respected. The philosophy has focused on the child, the child’s learning and development, attending to his or her whole potential. Placing a philosophy in existence was important as it played a crucial role in reminding teachers to work within the boundaries of the philosophy to achieve the goals of their centre. Thus, the inclusion of useful characteristics in the working philosophy was important for both the teachers and coordinators.

The early childhood education philosophy was seen as a way for early childhood teachers to obtain useful knowledge that they could use in their work with children. The administrators believed that developing a philosophy was important in encouraging educators to pursue creative and sensitive approaches to help them provide children with meaningful learning experiences. Thus, reinforcing that offering field-based training for kindergarten teachers was in the best interests of young children, their families and the people of the Solomon Islands as a whole. It appeared that the
philosophy had enabled kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands to work within their professional and personal boundaries and abilities.

Adopting a philosophy with attributes that appealed and was sensitive to the needs of Solomon Islanders was emphasised in the initial discussions and in the designing of the field-based training programme. Thus, adopting a philosophy with the ability to define quality programmes for children became one of the primary goals of the training programme. For the national and provincial coordinators, adopting the philosophy was supportive of the underlying vision of helping children to think about their culture, be self-confident and respectful of others. The national coordinator with the help of the provincial coordinators had reminded kindergarten educators to continue striving to achieve the broad goals of the overall philosophy.

The early childhood education philosophy had helped teachers to facilitate learning experiences that encouraged children to talk, to question and discuss freely in front of adults. This is important for kindergarten children in Solomon Islands as young children, boys and girls are socialised to listen and/or say little in the presence of their elders, a social and cultural process that also applies to how children are expected to behave around people highly regarded by society. Teachers are among professional groups that are granted high status within the Solomon Islands society, regardless of what level they are at in the education system.

One of the advantages of the philosophy is that it encourages empathy and understanding among the kindergarten community. It has placed an emphasis on including children with disabilities at kindergarten. The philosophy has interpreted the beliefs and values that underpin the teachers’ practices and the expectations of the Solomon Islands’ people in relation to their children’s learning. The administrators believed that having a vision of the early childhood education field was aimed at developing a good starting point for teachers, trainers and indirectly for families and the wider community. Teachers appreciated the importance of having a working philosophy, and acknowledged that each setting was unique, and that there was no one philosophy suitable for every setting. For example, the vision of one group of stakeholders in a setting is not the same as any other. However, the process used to develop a philosophy may be similar in different settings. This is exemplified in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum Te Whariki (New
Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) that stipulates one can weave strands into many different patterns. The development of the philosophy suggests that Solomon Islands as a nation attempting to manage the new field of early childhood education favourably, has a picture of where it is heading, and thus that it is more likely it will get there.

The importance of creating a working philosophy as envisaged by the national coordinator and supported by the provincial coordinators in the Solomon Islands is supported by literature. Research has shown that developing a philosophy involves thinking about the programmes considered valuable, the staff development participation desired and the kind of family participation that will strengthen the programme (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Deach, 1996). However, it is important to provide a clear direction for all those working in, and associated with, the early childhood education programme. A philosophy is needed before taking any other steps within the strategic planning process, therefore ensuring an ideal to aim towards. In any process of programme design, decisions need to be made about the overall philosophy. It is critical to note that even though a philosophy may not be formalised and recorded, it still exists, and is reflected in the practices an individual implements. For example, teacher participants in this study occasionally organised recreational activities for children and their families through their own initiative. Discussing and writing a philosophy makes it explicit, and gives a framework for conscious decision making or how to behave and act (Arthur, et al., 1996). In relation to the learning needs and welfare of children, the overall philosophy of the international symposium for early childhood education and care for the 21st century (1999) maintains:

Every child should have the opportunity to grow up in a setting that values children, that provides conditions for a safe and secure environment, and that respects diversity. As children are both the present and the future of every nation, they have needs, rights, and intrinsic worth that must be recognised and supported. Children must receive appropriate nurture and education within and outside their families from birth onward if they are to develop optimally. Attention to health, nutrition, education, and psychosocial development of children during their early years are essential for the future wellbeing of nations and the global community (World Association for Early Childhood Education & Association for Childhood Education International, 1999, p. 3).
10.2.2 The Solomon Islands and New Zealand Partnership

Engaging in partnership contributed to the success of the field-based training programme. The Solomon Islands' administrators who participated in this study were pleased with the assistance and financial support of the New Zealand Government in the early childhood education project and discussed their views on favouring the partnership aspect of the project. Besides the administrators, the partnership formed between the Solomon Islands and the New Zealand Governments was also highly commended by teachers, parents and members of the community. The coordinators believed that the partnership approach was the suitable model in contrast to the counterpart example. They felt that in the partnership approach, people were encouraged to participate and had a 'say' in the whole process. The trainers acknowledged that the partnership between the Solomon Islands and New Zealand Governments' was different and that it was sensitive to the culture of the people of Solomon Islands.

The New Zealand Government's funding assistance to the Solomon Islands' Government was incorporated in the project as part of the partnership strategy between the two countries. The appointment of two New Zealand professionals as consultants for the early childhood education project was also seen as a sensible and positive move in the partnership arrangement. The New Zealand officers were sympathetic to our cultural differences and diversity and that pleased the Solomon Islands people. The consultants established a close and mutual working relationship with the trainers, education and government officials, teachers and community people they came into contact with in their line of work in Solomon Islands. The trainers acknowledged the expertise, professional input and support given to them by these two officers in planning and implementing the field-based training programme. The New Zealand consultants had worked encouragingly to help train a team of Solomon Islands advisors, a group of people who in turn became their advisors on issues on Solomon Islands.

The early childhood project has evolved to a stage where our people have demonstrated sufficient confidence to carry on the work began by the consultants. However, the people were aware that they had the challenging task of maintaining the solid foundation built by the New Zealand partners with input from the national and provincial coordinators. It appeared that the
coordinators’ professional association with the New Zealand consultants and their involvement with the project had boosted their confidence to a level where they were ready to carry on the early childhood education work as they had already shown through their ongoing work with early childhood teachers.

Partnership as a process for development has occurred at the local, national and international level, with the example of this partnership process that had been forged between the New Zealand and the Solomon Islands Governments. However, it is important that effective partnerships involve consultation, negotiation and collaboration between and among stakeholders (Rodd, 1994). The initial decision by the Solomon Islands and the New Zealand Governments to form a partnership was particularly commended by the people of Solomon Islands. Their acknowledgement affirms that this international partnership between the Solomon Islands and New Zealand Governments is an effective way of dealing with a cross-national project of this nature.

10.2.3 Maintaining Ownership of the Field-based Training Programme

Most of the administrators in this study talked about why they thought owning the early childhood education field-based training programme was important to the people and Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders’ needs and interests were considered as early as the planning stage of the early childhood education project. A process that contributed to the people’s enthusiasm and the willingness to participate in both the planning and implementation phases of the training project. As their perspectives were sought right from the start, Solomon Islanders assumed ownership of the programme from then on, and credited the field-based training programme for the loyalty, encouragement, enhancement, cooperation, partnership, sharing and the ability to genuinely listen to each other, among the people and the communities. As a Solomon Islander responsible for carrying out this evaluative research, my involvement has also been seen as a reinforcement of this ownership.

The Solomon Islands trainers travelled to New Zealand at the early stage of the project as part of this ownership. The trip helped the trainers to gain an insight into the early childhood education system in New Zealand and how it functions in the various settings. It also provided trainers with an opportunity to observe another early childhood education context, compare, and to be able to be selective in what they would adopt upon returning to Solomon Islands.
One of the advantages of the New Zealand trip was that the trainers went back to the Solomon Islands understanding what early childhood education was like elsewhere. The experience gave the trainers the knowledge and inspiration to press on with the task they had been assigned to do with the help of the New Zealand team. Although the designers of the early childhood project had the eventual task of writing the actual training package, they emphasised that the first group of trainers were also instrumental in the concept, practical and eventual development process of the field-based training programme.

The involvement of people of Solomon Islands in developing the field-based training programme was stipulated by the recommendations of the analysis report carried out by the New Zealand consultants. After the report was mutually considered by the Solomon Islands and New Zealand Governments, the Solomon Islands’ Government endorsed it and declared its agreement and support for the proposed training programme to occur throughout Solomon Islands. The New Zealand Government, through its Official Development Assistance fund, agreed to finance the early childhood education project. As a result, the early childhood education project was written around the report, followed by the next stage which involved the designers of the programme returning to the Solomon Islands to commence working on the project in collaboration with the national and the first provincial coordinators who were all women.

The implication of this ownership for the country was that the early childhood education project presented the people of Solomon Islands with valuable opportunities to work with professionals of international reputation and standing, while they were also able to acquire worthwhile experiences in the process and from their collaboration. However, this process is not new; development initiatives and projects in Solomon Islands have often been influenced by international and regional organisations, which are important as funding agencies and implementers of development programmes, although the partnership style exhibited by the early childhood education project differed. A number of foreign governments have also influenced development projects through aid programmes and the policies associated with development. In comparison with the early childhood education project, for the majority of aid donors, the policies stipulating the implementation of their development aid projects often involve consultant-local counterpart partnership (Daiwo, 1999).
10.2.4 Constraints

A substantial proportion of administrators in this study identified similar challenges that they had encountered as they went about carrying out their coordinating and training roles and responsibilities. The main challenges highlighted by the coordinators included lack of funds, unsatisfactory travelling facilities, lack of co-workers, coping with long distance travelling and transportation problems.

The transportation issue was a common problem faced by the coordinators as they prepared to help the communities to understand the new idea of early childhood education. It had continued to be a problem for the trainers as they strove to maintain their links with the teachers they were responsible for training and the communities they aspired to assist. Lack of transportation and sufficient finance, and distance had often kept the trainers who were working in rural regions from carrying out their work effectively and from making easy contact with kindergarten teachers, families and the communities. Some trainers sought help from and negotiated with the provincial education officials for a possibility of sharing expenses on the use of their canoes and co-sharing the process of making future arrangements for the use of the provincial education division canoes to improve the money problem. Working within a limited budget was the most problematic of the challenges coordinators encountered in their coordinating roles. However, most of the time nothing could be done about these pressing problems, as attempting to secure funds for other related tasks, particularly on the remote islands, could be difficult.

The idea of employing and maintaining an adequate pool of human resources is another challenging element for those responsible for the administration of the early childhood education programme, as noted earlier. The majority of the provincial coordinators were responsible for covering large zones in their effort to implement the field-based training programme and to assist untrained kindergarten teachers. As a result, the coordinators had worked and continue to work under difficult and trying circumstances.

In some areas of Solomon Islands, distance has also been an ongoing challenge for children, teachers and parents. Children attending kindergarten, for example, have to travel by canoe, often travelling from the surrounding
islands to the one where the centre was built. In the Solomon Islands situation, this means that professionals working in the rural areas have to consider the distance, finance and transportation barriers as part of their daily travel to their job, as these three dimensions do influence one another if one is working on an island.

Early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands are working under trying circumstances. The study found that one of the challenges for the teachers in implementing their training outcomes was considering how best to plan and facilitate children’s learning activities as they were working with large groups, poor physical facilities and insufficient staff at their centres. Teachers had to cope with the influence of a large class roll on disciplinary issues, and were constantly dealing with a diverse group of children with different backgrounds. These issues were compounded by the lack of sufficient staff and inadequate physical facilities as previously noted.

Resources and teaching materials are fundamental issues for early childhood teachers in Solomon Islands. Teachers who participated in this study said that resources such as paper and pens were not easily obtained in their vicinity, and often they had to travel for hours to get to their training venues where they were likely to acquire such items.

Existing literature (e.g. Gallagher & Clifford, 2000) provides a summary of different types of barriers such as institutional, psychological, sociological, economic, political, and geographic that those responsible for implementing of new policies must overcome. In the case of programmes in early childhood education, there is a variety of potential challenges at work that teachers and administrators must attempt to overcome. As evident in the Solomon Islands situation, economic and geographical barriers do affect the ongoing progress of early childhood education and the field-based training programme. The limited financial resources at the national and provincial levels contribute to the economic problem. The geographical barrier has remained relatively constant over several decades in the Solomon Islands situation and will remain a persistent problem.

**Summary**

The study shows that administrators contributed to the success of the field-based training programme. The coordinators discussed important issues that
affected their coordinating and training roles and responsibilities, and kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands. They highlighted the need for kindergarten teachers to have a working philosophy to help them with their work with children. The coordinators believed that the partnership between New Zealand and Solomon Islands contributed to the success of the field-based training programme. They emphasised that the New Zealand Government’s funding support was appreciated by the people, and the consultants appointed to assist the Solomon Islanders were perceived as being graciously different from other foreign people who had entered the Solomon Islands to take up employment of any sort.

The early childhood education coordinators working in Solomon Islands kindergartens have continued to work under challenging circumstances. Having sufficient money is important to financing and maintaining the coordinators’ work and in ensuring the early childhood education programme continues to expand throughout the country. The current economic situation in the Solomon Islands is not encouraging with the economy deteriorating even more. In monetary terms, Solomon Islands is amongst the poorest of the majority nations of the world. Constraints such as geographic, economic, financial, transportation, distance, physical facilities and human resources have provided ongoing obstacles to early childhood education teachers and trainers in the early childhood education field in Solomon Islands.
Part Three: Discussion of Findings on Members of the Community’s Viewpoints of the Impact of the Field-based Training Programme

10.3 Members of the Community’s Viewpoints

As emphasised in chapters one and five, a key goal of the study was to assess the effect of the field-based training programme. In addition to interviewing the teachers and administrators, the thirty-five members of the community as noted in chapter five were informally interviewed for their opinions of the training programme.

