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The ideal early childhood teacher? Discursive constructions of professionalism in ECEC policy in Aotearoa

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In policy, teachers are persistently positioned as central to improving the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC). They are frequently the targets for policy reform that proactively seeks to shape teaching priorities and practices. The constructions of teachers in policy shape notions of ideal professional identities, opening up spaces for certain identities and closing spaces for others. This critical discourse analysis of seven key ECEC policy texts assembles a range of discourses to identify and critically examine two prevalent and distinct 'ideal' professional identities for early childhood teachers: The Professional and The Kaiako.

Keywords: ECEC policy, critical discourse analysis, teacher identities, professionalism

Introduction

In policy, teachers are persistently positioned as central to improving the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC). They are frequently the targets for policy reform that proactively seeks to shape teaching priorities and practices. Over the last three decades, ECEC policy has focused on the professionalisation of the sector through attention to qualifications, external and interview review processes, and competency frameworks. While policy has focused on teachers as an important factor in improving the quality of ECEC, government investment in the sector has fluctuated and a market-approach has largely characterised provision. These dynamics mean teachers are subject to multiple, shifting and often conflicting demands. The focus on professionalisation in policy arguably results in improved recognition for ECEC teachers but also has a regulatory effect. Policy shapes notions of ideal professional identities, opening up spaces for certain identities and closing spaces for others, in a process Archer (2022) identifies as discursive closure.

Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), specifically Gee's (2018) seven building tasks and associated critical questions, I examine how ideas about professionalism and preferred professional identities are discursively constructed across seven key ECEC policy texts from 1988 to 2019. The analysis assembles a range of intersecting and interanimating discourses to identify two prevalent and distinct 'ideal' professional identities for early childhood teachers: The Professional and The Kaiako. The Professional emerges from the prevalence of neoliberal discourse in policy texts inviting teachers to be forward-focused, consumer aware, innovative, and highly accountable. The Kaiako is shaped through the strong influence of *Te Whāriki*, the national ECEC curriculum, its relational focus, and discourses of biculturalism and participatory democracy across policy

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texts. The complexities, opportunities and constraints of these identities are examined, including how each delimits possibilities for being a teacher.

Professional identities and discourse

Teachers' professional identities encompass their perceptions about the purposes of their work, their commitments and priorities, the practices they privilege and their relationships to those around them. This study is underpinned by an understanding that professional teacher identities are discursively constituted, fluid and strategic. It takes up Gee's (2018) position that identities and discourse are opposite sides of the same coin: "Identity is someone enacting a discourse, and a discourse is a historical process and set way with words, deeds, and things that allow people to enact socially recognisable identities" (p. 132).

The discourses that pervade and shape the sector produce and regulate how we understand the practices and purposes of being an ECEC teacher and are especially powerful when mandated through policy. Research increasingly acknowledges the influence of policy discourse on the professional identity construction of early childhood teachers (Archer, 2022; Arndt et al., 2018; Osgood, 2012) who negotiate their identities by taking up, resisting or innovating a position in response. However, the preferred professional values, competencies and attributes communicated in policy can also be uncritically performed by teachers, depending on their ability to recognise their positioning and to see alternatives. This study uses CDA to examine the role that policy discourse plays in shaping teacher identities, to "render the norms and hierarchies of discourses visible" (Chan & Ritchie, 2020, p. 225) to open up spaces for multiple and more inclusive ways of being a teacher.

Critical discourse analysis

CDA provides the methodological and analytical framework for this study. Rogers (2011) describes CDA as "a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of discourse in the construction and representation of this social world, and a methodology … to describe, interpret and explain such relationships" (p. 3). While there are various methods and approaches to CDA, all highlight the political, constitutive and performative elements of language and discourse. CDA begins with the assumption that language is always shaped by and constitutive of specific social practices that "have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, distribution of social goods, and power" (Gee, 2011, p. 32). A significant locus of ideology, discourses seek to assert one correct reading of an issue and this becomes the naturalised way of seeing, being and doing in the world (Gee, 2014). Archer (2022, p. 2) identifies CDA as affording "opportunities to identify and name dominant institutional discourses which seek to create discursive closure around the 'ideal' early educator professional identity." This CDA examined how power is consolidated through policy discourse to shape preferred ECEC teacher identities in Aotearoa, recognising the often covert ways this occurs.

Gee's seven building tasks

The analysis for this study uses Gee's (2014) seven building tasks summarised in Table 1. Each building task represents a different way that language is used to build and naturalise meaning. Each has an associated critical question designed as an analytical entry point to examining text. Gee (2014) likens the use of these to "reverse engineering" with each task assisting in taking the text apart, revealing how the parts function alone and together to

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create dominant meanings and conventions, including the values, activities and norms that a teacher needs to enact to be recognised. Each task helps to explicate a different aspect of the mean-making process — the different ways that discourses constitute and construct the purposes of ECEC and the preferred practices and professional identities of teachers.

Table 1

Gee's (2014) seven building tasks for CDA

Significance	How does this piece of language make certain things significant or not, and in what ways?
Practices	What practices or activities is this piece of language being used to enact? How are these practices normalised by social groups or institutions?
Identities	What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact or seeking to enact for others?
Relationships	What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?
Politics	What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?
Connections	How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things? How does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?
Sign Systems and Knowledge	How does this piece of language privilege or deprivilege specific ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge?

Policy selection

Seven policy texts from across important ECEC policy eras critical to the sector's development were chosen. Each policy is considered significant in influencing the sector, either as a policy blueprint for sector development or, in the case of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b; 2017), as a curriculum document with significant influence on ECEC teachers' daily work. In each policy, teachers are positioned as doing significant ideological work on the government's behalf, and discourses about teachers and teaching are interwoven with larger social and economic discourses (O'Neill, 2005). The decision to choose big policies from a number of different eras allows the historical emergence of different official discourses to be identified and explored. Each of the policies selected contribute substantially to the foundations of a policy architecture that shapes contemporary ECEC in Aotearoa. Each policy varies in the type and extent of consultation with the sector and its reception and impact. The stories of these policies, including the processes of producing them are important context (May, 2019). Nevertheless, they are "windows" into the official discourses in circulation at the time, illuminate the effects of shifts in power/knowledge on teachers and are recognised for their capacity to set discursive boundaries for how teaching work is understood. Tracing how particular discourses emerge and gain (or lose) power over time illuminates the effects of shifts in power/knowledge on teachers and opens up ways to consider losses, gaps and silences.

An overview of each policy is provided in Table 2, including the title, author, type of policy text and a summary. The final column identifies the implications of each document

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for teachers, emphasising the professionalisation of the ECEC teaching workforce in policy over time.

Table 2

Policy Texts For Analysis

Year	*Document title and author*	*Document type and summary*	