In this section the community’s viewpoints are discussed under four headings: family and community participation, involvement and support; how children, families and community people have benefited; transition to school: children’s experiences; and the impact of the Church.

10.3.1 Family and Community Participation, Involvement and Support

Members of the community were involved in the kindergarten settings in several ways, which included helping with making teaching resources and materials, building new centres, and organising fund raising activities for the centre activities. Families and members of the community helped with routine tasks relating to the preparation of materials and equipment, hygiene and safety, and where necessary erecting new kindergarten centres. Mothers, in particular, participated constantly in and contributed to the activities of the kindergartens. They also continued to play major roles in certain aspects of the kindergarten operations, for example, making resources and materials for teachers and the centres. Fathers’ support and involvement was often geared to undertaking demanding physical tasks, such as planning and erecting the centre buildings. However, the task of building a new centre was often carried out under difficult financial situations.

The lack of enough money in and for kindergarten events and activities was a huge challenge for not only teachers, but also for trainers, families and members of the community. This created a climate of cooperation to find ways of minimising and/or solving the problem. Despite the people’s efforts, this
study found that the kindergarten community challenges were exacerbated in some areas because a single school committee catering for both the kindergarten and the primary sectors had to be appointed. This meant that any money that was acquired had to be stretched and distributed equally among the kindergarten and primary tasks and activities. The financial problems faced by the communities were prevalent and they represented a serious threat to the sustainability of early childhood education.

The involvement of fathers and/or men was valued in the early childhood education programme at the initial stage. Men contributed their ideas on how the programme should be planned and delivered within each community. Also, it was easier to involve mothers and/or women in the planning and the implementation of the programme as the first group of trainers or coordinators were predominantly women. The implication was that mothers were especially inspired by these female trainers and were helpful to kindergarten teachers and contributed to the ongoing process of changing conservative family attitudes towards children’s early childhood education. Mothers were instrumental in making parents aware of the importance of talking with children at an early age and of the impact of encouraging communication with children. However, generally there was a need to concentrate more on bringing fathers into early childhood education work, as fathers were not easy to engage, although they seemed to like participating, but were not always able to.

The benefits of close involvement and participation of parents could not be taken for granted. The participation of families and community people was acknowledged as having wide benefits for the families, for their children, for early childhood education programmes and the wider society. It meant that as children’s closest caregivers and members of their extended families, Solomon Islands’ parents were encouraged to take on an important role in supporting the early childhood education programme through the implementation stage; and through their partnership with early childhood teachers and trainers. This was encouraged by the fact that those who administered the early childhood programme, particularly coordinators, saw parents and community people as partners in their endeavour to make the programme a success. However, at this development stage of the early childhood education project, parents recognised that they lacked the specialised knowledge and expertise to directly support their children’s development, and that programmes such as the early childhood
education project could only be conceived, directed and operated by trained and experienced personnel. Hence, parents and community people were keen to be learners as well in their partnership with the coordinators of the early childhood education programme.

In Solomon Islands, one of the potential obstacles to fully acquiring effective family participation is the perception held by family members that teachers are experts. This perception implies that if the teachers are the experts, the parents are unaware of the learning of their children in the early childhood settings, and thus have little to offer to discussions of curriculum programmes. As a result, and if it is not handled sensitively, parents and teachers can have the possibility of missing out on a range of information that could be utilised within the kindergarten and home context. For example, parents and other family members can contribute significantly towards providing an insight into the teacher’s understanding of their children, and teachers may have a greater knowledge of pedagogical issues, which are of interest and value to parents. As research (e.g. Evans, 2000) suggests, when teachers viewed themselves, children, children’s family members, other educators and members of the community as partners, there is a positive effect on children’s learning and motivation.

Family and community participation in the field of early childhood education was acknowledged as one of the keys to having effective early childhood education programmes. For example, as noted in chapter five, parent and community people’s participation was noted as a component in the Solomon Islands-based early childhood education project proposal and was included as an element of the designed new early childhood initiative. Early childhood teachers had to encourage parents and community people to get involved in the early childhood development programme in any way they could. There are several implications for parent and community people’s participation and involvement in the early childhood education programme and support for teachers. First, children, families and members of the community have benefited and will continue to benefit from improved relationships since the inception of the early childhood education project. They will also benefit from developing and maintaining a more positive attitude by parents towards the notion of their child attending early childhood education, and from developing an informed understanding of the early education
process. Kindergarten teachers have further benefited from the establishment of a partnership with families focusing on the best interests of the children. In this context parents and community people have become valued partners. As children’s first teachers (e.g. Arthur, et al., 1996), parents determine the primary environment within which their children are raised during children’s earliest years. Thus, it was valued that, whatever the local conditions, challenges and circumstances, parental and community participation was an integral part of the early childhood education programme. As a result, children, families and teachers anticipated and recognised the benefit of forging and encouraging family participation in the early childhood education settings.

Research has shown that the value of family participation in early childhood education programmes has proved beneficial and has been widely acknowledged (Myers, 1992; Evans, 2000). For example, it has been recognised that good communication and supportive relations between staff and parents help to build mutual understanding, provide for greater consistency in children’s care and promote children’s general sense of identity, security and wellbeing (Arthur, et al., 1996). Also, educators working in the first years of school have identified parent participation as a critical aspect of effective schooling (Epstein, 1993; Epstein, Schweinhart & McAdoo, 1996). Parents and teachers have long been acknowledged as partners in children’s education, affirming that they have both rights and responsibilities (Arthur, et al., 1996; Evans, 2000). Parents are seen as great assets to programmes, and the more parents and community people participate in the early childhood education programme and its development, the more the programme is likely to be appropriate to its context, and therefore more effective in reaching its goals (Thomas, 2000).

10.3.2 How have Children, Families and Community People Benefited?

Most members of the community believed that the early childhood and training programmes had created positive changes in the attitudes of children and families, motivation for the people and had enabled teachers to learn appropriate skills to assist them in their professional and teaching roles and responsibilities. They emphasised the positive changes and differences they had seen in children’s behaviour and attitudes. The training programme has also encouraged partnership, cooperation, sharing, community spirit and oneness,
the value of listening and a point of reference for members of every village. For example, old people, young people, children, parents, chiefs, women, politicians, church workers, teachers and government workers felt they had something in common.

The immediate effects of the early childhood programme on children, families and members of the community had increasingly been recognised by people throughout the Solomon Islands. The benefits were viewed in different ways, and tended to appear in various ways. In relation to how children had benefited for example, children were reported as taking more active roles in their own learning both in kindergarten and in home settings. They had grown in confidence and were willing to create friendships and networks among kindergarten peers. Children continued to be actively involved and had increasingly been engaged in their own learning activities and village functions and events. Children were happier to be at kindergarten compared to their early experiences in the first week of their kindergarten education, when they had shown much reluctance to remain in the school setting, as evident in the findings. Parents had attributed this change in children to the effect of their own willingness to encourage their child to attend kindergarten. The change seen in children had also extended to their attitudes towards culture and how they had tried to put into practice the meaning of their cultural obligations at home. For example, children’s learning of culture had been enhanced significantly in the way they had shown their love and care for their elders, parents and families. It was emphasised that respecting elders of our families, tribes, village or community had always been part of our culture and subcultures. However, because of what children were learning at kindergarten in the area of culture and subcultures, children’s learning of the culture and their subcultures had been enhanced greatly, especially in relation to their elders and in terms of helping parents, especially mothers, with chores around the home. Children’s positive behaviour had been enhanced by the influence of the field-based training programme through the skills and competence of trained teachers.

The introduction of the early childhood education field-based training programme to some extent motivated members of the community to compare and engage in close scrutiny of our traditional and cultural strategies and processes that were utilised in educating young members of the community.
about traditional values, knowledge, skills and practices. Thus, children’s learning at kindergarten had been seen to complement and enhance their traditional and cultural learning. For example and as previously noted, since the programme was introduced, positive changes had occurred and continue to occur among kindergarten children, bonding them to a common level of striving to gain educational and academic achievement and to learn traditional and cultural values. Traditionally, since children are highly valued in society, they have a very special role to play in continuing the family, culture and in providing care for elders of the community. The concept of the extended family is still firmly practised and preserved by most people. In my cultural lineage for example, all children belong to the tribe. The concept of an illegitimate child rarely exists.

Early childhood teachers should be mindful of, encourage and enhance kindergarten children’s social development in support of children’s prior experiences. Teachers need to provide children with experiences to develop further their personal and interpersonal skills to enable them to participate at different levels as a member of a group. For kindergarten teachers, this process should include fostering the development of play skills, sensitivity and positive peer interactions to enhance children’s cooperative play. This is important as when children started kindergarten for the first time, they would have entered the setting with a range of social skills and competencies gained mostly in the home environment (Duffy, 1998). Some Solomon Islands’ children demonstrated strong individualistic attitudes at the start of their kindergarten education and their socialisation and interaction skills had expanded to a degree that they had established communicative relationships with their peers and the adults they come into contact with in the process of their schooling. Children were encouraged to learn to communicate their experiences in several ways, both verbally and non-verbally. Children were provided with the opportunity to develop further competence in and understanding of language. The early childhood programme has encouraged the use of oral, written English and cultural language experiences, to foster children’s understanding and use of verbal and non-verbal communication. The majority of the kindergarten environments viewed during the research fieldwork were rich in symbols, such as words, numbers and images, modelling positive language and reading and writing which is gender inclusive and culturally appropriate.
As seen by members of the community, training was a necessary tool for early childhood education teachers. They described it as a mechanism for teachers to gain appropriate skills to use in their planning of child-orientated teaching programmes. In the span of the fieldwork, the need for teachers to help children to gain lifelong education was often acknowledged by parents and members of the community. However, recognising the importance of employing qualified early childhood teachers, community participants pointed out that untrained kindergarten teachers would have a firmer grasp of their job if they had some sort of basic training in the early childhood education field. Kindergarten educators with field-based training qualification had changed in their attitudes, behaviour and had striven to improve their teaching practices and management skills, evident in the way kindergarten teachers were practising what they had learned and organised their learning areas appropriately in the centres where participant observations were carried out.

The findings indicated that the early childhood education initiative had contributed to and influenced positive changes occurring among people, villages and communities. The programme had impacted on village people’s lives in several ways and it had also caused excitement for members of the community. The attitudinal change in the communities had resulted in harmony and cooperation among village people, and had enabled people to work together in dealing with kindergarten activities and issues. Increasingly, mothers had become leading partners with early childhood teachers and coordinators in being available and offering their help and support in the kindergarten settings. Those who were selected as kindergarten committee members had taken up responsible roles in the activities of kindergartens besides their own family commitments. These mothers had also been strong in encouraging other women to participate in kindergarten work, as well as empowering their husbands and other men through their example and determination to get involved, and support the work of the early childhood education centres. They had been leaders in assisting kindergarten teachers to equip their centres with resources and materials. Most families were committed to doing the best they could for their children. However, sometimes families had not felt comfortable participating in all aspects of an early childhood education setting, due to a variety of reasons. For example, in the early stages of the early childhood education project, some family members were uncertain of
what was actually happening in a kindergarten centre and therefore were hesitant to offer their support. However, after attending community awareness workshops organised by coordinators and teachers, often separately, parents' initial reservations were overcome and families became confident about participating in necessary kindergarten activities.

In the Solomon Islands' context, families and members of the kindergarten community had become active agents for change in their communities, which had contributed to broader child, individual people and community benefits. Existing literature highlights parents' responsibility for the child. For example, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, cited in UNICEF, 1998), parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, with the support of the State, in their mutual concern for the best interests of the child. Meanwhile, this study supports research (e.g. Arthur, et al., 1996; Thomas, 2000), which shows that a parent's own development can be greatly enhanced by participation and many move along the participation continuum over time, taking more responsibility for aspects of programmes as their confidence and experience grows. Research has also shown that early schooling and education has powerful effects on children's life opportunities and eventual wellbeing (Myers, 1992; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000). The benefits of early childhood programmes are influenced by the interrelated factors that assist teachers respond to individual children, and curricula that serve as a bridge between home and school (Rodd, 1997), while helping parents to improve their skills as caregivers can contribute to improving children's life opportunities.

10.3.3 Transition to School: Children's Experiences

In Solomon Islands, kindergarten centres are located in communities where there are also schools for some children to attend. Although the school teachers' views have not been made explicit in the early sections of this thesis, the community representatives interviewed in the study included some school teachers (Refer to chapter 5, p. 88), particularly preparatory class teachers who had taken in children who had completed kindergarten and had started school. Attending kindergarten had enabled some children to move to the schools in the vicinity to continue their education. One preparatory class teacher, for example, added that their school was excited about the reforms happening in kindergarten as they were seeing encouraging outcomes from children who had
moved from kindergarten into preparatory class, as she explained in the following interview excerpt.

Children's school experiences are encouraging. I am seeing positive changes in the attitudes of children who have come from kindergarten to preparatory class. Children are more alert and are eager to learn. They are quick to pick up what the teacher is saying, they love to read and do writing activities. They are not afraid to speak with the teacher and lead other children in asking questions. They are also not shy to encourage other children to participate in class discussions (Community 3 female representative 2, & schoolteacher, Informal Interview: 14-04-99).

Children who had moved from kindergarten to school were active and had developed and continued to grow in confidence, enabling them to communicate with the teacher with ease. It is important, as it will help children to learn in, and progress through the school system without fearing to speak with the teacher and other adults working in the system.

However, it is fair to suggest that some of the communities' initial concerns might have been brought about based on their understanding of the teaching methods children would need to adapt to in school, and the importance of early academic achievement if the children were to succeed at that level. Woodhead (1996), for example, explains that within an ecological systems model, the influence of the child's experiences within one micro-system will be affected by what follows in another micro-system.

Schooling in Solomon Islands is highly competitive, with vigorous assessment criteria, selection and ability ranking a regular part of children's experience throughout their school journey, with some students failing to get a place in school and many more dropping-out during their progression into the higher grades in the education system. Kindergarten can play a pivotal role in this process in two major areas: in terms of access, and in terms of curriculum.

Access to school is not a straightforward process as primary education is not available to all children, as indicated in chapter two. The Government of Solomon Islands pays for teachers' salaries, but building and other costs are the responsibilities of local authorities that in turn, particularly in rural areas, pass on these costs to local communities. In this way, there are significant hidden costs to families, for example, school uniform, books, contribution to building maintenance, and in many areas, especially in towns, there are not sufficient places for children. In Solomon Islands, the purchase of school uniform is obligatory and universal even at kindergarten level. The consequence is a close
association between the wealth of a community, the proportion of children actually attending school, the resources available for those that do attend, and their academic achievement. Inequalities in resourcing and achievement have always been associated with the school system, but it was clear from the research findings that the early childhood education sector through its kindergarten initiative was working and trying hard in contributing to change this disparity in the education system. The close relationship between kindergarten attendance, school admission and academic progress is one of the major factors accounting for enthusiasm for kindergarten schooling, even among the most struggling rural communities. Kindergarten and preparatory school teachers and families spoken to in the study acknowledged that attending kindergarten was the first stage on a very fast narrowing ladder of educational opportunity for children in Solomon Islands.

The second area in which kindergarten education is expected to contribute to children’s educational achievements concerns curriculum and teaching policies, especially the language of instruction. Language competence is a major pathway to social mobility in Solomon Islands. The young children who are going to progress in school face the challenge of becoming fluent in more than one language by a very early age. Children would usually learn three languages. First, during infancy they will learn their mother tongue, one of eighty-seven main languages in Solomon Islands. Next, children are introduced to pidgin, the common language that serves most aspects of social and to some extent commercial life. At school and sometimes before they go to school, children will learn English, which is the access language to professional, business and elite positions. In particular, English is the language medium in which children are taught in preparation for the major examination at Standard 6 (ages 12-15) which determines whether they are accepted for entry to secondary school. Primary schools vary in the emphasis they place on these languages depending on location (urban versus rural), their status, and the aspirations of families and the communities. It is suggested that these varying language policies in turn have influenced the kindergarten sector. For example, some kindergarten classes, especially in rural settings, teach almost exclusively in the mother tongue, only introducing rhymes, stories and songs in English and pidgin. Others, especially in the urban areas, concentrate on introducing children to pidgin, and also to the English language which will become
increasingly significant as they progress. In this way, the early childhood education sector can serve an important gateway function, preparing children in language competencies that determine whether they are admitted to, and how well they progress within the school system. The Solomon Islands’ school system’s organisation and policy place certain demands on children, particularly the abilities and skills that are expected on entry.

10.3.4 The Impact of the Church

As the Church has a significant impact on all aspects of people’s life and society in Solomon Islands, most of the community people spoken to spoke highly of its contribution to society. The Church’s influence on aspects of life was played out through its significant roles in the various sectors of the village life and in the lives of the people. It had also been very active in promoting harmony, cooperation and coordination among the community people in their endeavour to provide for the education of their young children.

The Church has had a significant effect on the wellbeing of Solomon Islanders, since it was first introduced by the early missionaries who represented the churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, South Seas Evangelical, and Seventh Day Adventist) that exist today. These different churches for example, have played a varied and often important role in helping the communities to integrate into the cash economy. Many of the early church missions were actively involved in providing medical, educational and communication services for the people. Through the education system Christian doctrine became widespread, along with ideas of what was perceived as best for society. The churches continue to play this vital role today, particularly in education, although the government has taken increasing responsibility for the funding of these services. The Church has a notable impact on people’s perceptions and ways of thinking about development, it is a prominent stakeholder in any development process, evident not only in Christianity’s teachings, but also in the Church’s involvement in providing education and health care services. Well-established Church-owned and managed schools are found in various parts of Solomon Islands.

The findings showed that the churches willingly offered and extended their assistance and support to the early childhood education initiative, especially in ensuring that families and members of the community supported
children attending kindergarten, and teachers as they established themselves within the kindergarten setting. Besides its influence on various aspects of life as noted earlier, the Church had consistently been active in promoting encouragement, leadership, partnership, harmony, cooperation and coordination among members of the community in their endeavour to ensure their children pursued their early education and progressed to other succeeding levels of education.

The value placed on the Church by the community, and the crucial impact the Church has on the society and its people, is a significant factor in the lives of people throughout Solomon Islands. It is a way of life for the majority of the people of Solomon Islands. This study, for example, found that in kindergarten settings, teachers assisted children to develop an understanding of moral issues by providing opportunities for peer interaction, and by encouraging children to discuss and negotiate issues of concern among themselves. The process encouraged educators to enhance children's ability to solve problems through their consideration of these views.

Research has shown that children's everyday experiences provide them with the basis of their moral understanding (Damon, 1988). It has been suggested that the child's moral awareness is shaped and supported by natural emotional reactions to observations and events. Children develop their moral awareness from engaging in normal social experiences.

Summary

Families and members of the community were part of the success of the early childhood education field-based training programme in Solomon Islands. They had readily been helpful and supportive of teachers and coordinators and had contributed to the requirements of kindergarten settings. The people had reinforced the cultural values of respect and loyalty by how they had behaved towards matters of the early childhood education programme and in their relationship with the people directly involved in the project. Families had also adopted open and challenging attitudes in trying to forge and maintain meaningful interactions with their children.

Kindergarten environments encouraged free choice, child initiated activities and play learning experiences. Kindergarten practitioners modelled collaborative practices and facilitated groups that acknowledged children's
differences. Children were encouraged by teachers to recognise their feelings and to express them in appropriate ways. Children explored diverse interests in their learning and in the pursuit of their cultural knowledge and identity. Parents, especially mothers, were also encouraged to seek appropriate help and guidance to ensure their child was progressing in the right direction in her or his learning. Increasingly, positive changes in children's behaviour and attitudes had been noted by families, members of the community and by teachers themselves.
Part Four: Discussion of the Kindergarten Observation Outcomes

10.4 The Kindergarten Observation Outcomes

In addition to interviewing participants in the study, participant observation was carried out in two kindergartens.

In part four, the themes investigated are: teachers' administrative, planning, implementation and management skills; play as a tool for children's learning; encouraging creativity and advance learning skills in children; and children's peer friendships and relationships.

10.4.1 Teachers' Administrative, Planning, Implementation and Management Skills

Kindergarten teachers who were based in the two centres where participant observation was carried out had adequate knowledge of how to plan, implement and manage their curriculum programmes and the centre activities. The skills of planning, implementation and management had helped teachers to organise their curriculum programmes and administer and manage their centres and other related responsibilities with confidence and professionalism.

The teachers in the observed centres had utilised what they had learned in their training to plan integrated learning activities for children and attend to other roles, with dedication and commitment. They were, for example, taking initiatives in planning for small group learning experiences for children. They were also planning concentrated activities for children to last the designated working hours each week, often trying to ensure that their planning was based on children's interests and learning needs. The planning, management, administrative, professional and leadership skills of kindergarten teachers had often been self-scrutinised in the way they had consistently conducted themselves to ensure that they were providing children with appropriate, challenging and meaningful learning experiences. In addition, teachers had constantly ensured that their classroom environment was set out in a child-friendly manner.

However, although the majority of kindergarten teachers were striving with confidence and competence, the data showed that a few of them still
needed to work on certain aspects of their planning and implementation skills, (as expressed on page 176). The teachers concerned seemed to be intensely creative and outstanding in their mental planning of, and effectiveness at facilitating children’s activities. Nevertheless, these teachers had often been reluctant to record their strategies and the actual activities they had planned for children and for their centres if they had not sought assurance from a trainer. With increased practice and confidence these kindergarten teachers would progress to a level where they would acquire and match their colleagues’ written planning skills without seeking ongoing assurance from their trainers.

The teachers observed were aware of the importance of having a range of teaching strategies available to draw on in different situations for different children and they were putting that idea into what they were organising for children in their classroom setting. Kindergarten teachers’ activity and programme planning was made easier by the assistance and support of members of the community. For example, parents created materials for teachers and kindergarten centres. The people’s support was important to keep the supply of materials ongoing, as the hot and humid climate of Solomon Islands can contribute to rapid deterioration of materials and resources. A challenge that had helped teachers and parents to cooperate in order to minimise negative effects on children’s learning activities, and on how activities were planned and implemented. As early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers had recognised that their role in facilitating children’s learning experiences is crucial in helping children to consolidate existing learning and to challenge them to move on to the next stage.

The idea is illustrated by Vygotsky (1978), in his concept of the zone of proximal development, which defines the stage where children can operate at a level slightly above their independent competence with the help of an adult or more experienced peers. Rogoff (1990) suggests that children develop through participation in problem-solving situations with more experienced players. Adult involvement is thus essential in assisting children to bridge from the known to the new. However, this does not mean that adults should interfere in children’s learning, rather they should be tuning into what is happening and provide help and challenges when necessary. The adult’s role is to assist children to discover new knowledge by asking questions and making suggestions for new discoveries. The concept of extending children’s learning
beyond their current level is supported by Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992), who state that early childhood educators have a teaching continuum, ranging from non-directive strategies, such as acknowledging and modelling, to mediating strategies, such as facilitating, supporting, scaffolding and co-constructing, leading to more directive strategies, such as demonstrating and directing. These strategies can easily be incorporated into written plans, as teachers in the present study had consistently done.

10.4.2 Play as a Tool for Children's Learning

Play is, and should be the right of every child and opportunities should be provided to exercise this right in their learning environment. In learning through play children learn a great deal as they engage in and develop such abilities as investigating, questioning, role playing, practising, problem solving, creativity and flexibility, and come to understand the world around them (Bruce, 1991, 1994; Anning, 1994; Curtis, 1994). Play is an essential aspect of learning for young children and planning for play is seen as the central component in designing a curriculum that integrates all areas of the child’s learning. Thus, early childhood educators have a critical role in responding to children’s play ideas and in establishing an environment that supports and extends children’s learning and development through play.

The Solomon Islands' early childhood teachers in the observation centres recognised the importance of play as a learning tool for kindergarten children, as part of the educative process and as characteristic of young children. Educators recognised that through play, young children learn different skills, for example, language development and how to communicate and interact with other children and adults. Children are also developing social and socialisation skills with the teacher, facilitating children’s play.

The early childhood educators had adequate knowledge of the educational advantages of play for young children. In this context, it can be argued that developments in children’s play reflect and impact on several abilities and skills happening in intellectual, motor, social, emotional, moral, physical, creative, cultural and language areas. Teachers recognised that play is the life-blood of young children and it is how they learn about important things in life and about people around them. Through play children learn to be creative, to think, they learn to compromise and to socialise. Although play is
highly valued in the Solomon Islands context, some parents still cannot see how it can be used as a tool for children’s learning in a classroom environment. Teachers and coordinators have a duty to educate parents about play in the kindergarten setting. Traditionally, our children have always been encouraged to socialise through free play.

The idea that ‘play is the life-blood of young children’ (see page 184) can be interpreted to mean young children learn important principles about life, people and relationships through play and develop and exercise meaningful relationships with and in how they relate to other people around them. Through play children encounter new experiences, forming challenging questions and seeking solutions to life’s obstacles along the way. In most circumstances, children’s development senses are in full demand as they set out to explore and learn from the different environments they come into contact with. In the Solomon Islands’ kindergarten setting, children’s play enables them to achieve their learning goals set for them by their teacher. At the same time, teachers’ development of an understanding of the value of play in children’s learning and development is enhanced, which should encourage and display ongoing commitment to the development of a play-based curriculum in their centres.

Play has a significant place in the early childhood education curriculum. However, although it is used as a medium for learning in early childhood settings throughout the world, its value as an education tool is not necessarily accepted by all cultures (Curtis, 1994). In Solomon Islands, for example, the concept of play is often considered within the society’s cultural interpretations of play and in relation to adults’ attitudes towards play. The value placed on play varies among subcultures and island groups (refer to page 181). For example, although parents accept that their young children play, few of them really consider it as a way of learning for children in a setting such as a kindergarten. Hence, while some Solomon Islands’ families believe that children learn through play, other families expect a more regulated curriculum for their children. At the early stages of the early childhood education project, both coordinators and kindergarten teachers faced some difficulty in their attempt to educate conservative parents in Solomon Islands who saw play as a rather time wasting mechanism and not a learning tool for children attending kindergarten. Despite the sensitivity of play as far as some parents were
concerned, teachers had worked hard to educate families about its value for children, and continue to provide learning activities that challenge children’s reasoning abilities through the mode of play.

In the context of the Solomon Islands’ culture, play is a way for young children to learn about the cultural norms and values of society. Traditional games, especially games with rules, generally form an integral part of our culture in that they provide a means of communication for social norms, assist in the assimilation of group members, and allow for differentiation among group members. The games children play and the playthings they use in play are often tied to the culture in which they live and provide a way for children to practise skills needed as both as children and as adults. Play is also a way for young children to practise the roles and skills they will need as adults, and these specific play behaviours may vary from island to island. Play of children in the islands reflects the culture as a whole. Since gardening and fishing are among the important parts of the culture, for example, boys play fishing games and practise spearing skills, while girls practise gardening skills as ways for the children to master the skills they need as adults.

My view is that practitioners will increasingly be aware of the effects of cultural diversity in their kindergarten settings and will increase their incorporation of diversity into their curriculum programmes. As one of the most common elements of childhood in the Solomon Islands’ culture is play, I believe educators will increase their recognition of the importance of play in the lives of young children and will make use of play as a means of promoting cultural awareness as well. The relationship between play and cultural diversity is important for three reasons in my opinion. First, a growing group of young children from culturally diverse backgrounds is attending kindergarten. Next, play is a way for children to learn about the world around them and to learn cultural values. Children not only learn about themselves, but also about differences in other people. Finally, early education programmes should work to enhance a positive awareness of individual differences and cultural diversity as a whole. Thus, play experiences can serve as an excellent way to help teach children about the differences in other people and that these differences are not bad.

Although the findings reported some parents having initial difficulty accepting play as tool for young children’s learning, I believe parents will
gradually change their attitude as they engage more in the activities of kindergarten centres, particularly in terms of working with teachers to help children learn. In Solomon Islands, the relationship between play and culture is significant to families and community people because they understand the importance of children’s play from the cultural perspective. The parents’ awareness of the inherent link between play and culture is supported by cross-cultural perspectives (Arthur, et al., 1996). Play is culturally grounded, that is, it influences development and cultural learning. However, it is important for Solomon Islands’ kindergarten teachers to realise that play has been demonstrated to impact how children see and understand the world around them. I believe that if educators were able to clearly identify emerging cultures found in children’s play, it would allow early childhood practitioners to interact with children in culturally relevant and similar modes. Teachers need to foster ways in which they can develop the ability to have a multiethnic perspective.

Play has been suggested to provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and manipulation that are essential for constructing knowledge and contributes to the development of representational thought (Bruce, 1994; Moyles, 1994). During play, children examine and refine their learning in light of the feedback they receive from the environment and other people. It is through play that children develop their imaginations and creativity. However, during the primary school years, children’s play becomes more rule-oriented and promotes the development of autonomy and cooperation which contributes to social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Research has maintained that during the early years, children’s interactions with each other and adults take on new dimensions (Bruce, 1994; Moyles, 1994). Children relate to play as a result of experiencing a range of new and varied social situations at this stage. In the Vygotskian paradigm, socially oriented play does not have to happen with other children, as the child can engage in what has been called “director’s play”, when children play with pretend playmates or direct and act out a scene with toys (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 129). In the early years, (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Anning, 1994; Bruce, 1994; Moyles, 1994) the move is from solitary or onlooker play to parallel play where children are near others as they play. Children then move to cooperative play where much of the play is decided through interaction and negotiation. This
study supports that children need to have opportunities for solitary, as well as cooperative play, as they benefit from participating in these various kinds of play in so many other ways.

10.4.3 Encouraging Creativity and Advance Learning Skills in Children

Kindergarten practitioners were dedicated and committed to providing children with a wide range of learning activities and opportunities, to encourage critical, advance learning skills and creativity among children. Teachers organised and set their kindergarten environment to provide a variety of experiences to develop children's creativity and foster individual thinking processes, imagination and self-expression. They consistently tried to provide a setting that promotes exploration, experimentation and children learning through play. They used space, interactions, materials and routines as resources for constructing the environment. Recognising that young children would have experienced a range of opportunities for creative expression and would enter early childhood settings with a natural curiosity about expressive materials, kindergarten teachers endeavoured to encourage and extend children's communication skills, imagination, and curiosity. Teachers were responsive to children's ideas, assisted children to express their thoughts and supported the development of skills required for creative learning. They catered for children's development abilities and attitudes by providing learning experiences and opportunities that encouraged children to explore, experiment and to express their imaginative ideas, further encouraging cooperation among children.

In Solomon Islands, these ideas have important implications for the early childhood practitioners, other teachers and parents in their endeavour to assist young children learn and enhance their potential. For example, kindergarten educators need to continue ensuring that their curriculum planning values and acknowledges individual differences in a variety of ways. Every child and her or his development are unique (Duffy, 1998), hence teachers must recognise young children’s general patterns of development and learning that arise over time. Teachers must be reflective and continue providing children with opportunities to talk with each other and adults as they work. In addition to their cognitive and physical stimulation, children benefit from the experience of interacting with others, and that by providing children with appropriate opportunities, their social development is facilitated with children developing
both as individuals and as members of a group (Duffy, 1998). Kindergarten teachers in this study adopted traditional knowledge to encourage children's curiosity to enhance their learning. Teachers planned and exposed children to activities that resembled traditional skills, themes, artefacts, music and stories. The learning experiences organised for children were also planned to enhance their understanding, confidence and foster their individual and cooperative learning skills.

Kindergarten children demonstrated a refreshing degree of freedom and enjoyment as they experienced learning activities and experimented with a variety of materials and resources. With the help of teachers, children were using their imagination to develop a range of interesting and unique learning experiences. For example, children were putting words together in new ways, building a model of an island, and were developing a new story line in a traditional tale. Children's creativity was encouraged in many ways by the modelling of the teachers. Kindergarten educators and other adults working with children in the participating centres made sure that they organised learning experiences for children through their involvement, participation and consistent practice. This was reflected in the way adults were responding openly to children's questions and interests, and listening to their ideas and suggestions. Children's language skills were extended through teacher-facilitated activities, questioning, interaction and discussion between children and adults and among children themselves. The provision of critical learning opportunities and encouragement of children's creative, active and advance learning skills by practitioners suggested that children were deeply involved in their own learning and were being challenged to contribute fully to the learning process. This has important implications for young children in Solomon Islands. For example, it is likely to send positive messages to children that their contributions and competence are valued, which can in turn have an important influence on their self-esteem. Also, by encouraging children's creativity, early childhood educators are promoting their abilities to explore and understand their world, increasing children's scope to make new connections and gain new knowledge.

Research has shown that creativity as an essential form of problem solving (Duffy, 1998) involves adaptability and flexibility of thought and skills that are critical for any learning experience. Creativity can be viewed in terms of
process, product or person (Duffy, 1998) and has been defined as the interpersonal and intra-personal process by means of which original, high quality, and significant products are developed. In dealing with children, the focus and basis of creative potential should be on the process of developing and generating original ideas (Duffy, 1998). Young children will have experienced a series of opportunities for creative expression and will enter early childhood settings with a natural curiosity about expressive components of their learning environments.

10.4.4 Children’s Peer Friendships and Relationships

Early childhood teachers emphasised the importance of their kindergarten children forming peer friendships and relationships among themselves. Observation data showed that children’s friends were important to them and would spend more time with them devising and engaging in advance and special interactions with their friends. Children enjoyed playing more with friends, as well as trying to find ways to comfort them when needed. Friends spent more time negotiating, planning and constructing play for themselves utilising concrete resources offered by teachers and enjoyed interacting with each other and having fun.

There was mutual understanding of friendship dynamics such as humour among children who were friends. Children who were outgoing assumed leadership roles in their friendship group and tended to demonstrate a sense of obligation or commitment to their friends, such as being protective of their shy friends. Teachers reported that children who were not overly shy were confident to make friends and got to know other children around them easily. The children concerned were talkative, outgoing, demonstrated leadership skills and became the leaders among their friends or peers. They were also very protective of their shy friends and were popular among their peers.

In some situations, the observation findings showed that children from the same villages or islands kept their friendships to those within their own village or island groups. The explanation for this behaviour could be attributed to the fact that children spoke the same language and their friendship would have previously been formed at home. Evidence also showed that gender tended to have played a part in the forming of friendships among peers, in such a way
that girls from the same villages would always ensure they were participating together when there was small group work organised at kindergarten.

Peer friendship and relationship dynamics among Solomon Islands’ children showed some children having greater confidence to initiate and join in social interactions than others, as some children did not feel comfortable in approaching a group or attempting to gain entry into a game or play situation. There were examples where teachers had acted as models for participating, or pointed out how children could join other groups, which suggested that teachers had to actively help some children to develop appropriate strategies for group participation, particularly shy children. As keen observers of children, educators acknowledged the need to recognise individual children’s development and maintaining of friendships, socialisation skills and interactions.

Friendships among children in the kindergarten setting are an important aspect of their social development, as they provide children with an environment where they can practise certain behaviours and styles of interaction. Friendships further provide young children in the Solomon Islands’ kindergartens with the context in which they can learn about themselves and develop their own self-image. This is important, as children would have entered the kindergarten setting with a range of social skills and competencies from their village and community experiences, as noted earlier. The centre dynamics suggested that children’s socialisation skills, positive peer interactions, and cooperative play skills were enhanced by the provision of appropriate experiences, which in turn, were enhancing children’s personal and interpersonal skills, enabling them to participate at an advanced level as a member of a group.

The peer culture and experiences of Solomon Islands’ children are supported by research (e.g. Duffy, 1998), which states that children develop special relationships, including friendships, when they get acquainted with other children. Some children are more popular than others and are sought out as playmates or friends more than others. Popular children have been described as socially competent (Kemple, 1991) as they are able to interpret, predict and respond to the actions of others, as well as having self-confidence. Popular children are also reported to engage in a wider range of interactions with others. The literature suggests that the engagement of popular children in more
complex interactions can promote their capability to explain and predict their own and other people’s actions (Duffy, 1998). Friends become increasingly important to kindergarten children. Children can and do make strong friends within the early years, friendships that are important and have the potential to last and extend into the adult years.

Summary

The data used to substantiate the discussion in this section were from the kindergarten observation outcomes. The study suggests that children had developed a wide range of physical, social, intellectual, emotional, moral and cultural abilities, experiences and success with peer interactions and communication. The children’s diverse abilities were respected by adults and were provided with opportunities to develop at their own pace and potential. Practitioners prepared appropriate opportunities that provided children with experiences that catered for their learning needs. Built on mutual trust and respect, the relationship between teachers and children was extended to children’s families and members of the community.

Early childhood educators respected children’s verbal and non-verbal communication styles. They provided learning environments rich in symbols such as words, numbers, sounds and modelled positive language, reading and writing which was gender inclusive and culturally appropriate. Teachers helped children to become socially and culturally aware by involving them in reflecting on events, experiences and by exploring alternative ways of relating to people. Children were encouraged to learn and experience traditional ways of doing things such as weaving. Teachers were often encouraged by positive feedback from parents and community people. Children were encouraged to take the initiative in their own learning and worked at different activities that encouraged them to interact with peers and question their teachers, communicating in the local language. Teachers created learning opportunities that fostered creativity, healthy self-concepts, regard for others, and holistic experiences.

Play was integrated as part of children’s learning dimensions. Recognising individual children’s development of friendships, associations and interactions, kindergarten educators strove to provide experiences that enhanced individual children’s level of play and encouraged children to participate in social
interactions with their peers and with adults. Establishing friendly learning settings for children was important to early childhood teachers, as they facilitated challenging activities with confidence, recognising the need to integrate content across the curriculum areas. Teachers were motivated to better their teaching skills and maximise their teaching practice and experience. Thus, the need to base children’s learning on their interests and abilities had become a key component in teachers’ planning of curriculum programmes in Solomon Islands’ kindergartens.
Part Five: Conclusions, Recommendations and Postscript

This study evaluated the impact of the field-based training programme as indicated in chapters one and five.

A qualitative research approach was adopted to examine the participating teachers, administrators' and the community people's perspectives of the field-based training programme and the participant observation held in two kindergartens. The study was informed by the principles of the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The importance of these theories lies in the fact that they contribute to our understanding of the learning and development of children in the context of cultural, social, historical, economic, educational and political environments.

10.5.1 The Conclusions of the Study

The overall tone of the conclusions is that the impact of the field-based training programme was highly favourable. It has given early childhood teachers a wide range of skills that they did not possess before field-based training, and through that up-skilling process has laid the foundation for high quality early childhood teaching in the community setting. The programme design has proved an effective way to reach widely dispersed staff and put them on the path towards becoming highly professional early childhood teachers. There are lessons here for any other attempt that might be made to provide on-the-job training for people who are trying to provide specialist services in education, health, agriculture and other areas in widely dispersed rural regions. Attention is given to some of the more contentious innovations being tried in early childhood education such as the use of play in teaching, culture and gender sensitivity.

Specifically, the significant features that have emerged from the findings of this study include areas such as, training and reflective practice: professional development, education, experience, knowledge, skills, reflection, confidence, competence and sensitivity; a solitary and successful field-based training model; the field-based training programme promotes another way of viewing early childhood education; the field-based training programme reinforces the indigenous pride and identity of Solomon Islanders; the field-based training
programme as a mechanism for a gender sensitive perspective; and implications for other development projects.

10.5.1.1 Training and Reflective Practice: Professional development, Education, Experience, Knowledge, Skills, Reflection, Confidence, Competence and Sensitivity

The study shows that the qualification kindergarten teachers had gained from their successful completion of the field-based training programme had helped them to gain new knowledge, significant skills and experience. They had demonstrated high levels of reflection, confidence, sensitivity and competence in their work with children. The training programme had enabled kindergarten educators in Solomon Islands to acquire training, professional development, ongoing education, appropriate knowledge and to engage in reflective practice to enhance their professional roles and teaching practice as kindergarten practitioners. The teachers had benefited from their direct involvement in the field-based training programme, and had taken positive steps in learning from and working with other teachers and trainers. The educators' training experiences had influenced their teaching practices and enhanced their confidence to provide meaningful learning activities for children and to support their learning and cultural needs. Attempts by the kindergarten teachers to be culturally appropriate, particularly in terms of curriculum and resources and materials used by and with children had been enhanced by the inclusion of useful aspects of the people's unique culture in the field-based training programme. As professionals, the early childhood practitioners were keen and challenged to seek ways that could nurture their professional development and help them move to higher stages of professionalism. The field-based training programme has impacted on early childhood education staff, children, parents, and members of the community and the wider Solomon Islands' society in a meaningful and positive fashion.

The findings of this study showed that gaining the critical knowledge base for early childhood teachers had presented significant challenges such as monetary, transportation and geographic to the trainers who were responsible for assisting teachers with their field-based training. In spite of these challenges, there was an ongoing effort by trainers to provide training that could effectively prepare kindergarten educators to meet the learning needs of the Solomon
Islands children. The field-based training programme has been successful, with early childhood staff adopting effective interaction skills and methods, increasing their learning and knowledge base, and gaining a sense of achievement.

The practitioners' curriculum programme planning had become easier and programmes were appropriately geared toward children's interests and learning needs. Teachers' experiences suggest that the field-based training programme has expanded Solomon Islands' teachers' skill bases and has helped them to develop sensitivity and to carry out critical analysis of the importance of children's learning in relation to the dominant aspects of child development. The outcome of teachers' training had also created an atmosphere of courage, strength and loyalty in kindergarten teachers and in how they should manage their relationships with children and other professionals. Moreover, this study suggests that the training has helped early childhood education teachers in Solomon Islands to see how they should improve their teaching practices and processes, and how to prepare appropriate resources to use with children.

Training and professional experiences of Solomon Islands' early childhood educators are consistent with what research (e.g. Phillips & Howes, 1987; Epstein, Schweinhart & McAdoo, 1996; Moss, 1998; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000) on teacher training and professionalism for early childhood education teachers has shown. It maintains that the knowledge, skills and expertise teachers gain from their training enhance their sensitivity and confidence to plan quality programmes and organise the best kind of learning opportunities for children under their care.

The Solomon Islands' kindergarten teachers' training has prepared them to be reflective, plan, implement, manage and assess the effectiveness of their work with children. Being trained, for kindergarten staff, also meant that in their capacity as qualified practitioners, they have to assume a variety of roles. The findings showed that besides their own teaching and professional roles and responsibilities, for example, kindergarten educators worked hard to build and maintain working relationships with families, early childhood coordinators and the communities.

The Solomon Islands' practitioners' training had demonstrated a balanced representation of their cultural sensitivity and professional abilities and endeavours. The field-based training programme has incorporated aspects of
the Solomon Islands' culture to enhance teachers' cultural knowledge and skills to assist them in their work with diverse groups of children. That is, the field-based training programme has provided kindergarten teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills in the areas of cultural practices, histories, ideologies, child-rearing strategies, child training methods, and cultural expectations to help them in teaching children from diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

The findings suggest that professional training for early childhood education teachers in a majority nation like the Solomon Islands needs to take into consideration the value of the indigenous culture, its key features that are important and should be incorporated in early childhood education programmes. Most models of early childhood education training programmes are influenced by the Western cultures (e.g. Woodhead, 1999). Recognition of the strength and appropriateness of the indigenous cultures should make training programmes in countries like the Solomon Islands more meaningful and consistent with the people's lifestyles and the cultural needs of its children and young people. The implication for researchers and other professionals is that it is no longer correct to generalise about early childhood issues and practices, and that it is important to apply cultural sensitivity when writing about aspects of the indigenous cultures. As Bram (1998) explains:

Assigning value to the original culture and to the mode of early childhood care of different groups means recognising that in every culture there are worthwhile elements, and that if these are rapidly replaced by other models, this will be harmful, rather than productive. It also means recognising that changes in modes of education and early childhood care should take place from within the culture of origin and in conjunction with it, not in conflict with it (Bram, 1998, p. 29).

10.5.1.2 A Solitary and Successful Field-based Training Model

The study shows that the field-based training programme is the first of its kind and the only one currently operating in Solomon Islands. The training model has been successful and the teachers believed that it was a better and more appropriate model for Solomon Islands. This study found that the training programme had encouraged positive learning experiences for children and had supported teachers with their work with children and their relationship with children, families and members of the community. Bredekamp & Rosegrant (1992), maintain that training models are necessary to any discussion of early
childhood education programmes, and are essential in determining programme content.

The impact of the field-based training programme on children in Solomon Islands was encouraging and productive. Children had been found to be assertive, they were no longer being passive in the kindergarten setting and were taking an active part in their own learning. They were actively learning about their world through social interactions and explorations. They were exposed to a variety of patterns such as dance movement patterns, melodies, rhythms and other musical patterns and rhymes to help children manage their own learning. Children were encouraged to be imaginative, creative and to exercise critical thinking with the teacher acting as a facilitator in the process. Early childhood educators respected children’s diverse abilities and they provided them with challenging learning opportunities. Research (e.g. Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Death, 1996), maintains that children in early childhood settings will have a wide range of physical skills, cognitive abilities, experiences and success with peer interactions and communication. This study suggests that by providing learning opportunities where children may experience success, kindergarten teachers are increasing the likelihood of children developing competence and having the confidence to approach new experiences positively.

The field-based training programme had succeeded in its goal of training working untrained early childhood teachers and has continued to spread throughout the country. Solomon Islanders have accepted it with enthusiasm, as it has contributed to the professional growth of kindergarten teachers in a meaningful way. The success of the early childhood education training programme was attributed to its vision, and the dedication and commitment of the national coordinator, trainers, teachers, parents, families and members of the community. The success of programme was also attributed to how efficiently it had been programmed and the help and the support of Solomon Islanders. The training package included necessary topics for kindergarten teachers and was unique, constructive and collaborative in its approach. The basic training programme had worked because the people understood their role from the beginning and were committed to its goals. The vision of the national coordinator, New Zealand partners and the provincial coordinators was a fundamental part of the field-based training package.
Another factor that has contributed to the success of the early childhood education training programme was that there was mutual respect among all the people involved in its design and implementation, particularly the coordinators and the New Zealand partners. The training programme had empowered the trainers and teachers. They had learned useful knowledge from being involved in the project and by working with the New Zealand officers. The importance of training for early childhood education teachers has been supported by research (e.g. Bredekamp & Willer, 1992; Gould, 1998; Freire, 1998; Schweinhart & Epstein, 1998). The field-based training programme had succeeded in offering training for kindergarten teachers in the Solomon Islands.

Nevertheless, despite the positive experiences of the field-based training programme by kindergarten teachers, it is cautioned that the lack of data on teachers’ practices and philosophy and children’s kindergarten experience before the intervention limited the scope of the evaluation and as an evaluation of processes of change.

10.5.1.3 The Field-based Training Programme Promotes another Way of Viewing Early childhood Education

The field-based training programme has provided another way of considering early childhood education in Solomon Islands. The participants agreed that the programme had promoted in people another way of viewing early childhood education, compared to viewing early childhood education traditionally. Child-rearing practices for example, have for decades been viewed from the cultural perspective and are implemented in that context. Childhood values, beliefs, practices and expectations have always been translated using cultural interpretations and understandings.

The idea of early childhood education is a Western concept. In contrast, all Solomon Islands children learn at an early age, but they learn important life knowledge, skills, cultural values, beliefs, traditions, histories, norms, expectations, methods and processes through traditional education. This understanding suggests that some authors need to be more careful about what they assume as being typical of all early childhood. In the Solomon Islands’ communities, for example, young children learn cultural knowledge and skills by observing and listening to their grandparents, parents, older siblings, father and/or by helping his or her mother do things and learning essential skills. It is
part of children's traditional education that they work in their food gardens, and work alongside adults planting, harvesting, weeding, collecting and fetching food and water. However, as most participants said, the people of Solomon Islands had recognised that times had changed and the idea of traditional education being practised alone was no longer viable for the lives of young Solomon Islanders at the present time. The people felt that there was need to ensure the education system was doing more for the Solomon Islands' children and young people. Early childhood education was seen as having a part in that line of thought.

Encouraged by this new perspective, the kindergarten teachers focused on activities that encouraged children to be able to make their own decisions and judgements, and provided opportunities for children to create and act on their own ideas and experiences. Teachers encouraged these activities with the knowledge that they would stimulate curiosity, enthusiasm and enjoyment in children. Traditionally, the teacher-centred approach is the commonly used teaching strategy. However, although the child-centred method is a new concept for teachers throughout the country, it fits the societal values and beliefs. Influenced by the guidelines for the early childhood education field and encouraged by families and other teachers, kindergarten educators had enthusiastically endorsed this new teaching approach by using it in their centres and in everyday community activities. Stephens (1999), for example, asserts that children need activity-based, hands-on, sensory experiences to build the brain's learning pathways. This study supports that learning for children is most meaningful when self-initiated and supported by educators.

In practising the principles of early childhood education, early childhood teachers had to also deal with the different opinions about play as a learning tool in the kindergarten setting, as noted earlier. At the beginning of the Solomon Islands' early childhood education project, some parents told the teachers and the coordinators that their child was playing at kindergarten and not learning anything constructive. They refused to accept that play was a learning tool for children, and families resisted for a while. It took several workshops by coordinators with the help of teachers to convince conservative parents to think about changing their attitudes towards play. Some families were asking for more structured learning experiences for their young children. Some families, however, believed that learning must be in the direct reach of
the child's culture. These experiences can and will help teachers to enhance their professional skills and teaching practices. The parents' resistance of play as a tool for learning suggests the importance of engaging in open communication between teachers and parents. It also suggests that educating parents and members of the community about early childhood education practices is necessary if common understanding is to be reached by all members of the kindergarten community.

Teachers had to deal with socialisation practices and home-kindergarten cultural partnership processes. They strove to work with families to build a harmonious relationship between the home and kindergarten setting. In this ongoing process, educators faced both success and challenges. However, most parents showed a willingness to accept new methods of learning for their child, and were incorporating materials from kindergarten into their child's learning activities at home, thereby increasing potential literacy activities. Moreover, teachers had increasingly encouraged parents' involvement in the educational process and in kindergarten activities, they had continued to collaborate for the sake of children and their learning and development. Additionally, parents were satisfied that their children were using good learning environments and working with kindergarten practitioners. The findings showed that this interrelationship between teachers and families had encouraged them to aim higher for successful outcomes. It was important that educators and parents built and enhanced a strong and mutual relationship to benefit children, teachers and families. The literature asserts that parents and early childhood education teachers share responsibility for the education of young children (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2000). It is important that they share a vision of children's readiness, to encourage the skills, attitudes and attributes that kindergarten teachers look for in children (Piotrkowski, et al., 2000).

10.5.1.4 The Field-based Training Programme Reinforces the Indigenous Pride and Identity of Solomon Islanders

The findings of this study endorsed the field-based training programme as enhancing and reinforcing the indigenous pride of the people of Solomon Islands. It is a training programme planned, designed and implemented with Solomon Islanders, administered and managed by Solomon Islanders, for Solomon Islanders. The programme values the people's culture and languages.
It has provided early childhood education staff and professionals with the necessary knowledge and guidelines about schooling in diverse ethnic and cultural groups to enhance their cultural knowledge and skills. Teachers believed that for them to be effective in working with the diverse children under their care, they must learn appropriate knowledge on how to cater for the learning needs of children from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers exercised culturally appropriate skills, particularly in terms of curriculum and materials used by and with children. The inclusion of aspects of the people’s unique culture and cultural values in the field-based training package was a significant characteristic of the training programme and it promoted sensitivity and strengthened communication, problem solving and understanding as keys to providing what the Solomon Islands children need in kindergarten. It suggests that the early childhood training programme has endeavoured to accommodate differences in beliefs and expectations while tuning in to the learning needs of children in ways that promoted their own cultural values.

The training programme was strengthened by its main goal of training Solomon Islands early childhood teachers while they were being employed. It combined supervised practice and instructional modules including culture and language. The training programme incorporated experiences designed to allow teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to teach Solomon Islands kindergarten children. The implication was that the national coordinator, with the assistance of the provincial coordinators, had to ensure that the philosophy of the early childhood education system in the Solomon Islands was culturally sensitive and appropriate. They ensured that it accurately reflected the views, perspectives and various value systems of the diverse social and cultural groups of people in the Solomon Islands. The cultural context of the people of the different parts of Solomon Islands was incorporated in the goals of the programme and integrated in what was done to achieve them, as noted previously. The training programme allowed for the fact that teachers could use local language vernaculars to teach and were encouraged to use local materials and to create local resources. Community elders and other older people with traditional knowledge and skills were encouraged to visit kindergartens to pass on their knowledge and skills to children. In this way, positive steps were taken and continue to be taken to ensure the diverse cultural needs of children are met. The training module on culture and language was written in such a way
that it could be adapted to suit the children’s cultural values. The training programme had incorporated the Solomon Islanders’ social and cultural beliefs and had reflected the aspirations and different value systems of the diverse cultural groups that make up the Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islanders were so involved in the field-based training programme, and committed to it, that they felt they owned it. The ownership felt by the people had also strengthened their indigenous pride. The training programme created a strong sense of community spirit, which had encouraged the people in the communities to assist and support practitioners, where families and members of the community would sometimes initiate and drive the process. The principles of the field-based training programme were in harmony with the people’s values. They were also about engaging in appropriate working relationship, partnership and ownership processes. The programme had created authority among the people of Solomon Islands with their self-confidence, dignity and integrity strengthened and their stamina, faith and abilities enhanced. Essentially, for the people of Solomon Islands, their involvement and role in the initial stages of the training programme was fulfilling and satisfying.

The macrosystem factors reflected in the Solomon Islands’ traditions, customs, cultural values and practices encouraged by educators in the early childhood curriculum programmes they prepared for children, further highlighted the people’s indigenous pride and identity. The kindergarten observation findings showed that teachers were increasingly ensuring that when preparing teaching programmes, children’s cultural interests, values and beliefs were also included and demonstrated in the type of local materials made available within the learning environment. For example, practitioners setting up learning areas for children emulated traditional activities and materials such as house building materials, stone oven baking and food gardening tools, musical and traditional dancing instruments, fishing and hunting gear, canoe and paddle making equipment were used, as well as items related to church life. For example, Nimnicht and Arango (2001) maintain that such programmes help to strengthen the cultural identity of families and communities, to recover their own history and use their free time in a healthy enjoyable way.

The social and cultural learning of Solomon Islands’ children was emphasised in the early childhood education programme. The implication for
children was that they were provided with activities that included interaction and opportunities to explore their social and cultural environments; appropriate language stimulation and play. Children were provided opportunities for example, to acquire values, exposure to the wisdom of the culture, and the chance to practise socially and culturally related skills to facilitate children’s social development. The process included children being given opportunities to share by participating in activities with members of the extended family, village and community. For example, children were encouraged to participate in church and village activities, such as a village communal cleaning up session. Children were also encouraged to spend quality time with their grandparents and other relatives, to learn traditional skills, knowledge, norms, values, traditions, beliefs, practices, histories, ideologies and legends. The training programme has responded to the indigenous needs of teachers, children, families and communities and has also enhanced and reinforced self-reliance in society. Nimnicht and Arango (2001) ascertain that:

An educational model that responds to the needs of learners should look at those needs in a broader context than the immediate environment, because many forces that come from the broader sociopolitical environment influence every individual or group (Nimnicht & Arango, 2001, p. 34).

The field-based training programme has supported and trained teachers working in early childhood centres in the communities. It has respected the people’s indigenous identity, their languages, values and practices. It has brought the people together and has encouraged them to reassess their indigenous identity. As Smith (1999) explains:

Indigenous peoples has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonised contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organise and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages. Thus the world’s indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples (Smith, 1999, p. 7).

10.5.1.5 The Field-based Training Programme as a Mechanism for a Gender Sensitive Perspective

The field-based training programme has emerged as a mechanism for providing a forum for assessing the situation of gender equality, the sharing of ideas and for considering and developing activities to address the gender issue at the kindergarten level, with an emphasis on a gender receptive perspective.
and appreciation. One of the strengths of the field-based programme is that it stipulates in one of its training modules that curriculum programmes for children must be gender inclusive, sensitive and must take into account the learning needs of both boys and girls. It advises that gender preference be avoided in the kindergarten setting and that practitioners encourage children to appreciate their differences and to engage in and integrate a gender sensitive perspective and interaction among themselves. The inclusion of gender guidelines was appreciated by early childhood teachers in this study, and organised gender-inclusive activities in their kindergarten setting, where boys and girls were encouraged to work together in class activities without placing restrictions on what they could do together. The emphasis was on gender equity and inclusive early education for all children.

The inclusion of gender guidelines was important for kindergarten educators and trainers who participated in this study because the guidelines provided them with an opportunity to grow both professionally and personally and had empowered them to go forward in their jobs. The programme had created a social and professional climate where as members of each gender, they had participated and had been involved in decision-making concerning the early childhood education project without their gender becoming an issue and/or an obstacle in their progress. For the coordinators in particular, their participation in decision-making regarding the training programme, especially at the initial and planning stage paved the way for other women as their perspectives were genuinely taken into account in respect of the goals of the field-based training programme. The women’s involvement, participation in and support for the training programme had encouraged them to adopt leadership roles not only as coordinators and teachers, but also as adults in their communities.

The majority of early childhood education teachers in Solomon Islands are women. Teacher participants believed the field-based training programme had given them a chance to do something important for their country. They believed that their contribution to helping children under their care was one way for them to give back something to those who had helped them to reach where they were in their job as early childhood education practitioners. The female teachers had contributed and continue to raise the voice of women in Solomon Islands. The field-based training programme has raised the status of
the women who are directly involved in it and others who are affected through their help and support. Gender is a sensitive issue in Solomon Islands, as noted in chapter six. This is because Solomon Islands is among the traditional societies in the world where traditional beliefs regarding the status of boys and girl is still an issue. The attitude has affected girls or women the most because it tends to undermine their progress in many areas. For example, in the area of education, girls or women don’t get as many opportunities as boys do. The attitude has extended to viewing the appropriate roles for women in society, and about the gender-based division of work in the household where in some communities has influenced decisions about schooling for girls. Gender is thus an aspect of the Solomon Islands culture, which is supported by literature. Williams and Sheehan (2001), for example, state:

Gender relates to specific social and cultural patterns of behaviour and to the social characteristics of being a man or a woman. Gender is therefore constructed by the society in which the individual lives and is socialised (Williams & Sheehan, 2001, p. 212).

The field-based training programme is unique as it recognises the importance of encouraging gender-inclusive activities for boys and girls. The programme acknowledges that girls or women are valuable in many areas, they have a lot to offer to society and should be encouraged to be partners with boys or men in the area of development. Although, the idea has been realised in Solomon Islands, it is gradual. Hence, what is being undertaken at kindergarten level is important to keep the process going and to encourage girls to be part of everything that is going on at the centre right from the beginning. Also, teachers should be able to educate boys and girls about gender stereotyped behaviours through encouraging them to work together and share in all learning activities. The process should contribute to developing some form of balance in the gender-stereotyped attitudes of the people in Solomon Islands society.

Gender dynamics and how these are played out in educational settings are complicated. In some way, education maintains and reinforces unequal gender power relations, for example, through stereotypes in textbooks (Hill & King, 1993; Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000; Williams & Sheehan, 2001).
10.5.1.6 Implications for Other Development Projects

The success of the field-based training programme and the positive partnership approach created and utilised by Solomon Islands and New Zealand has implications for foreign governments and organisations as aid donors to majority countries such as Solomon Islands. The feeling of inclusion experienced by Solomon Islanders at the initial phase of the project developed a sense of ownership of the field-based training programme in Solomon Islanders. In such development projects, it is crucial that potential aid donors consider incorporating the indigenous people’s perspectives in the original planning and in the decisions regarding the goals and features of the potential overall aid package. The partnership approach has worked to benefit kindergarten teachers, children, families, the communities and the wider Solomon Islands’ society. As in this Solomon Islands and New Zealand project, such an arrangement can make a definite difference to the people’s initial reaction and acceptance, and the degree of assistance and support they are prepared to offer towards the project.

As in the Solomon Islands and New Zealand example, once the trust, interest and enthusiasm of the people have been gained, the internal processes are likely to proceed, despite financial, transportation, geographic and/or political challenges. The field-based training programme with its organisational tenacity has significant implications for other development projects intending to provide financial support and human resources to the governments and people of the majority countries.

The success of the process undertaken to implement the field-based training programme in Solomon Islands had been hailed as people-friendly, productive and encouraging. As a result, it appeared that the people of Solomon Islands would be cautious when negotiating future potential donor projects. The people directly involved with the negotiation stage of the field-based training programme were satisfied and pleased with the eventual outcome and with what is happening in the early childhood education field. The field-based training programme has been described as the best of all the projects funded by foreign donors to Solomon Islands in the recent years.

The success of a programme such as the field-based based training programme funded by an outside donor depends on the mutual understanding and discussing especially at the negotiation stage of the project, between the
foreign donor and the country concerned. They need to discover through discussion what they can about what makes an effective programme work, and to initiate a bilateral dialogue to deepen their common understanding of how to create and/or support the project concerned (Salole & Evans, 1999, p. 3).

10.5.2 Recommendations

10.5.2.1 There is Need to Employ Additional Trainers

The findings of the present study showed that there was a need to employ more trainers to assist the existing officers who are working under trying circumstances and facing a variety of challenges. The field-based training programme has evolved to the stage that it is operating in all the provinces. Its success has resulted in a high demand from the different provinces to train the unqualified teachers teaching at their kindergartens. The best option is likely to be engaging two trainers in each of the regions to enable more teachers to be trained. This should help to alleviate the professional isolation that the trainers often face in their job, as they would have another professional to communicate with and share ideas and the workload. As this will depend on the availability of funds, it is important that the Solomon Islands' Government considers training for kindergarten teachers among its priority development areas, as persistent demands can create dissatisfaction among the communities and impose negative effects on the entire early childhood education sector.

10.5.2.2 Engaging in longer Teaching Experience

Although the majority of the teacher participants were confident and determined, the findings of this research showed that a few of them shared the areas which they were less confident to manage alone. Thus, it is proposed that the kindergarten educators who have successfully completed all the required modules of the field-based training programme spend more time on teaching practice before they can be recommended for certification by their coordinators.

While the others are on teaching practice, the teachers need to be assessed by their trainers. Each teacher should at least be observed and assessed three times before they can be considered for certification. The teaching practice period should be carried out and completed within a year after successfully completing the module component of the teachers' field-based training. This
should enable practitioners to gain more confidence, to practise and master the necessary skills they need to manage and facilitate children’s learning, to be creative in their planning and to understand and meaningfully implement what they have learned in field-based training in the classroom and the kindergarten setting. In summary, early childhood teachers must be competent and confident enough to apply what they have learned about kindergarten teaching without demonstrating occasional fear and self-doubt. It is important for practitioners to keep working hard to gain confidence and apply their classroom management skills with clarity and firmness.

10.5.2.3 Further Research

There are important gaps that should be addressed to more effectively respond to the educational needs of young children in Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands’ Ministry of Education has attempted to develop an information system and with the assistance of aid donors has also undertaken important national surveys in some areas in the education system. However, there are many other issues that need to be further researched, particularly in the early childhood education sector. One obvious gap is better understanding of the state of the early childhood education sector – the number of early childhood establishments, size, length of time in existence, staffing arrangements, administrative arrangements, specific problems and other related issues. This should also provide a better idea of training needs and the kind of demand that might affect the field-based training programme in the future.

10.5.3 Postscript

10.5.3.1 The prospect of a more Peaceful and Equitable Society being restored when the Values underpinning Early Childhood Education are accepted by most Citizens

Since the research fieldwork was completed in Solomon Islands in 1999, an ethnic and social conflict has erupted and engulfed Solomon Islands, and has placed the nation in disarray since then, as noted briefly in chapter two. The social unrest has uprooted and disrupted the lives of the people and has brought about divisions, tensions and dilemmas among the people in Solomon Islands, particularly the people of the two islands who were directly involved
in the ethnic crisis at the beginning. Although the crisis was initially between two inter-island and ethnic groups of people, it has impacted on the whole nation in many ways. Its negative effects have rippled through all areas of people's lives, particularly affecting the economic, educational, familial, social, political, cultural, moral, emotional and environmental domains in the lives of the people of Solomon Islands. The influence of the crisis on these areas varies in degree and density, but it is still profound in leading areas affecting people's needs and welfare, especially the economy, health and education sectors.

In relation to the economy of Solomon Islands, the effect of the ethnic tension has been extensive and it will continue to affect the people and the country for the next and upcoming years. The national economy was in a fragile and deflated state prior to the ethnic tension, and this has been compounded by the crisis. The infrastructure and human resources have also been affected because of the vulnerable economy, comprising an economic base of mixed subsistence farming and small-scale development as indicated in chapter two. Potentially, the early childhood education programme can contribute to improving the economic situation through kindergarten education in the long term. For example, children's contribution to increased economic productivity as adults can be nurtured in their early childhood education years. Research literature on majority nations has shown that intervention programmes supporting young children's cognitive and physical capacities lead to increased enrolment and improved progress and performance in school. School performance, in turn, has been associated with children's economic productivity when they become adults (Myers, 1992, p. 6).

The social crisis has seriously affected the education, health, and public service sectors. Since the height of the crisis, for example, teachers, police employees and public servants have had to wait longer to obtain their salaries. It is difficult for families, especially those residing in the urban areas who rely on the salaries of family members to care for their families. The relationships between families, particularly those people affected by inter-island marriages, are affected by the ethnic unrest to the extent that members of the same families are sometimes forced to separate because of their inter-island and tribal obligations. Many of these people have endured family separations, hunger, sadness and fear, with the process in turn undermining the Solomon Islands' communities and society. As ascertained by prominent Solomon Islanders, the
people's immediate need is to support the restoration of peace, bring about reconciliation, and promote forgiveness processes that have been advocated for the people of Solomon Islands. It is important that the people begin to rehabilitate the country and to live in harmony, by learning and adopting the process and virtue of forgiveness, with the support and encouragement of the Church, communities and village leaders. The Solomon Islands' Government has an obligation to the people to ensure that the peace process operated with the assistance of Solomon Islands' educational, economic and diplomatic allies and partners (Panakera, 2001), in particular the governments and people of New Zealand and Australia, is upheld, respected and honoured.

The early childhood education project and the field-based training programme have fared reasonably well in spite of the unrest. Even at the height of the crisis, the programme had continued to operate under the management and with the determination of the early childhood education coordinators, with the assistance of teachers, parents and members of the community. Although work was slow in the areas most affected by the social crisis, it did not prevent teachers from continuing their work with children, despite the challenging and difficult circumstances they encountered. Teachers and trainers ensured that the tension did not affect the early childhood programme to the extent it ceased to continue and operate in the communities within Solomon Islands.

The field-based training programme can play a significant role in promoting and restoring peace and harmony in Solomon Islands. In light of the effects of the ethnic crisis, the prospect of a peaceful and equitable Solomon Islands' society being restored will depend on the people of Solomon Islands recognising the values underpinning early childhood education and the field-based training programme for kindergarten teachers in Solomon Islands. For example, values such as believing in and encouraging quality, holistic, gender-inclusive learning experiences for kindergarten children; providing training for early childhood teachers; recognising children's cultural, social and ethnic diversity, identity and contexts; building supportive relationships among teachers, trainers, children, families and members of the community; forming partnership and linkages among teachers, parents and members of the community; and encouraging the cultural ideologies, beliefs and practices of respect, community spirit, caring for the elderly, welcoming strangers to one's family home, and instilling life virtues and traditions in young children.
When the people of Solomon Islands have consistently accepted these values and others in relation to the idea of early childhood education, the prospect of a more peaceful and equitable society can be achieved and should be fully restored throughout the country. The early childhood education programme has potential to bring communities together in the interests of young children and their learning. The enthusiasm that has been shown by teachers, coordinators, families, and the communities for early childhood education, and the ongoing positive effects of the field-based training programme will continue to encourage, highlight and enhance the values underpinning Solomon Islands-based early childhood education.

Similarly, the early childhood education field-based training programme can contribute to the promotion, continuation and enhancement of a culture of peace for Solomon Islands and its people in the long term. The vision, potential, values and positive effects of early childhood education in Solomon Islands are best described in the following excerpt by Panakera (2001), an academic from Solomon Islands.

Over-riding all else, we are one people and one country. The key objective of our country is that of a better quality of life for all those who live in all parts of Solomon Islands. That means safety and security, a preservation of personal and societal identity, appropriate economic development to achieve freedom from hunger, adequate shelter and the opportunity to develop the human potential of all. How these attributes might be delivered, and what they might consist of will vary across each province and village, but taken together they perhaps form an adequate vision of what we can achieve through partnership (Panakera, 2001, pp. 6-7).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Seymour, P. (1996). *Parents as teachers for indigenous American families in Phoenix and New Mexico; Parent support and early childhood education issues via the National Children’s Bureau, London; Parents as teachers, United Kingdom; The “community mothers programme”, a parent support programme, delivered via mothers of the community, Dublin: a Churchill Fellowship assisted project*. Wellington, New Zealand: Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter from Professor Anne B. Smith asking for Permission (on my behalf) to Observe at a Kindergarten in Dunedin (NZ) prior to the Fieldwork in Solomon Islands


[Name]
[Address]

Dear [Name]

I am writing to ask your permission for Joanna Daiwo to be a participant observer in your kindergarten for up to 3 weeks in morning sessions. Joanna is a Ph.D. student from the Solomon Islands and I am supervising her work. She is a trained primary teacher and has studied in both Australia and the United States. Joanna's study in New Zealand is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main part of Joanna's Ph.D. involves collecting information from kindergarten teachers (through interviews) and participant observation in kindergarten activities in a Solomon Islands context. She will be going to the Solomon Islands next year to collect data for her Ph.D. research (see attached information pamphlet).

Joanna would like to observe and participate in a Dunedin kindergarten so that she can practice the procedures which she will be using when she works in the Solomon Islands next year. This is intended as a pilot project only. We know that the kindergarten setting in Dunedin will be very different from the kindergarten setting in the Solomon Islands, but spending time in a Dunedin kindergarten will help Joanna get used to joining in and helping with kindergarten activities at the same time that she is observing. She will be observing by making notes about interactions between children and teachers and between children and children and about activities and events in the kindergarten. Joanna would also like to practice taping and transcribing conversations that take place in the kindergarten.

None of the data that Joanna collects at your kindergarten, will be used for her doctoral study. She needs only to practice the methods of collecting data. Any tapes which she makes will be wiped after Joanna has practised transcribing
samples from them. Notes and transcriptions of tapes will contain no identifying information about the children, teachers or kindergarten and will also be destroyed on completion of the study. If you have any questions about this pilot project please contact me at 479 5038.

Yours sincerely

Anne B. Smith
Director
Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

For the Solomon Islands’ Teacher Participants in my Research Study

(Note: I only needed to cover a bullet point if it had not already been covered in the answer to a previous question)

Background

• Introduce myself and explain why I want to interview them, try to make them feel at ease and make sure that they know that I am not checking on them.

• Start informally. Ask a general question about the person and their background (For example, “Tell me a bit about yourself and how did you come to be a kindergarten teacher”)

• Get background information for questionnaire (how long they have been teaching etc.).

Their Job as a Teacher (Roles, Responsibilities, Activities and Relationships)

• Ask them to tell me a bit about their job (Do you enjoy it or not and reasons why or why not, and which parts to do you enjoy most and least).

• What does the job involve?

• Who do you work with (colleagues, parents, community, supervisor, coordinator or trainer) and who does what, who is the boss, what chances do you have to make decisions?

• What are the hardest parts of the job for you?

• Do you think early childhood education is important (and why or why not)?

• Do you think training is needed for being an early childhood teacher (and the reasons)?

• Your relationship with children and adults you work with.

Training; Professionalism; Training Process; Curriculum Goals; Philosophy & Vision; Cultural & Geographical Context

• How and why you were involved in training (Open-ended question).
• **Satisfaction with training** (did you think it was worthwhile - if so why, if not why not).

• **Usefulness of training generally** (Ask about length, content, method of teaching and learning, delivery - that is the field-based training programme).

• Which parts were most useful and reasons why.

• Which (if any) were least useful and reasons why.

• Has the training **changed the way they do their job and how?** (Open-ended question).

• What were the **main ideas behind the training?** (Philosophy behind the training) - perceptions of the child; gender expectations; role of teacher; child-centred approach; use of play; discipline; curriculum goals.

• Has the training **changed the way you teach or work with children?** - the activities you do with children; whether the children get more choice of activities; whether they are involved in playing with the children; their relationships with children; their role with children (e.g. active versus passive, informal versus formal); how you discipline children; what you expect of children; whether you allow the children to take the initiative; your interactions with the children (e.g. do you praise the children more and punish them less?); the materials you use; your expectations of boys and girls.

• Has your training made any difference to what the children are learning and the children's enjoyment of being at kindergarten?

• Has the training **changed the way you work with families?** Your communication with families; the involvement of families in the kindergarten; your relationship with families; what families think about the kindergarten; how supportive and involved families are; whether families treat their children any differently when they see how the teachers treat them at kindergarten.

• Has the training **changed your professional role as a teacher?** - planning, evaluation, working as a team, goals, relationship with colleagues and community; who makes decisions; who is the boss; conflict with other teachers or harmony and friendships; meetings with other teachers; visits to other kindergartens.

• Has the training changed how you feel personally about being a teacher? Whether you are motivated or ambitious to go on learning; your goals for the future; your status in the community; how much do you enjoy your job?

• **How appropriate was the training programme to their Cultural and Geographical context?** - is the kindergarten programme useful to the local
people - why or why not; how isolated are they from the community; what does the community know about the programmes; does the community support the kindergarten; does the kindergarten programme influence on the local community in any way (e.g. attitudes to children), if so how?

- How do you feel about the involvement of New Zealanders in a Solomon Islands early childhood training programme?

- What suggestions do you have for improvements in the training programme?

- What suggestions do you have for improving the kindergarten programme for children, families and the community?

- What suggestions do you have for improving teachers job satisfaction and effectiveness?

- Do you have any final comments?

- Do you have any questions about my research study?
Appendix C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

For New Zealand-based Initiators and Designers of the Field-based Training Programme for Early Childhood Education Teachers in Solomon Islands

1. I am interested, first of all, in how the concept of developing a field-based training programme came about? What sorts of things had to be considered before choosing the idea? What role did you play in the planning stage? Were there other people involved in the planning stage? What role did they have to play?

2. Could you describe how and why you become involved in designing the field-based training programme?

3. How were Solomon Islanders involved in designing of the field-based training programme?

4. What were the goals of the training programme? Could you briefly describe these and give me your opinion on them? How have these goals been adapted to Solomon Islands needs?

5. How has the training programme suited the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographical context?

6. What is the philosophy of the field-based training programme?

7. What are barriers to successful implementation for things that made the process work?

8. Do you think this is the best possible model? (How successful is this model?)

9. How do you see it evolving? Does it have to be changed?

10. How do the Solomon Islands' people think of New Zealanders coming in to work in the Solomon Islands?

11. Are there any other things I have not asked about the training programme that you would like to share?

12. Do you have any final comments?
Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

For the National and Provincial Coordinators of the Field-based Training Programme in Solomon Islands

1. Could you describe how and why you become involved in coordinating the early childhood field-based training programme?

2. What role did you play in the planning stage of the field-based training programme? Were there other Solomon Islanders involved in the planning stage? What role did they have to play?

3. What was your vision for the Solomon Islands Early Childhood Education system? (National coordinator)

4. What is the philosophy of the Solomon Islands Early Childhood Education?

5. How has the field-based training programme suited the unique Solomon Islands cultural and geographical context?

6. In your view, what are (were) barriers to successful implementation for things that made the process work?

7. Do you think this is the best possible model? (Explain)

8. How do you see it evolving? Does it have to be changed?

9. How do you think of New Zealand people coming in to work in the Solomon Islands?

10. Are there any other things I have not asked about the early childhood field-based training programme that you would like to share?

11. Do you have any final comments?
Invitation Letter to potential Teacher Participants, and Consent Form indicating Willingness to Participate in the Study

8 October, 1998

[Name]
[Address]

Dear [Name]

I am currently studying in New Zealand at the University of Otago for my Ph.D. I have to do some research for my Ph.D. and will be returning to the Solomon Islands to do the fieldwork component of my research study in early 1999.

I am writing to ask if you would like to be a participant in the research study I am carrying out for my Ph.D. on teachers’ perspectives of the field-based training programme for early childhood education teachers (see information pamphlet attached). This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.

If you would like to ask any questions about the study, please write to me or my supervisor, Professor Anne Smith, at the above address.

If you would like to participate in my study please fill in and detach the form below and send your reply in the envelope provided to: National Coordinator, Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Honiara.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Daiwc (Ms)
Researcher

Name: .................................................................
Name of Kindergarten: ..................................................
Address: .................................................................
Would you like to take part in this project? □ YES □ NO
Thank you
Appendix F

RESEARCH PROJECT PAMPHLET

Field-Based Training for Early Childhood Teachers in the Solomon Islands

October 1998

Funded by the University of Otago, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (The Netherlands)

Field-based training for early childhood teachers in the Solomon Islands

Joanna Daiwo, supervised by Professor Anne Smith of the Children’s Issues Centre and Dr Bruce McMillan of the Education Department, is carrying out a study for her Ph.D. looking at a field-based early childhood training programme for kindergarten teachers in the Solomon Islands. The research involves Joanna talking to teachers who have experienced the training programme and taking part and observing in two kindergartens where trained teachers work.

Why is the Study important?

We want to find out how well this training programme has worked and how it has been put into practice in kindergartens on Kolombangara Island in the Solomon Islands. The training of early childhood teachers is an important way to improve the quality of early childhood education, but most previous research in this area has been carried out in North America, Europe and other developed countries. There is little published information about the involvement of trained teachers in early childhood education in developing or low income countries, so this study will add to the international literature. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the development of this training programme, and the programme developers have attempted to suit the programme to the needs and culture of the Solomon Islands. This type of intervention, if successful, could well provide a useful model for culturally appropriate intervention in the lives of children and families elsewhere in the Pacific. The study should also help to determine the directions of future modifications of the programme.

What will the Study involve?

Part 1 of the study will involve interviews with 12 kindergarten teachers from the Solomon Islands about their views of the training programme. Joanna Daiwo will travel to the Solomon Islands in early 1999 and talk to 12 teachers who recently trained in this programme. She is interested in which parts of the programme worked best for teachers (and if there were any parts that did not work so well), and how teachers feel the programme has affected their work in the kindergarten. Joanna hopes to talk to
teachers twice (after kindergarten hours if possible) at their kindergarten, during her 3 month visit to the Solomon Islands in 1999. Joanna will also be talking to the people who developed the training programme and to the Solomon Islands National Coordinator of the Training Programme.

During Part 2 of the study Joanna plans to spend time in two kindergartens (about 3 weeks in each kindergarten) on Kolombangara Island getting to know how two teachers have used their training in their kindergarten programmes. Joanna will join in with kindergarten activities and talk to children, teachers, parents and members of the local community. She will be making notes and recording some of the talk and activities that take place in the kindergarten and writing these up for her thesis.

How will the Participants' Privacy be Protected?

When Joanna writes up the findings of her study (for her thesis and for any publications she writes) she will not use the real names or any identifying information of the teachers, kindergartens, children, parents or community members who participate in the programme. Only Joanna Daiwo and Anne Smith will know the names of the participants and they will keep these private. The data will be stored securely and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any stage. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. The research has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago.

Participating in the Project

Joanna plans to write to teachers who meet the criteria for Part 1 of her study (successful completion of the requirements of the Introductory Early Childhood Certificate) and ask if they would like to take part in her study. She will choose 6 teachers from the first graduates of the training programme and 6 from the second graduates of the training programme. Joanna will select teachers (from those who are willing to talk to her) on the basis of the convenience and ease of reaching the kindergartens where they work, and from teachers who work in a range of kindergarten settings. Geographical accessibility and variety will also influence Joanna's selection of 2 kindergartens for Part of her study.

If potential participants have any questions about the study they can ask Joanna directly, or they can ask the Provincial Early Childhood Education Co-ordinator or the National Co-ordinator of the Training Programme.
Appendix G

Consent Form from Ethics Committee for Teacher and Administrator Participants

Application Form for ethical consideration of research and teaching proposals involving human participants

Field-based Training for Early Childhood Education Teachers in the Solomon Islands

CONSENT FORM FOR

Teacher and Administrator Participants in the research study

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Interview tapes will be destroyed after they have been analysed and transcribed, but interview transcripts and research notes on which the findings of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which they will be destroyed;
4. I understand that the findings of the study will be treated in strict confidence and that I will remain anonymous. Within these restrictions, findings of the study will be made available to me at my request;
5. Any personal information gathered during the study will be confidential and will only be seen by the researcher, Joanna Daiwo, and her supervisors;
6. The findings of the project will be written up as a thesis for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and may be used in seminar and conference papers, but my anonymity will be preserved in all cases.

I agree to take part in this project.

(Signature of participant) (Date)
This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago
Appendix H

Questionnaire Form for Teacher Participants

Application Form for ethical consideration of research and teaching proposals involving human participants

Field-based Training for Early Childhood Education Teachers in the Solomon Islands

QUESTIONNAIRE FORM FOR

Teacher Participants

1. Name: ..................................................

2. Gender: Female / Male: ..............................

3. Date of Birth: (Day / Month / Year): ................. 4. Age: ..........

5. Home Province: ..........................................................

6. Education: Highest Level reached, e.g. Form 3: ...........

7. What year did you start working in an Early Childhood Centre?

............... 

8. Did you start working in an Early Childhood Education Centre before or after your training?

.................................................................

9. What year did you begin the ECE Field-based Training Programme?

............... 

10. What year did you complete your Training?

.................................................................

11. Have you done any other kind of ECE courses? YES: ........ NO: .......

If Yes, please write name of Course (s) and year (s) completed: ...........

.................................................................

12. Who is your Employer?: e.g. Temotu Province, Anglican Church: ...... 

.................................................................
13. How long have you been Teaching?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Otago
Appendix I

The Research Plan within Solomon Islands: 13th March to 25th June 1999

1. 13 March 1999- Arrive in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

2. 14 to 22 March 1999- Work in Honiara. Meet national coordinator and Director of Primary Education, who is also responsible for the Early Childhood Education sector. Interview some participants in Honiara (town). Collect relevant documents from the Department of Education and from the National Co-ordinator. Organise air ticket to Gizo. Organise food ration for Western Province.

3. 23 March 1999- Travel to Gizo, Western Province. (See Time Line for Western Province).

4. 18 April 1999- Return to Honiara.

5. 19 April to 3 May 1999- Interview student teachers who have completed the Field-based training programme.

6. 4 May 1999- Travel to Auki, Malaita.

7. 5 to 16 May 1999- Complete interviewing the student teachers at SICHE.

8. 17 May 1999- Travel to KiraKira, Makira Province.

9. 21 May 1999- Return to Honiara.

10. 24 May 1999- Travel to Tulagi, Central Province.


12. 2 June 1999- Travel to Santa Cruz, Temotu Province.


14. 17 to 25 June 1999- Talk to some other people who are interested in giving their views, including parents, teachers, Education Officers, Government Officials.

Appendix J

Fieldwork Time Line

Western Province Research Segment: 4 Weeks

1. 23 March 1999- Travel to Gizo, Western Province.
2. 24 March 1999- Meet Chief Education Officer and other Officers in the Education Officer at Gizo.
3. 25 March 1999- Visit 3 Kindergartens on Gizo Island, Observe teachers and children at work, and talk to kindergarten teachers.
4. 28 March 1999- Travel to Rarumana Island.
5. 29 to 30 March 1999- Interview the people (chief, pastor, women, kindergarten teacher, chairperson of kindergarten centre, preparatory teacher) of Rarumana Island.
6. 30 March 1999- Travel to Pinadapada Island. (Late afternoon & evening)- Interview kindergarten teacher and talk to members of the community.
7. 31 March 1999 - Travel to Baraulu Island. (Am)
8. 31 March to 1 April 1999- Interview kindergarten teachers; preparatory teachers; community people (local politician, Church Pastor, Government worker, some women & men, chairperson) of Baraulu Island.
9. 2 to 5 April 1999- Easter holiday.
10. 5 April 1999 (pm)- Travel to Nusabanga Island in Roviana Lagoon.
11. 6 to 8 April 1999- Participant observation to be carried out at Nusabanga Kindergarten. Interview teachers as well.
12. 9 April 1999- Travel to Gizo via Munda.
13. 11 April 1999- Travel to Kena - Kolombangara Island.
14. 12 to 17 April 1999- Observe teachers and children at work; participate at Kena (Kolombagara) kindergarten. Interview teachers and community people (chairperson, women, members of kindergarten Committee, Church leaders and Pastors, Government worker and Chief).
15. 17 April 1999- Return to Gizo. Interview Western Province Early Childhood Education coordinator or trainer.
16. 18 April 1999- Return to Honiara.
Appendix K

About the Pidgin Language

Pidgin is a language spoken in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Solomon Islanders use a variety of languages ranging from tribal languages to English and pidgin. Pidgin is an integral part of the Solomon Islands history and culture, although English is the official language. There is no official pidgin language despite the fact pidgin is spoken widely throughout Solomon Islands. However, not every person speaks pidgin. Solomon Islands pidgin can be perceived as a simple language as many words are similar to, or an extension of English. For example, the word anchor in pidgin is pronounced virtually the same and is spelled *anga*. The term *angarem* means to anchor. However, pidgin can also be confusing to the learner, as there are examples of where one pidgin word has two different meanings. For example, the word *bonem* can describe or refer to a baby being born or to burn something.

A Representation of Pidgin Versions of Key Participants' Interview Excerpts

(The Names are fictitious, to retain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants)


My field-based training has helped me to develop confidence and to help others understand what is early childhood education and why it’s important, especially in the villages and within schools. Many mothers do ask how they could help us teachers by what they are trying to do with their child at home,
extending the child’s interests while he or she is at his or her home environment. I realise that early education is really an important area that mothers and fathers should learn about more. Children don’t wait until they start their education before they begin to learn. Children are already learning something from the different activities they are doing with their family at home. Parents are aware that it is their responsibility to build their children’s learning at home before children start kindergarten, so sometimes all it needs is a little push and encouragement from teachers. I believe that learning for children starts at home before they come to school. So that’s the reason why I also have a strong urge to help families and members of the community (Laura, Interview: 11-05-99).

Alison: Taem mi duim fil-bes trening blong mi, mi stat fo ting olketa nogud samting mi duim bifo mi tis as kinda tisa hem no tren. Nao, mi kam fo save gud dat enkarasing pikinini fo waka had long laning blong olketa hem helpem olketa fo tingim abaat olketa bigi fala samting long laef long bigfala we. Disfala trening hem helpem ting ting blong mi tumas nao, miting mi save staka samting nao long saed blong tising long kindi, staka idia abaat pikinini, hao hem impoten laning and grou blong pikinini hem reli impoten, espesili long faefala eria fo gron. Sentaem, trening blong mi hemmek wodemli mi save bigifala go mo, espesili fo save gud olketa samting abaatom pikinini an hao loketa gron. Hem olso helpem mi fo save hao tu wakem tising we blong mi an hao tu tisim olketa pikinini. Fil-bes trening stael hem help tumas tu long stak samting an dis taem mi fil confidens olsem tisa hu save tis long eli chalhud edikeson. Disiaem, mi luk afta gud kindi blong mifala, espesili long administrating saed blong kinda senta (Alison, Interview: 25-03-99).

When I did my field-based training, I thought about all the bad things I used to do as an untrained teacher. Now I have come to realise that encouraging children to work hard at their learning will help them to think seriously about things in life in a big way. This training has helped my thinking greatly. I think I know a lot now, about how to teach in kindergarten, lots of ideas about children, how children’s learning and development is really important, especially in the five areas of development. At the same time, my training has made me to want to learn more, especially to learn and understand more about children and how they grow. It also has helped me to learn how to teach and how to teach young children. Field-based training style has helped me a lot too in different things and this time I feel very confident as a teacher who understands well early childhood education. This time I am looking after well our kindergarten, especially in the administration side of kindergarten centre (Alison, Interview: 25-03-99).

Molly: Trening blong mi hem sensim wanem mi duim an tingim. Wanem mi minim olsem, bifo mi duim trening blong mi, mi save koros quiki taem, bata nao mi andastanem hao fo waka wetem olketa simol pikinini an mi save kontrolemi mi seleva. Hem olso heplemi mi tu fo lanem hao fo peisend wetem misileva an mi sens tumas nao an mi laekem olsem. Hem mekem strong wanem mi save abaat impotens an wae nao mi mas rispektem evri pipol. Mi save evri wan: long iumi pipol, iumi sipesol long on we blong iumi. Dis kan ting ting hem helpem mi fo sensim ting ting blon mi abaatom pipol, long waka blong mi osem kindi tisa. Wanfala samting tu olsem, fil-bes trening hem helpem mi fo chens an fitim waka wetem enikaen pipol. Fo ekamkol, taem mi wetem pikinini, mi save akt fo fiti sitiweson mi waka. Den, taem mi wetem
My training has changed what I am doing and thinking. What I mean is that before I did my training I used to get angry quickly, but now I understand how to work with children and control myself. It also helped me to learn to be patient and I have changed greatly and I like it. It has strengthened my understanding of its importance and why I must respect all people. I know everyone of us is special in our own way. This way of thinking has helped me to change how I think about people in my work as a kindergarten teacher. One other thing is that field-based training has helped to enable me to deal with all kinds of people. For example, when I am working with young children, I behave to fit the situation I am working in, then when I am with bigger children I act differently and it is the same with when I am with adults. I think I am like that now because my field-based training has helped me to change for good and I understand what it means (Molly, Interview: 07-04-99).

I think kindergarten education is helping young children to develop confidence when they are still small and is encouraging boys and girls to learn together. Children’s education has helped the idea for kindergarten boys and girls to learn something good together. Early childhood education also recognises children with disabilities to attend school with other children. Disable children feel good because they are part of the kindergarten community and they are learning with able children. Disable children feel they are part of Solomon Islands. So they are helping schools, families and the community with their happy attitude and how they are attending and becoming part of the kindergarten community. But for disable children to continue with their own lives and to help children of that nature to live like other people of Solomon Islands in the future, teachers, parents, families and communities must work together as one group. I think the idea of early childhood education has made new and effective learning for everyone. Children, teachers, families, parents, communities and all people in Solomon Islands (Lilly, Interview: 07-04-99).
Appendix L

STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME

This field-based teacher education programme consists of five modules. Each module contains four components - 20 hours of contact time with a trainer and another 20 hours made up from reading, assignments and practical work in a kindergarten.

The modules will be studied as shown below. The module on Language and Culture will be studied at the same time as the other modules.

PROGRAMME

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

WORKING WITH CHILDREN

LEARNING AREAS

MANAGEMENT

Description of Modules

1. Child development – a focus on children as learners, development of resources to support children’s learning.
2. The learning areas – a description of what to do and how to go about programming – developing resources in each learning area.
4. Culture and language – a focus on increasing students’ knowledge of culture and language.
Also, the making of appropriate resources is included in this module.

5 Management and administration of kindergarten programmes. Also, working with parents is included in this module.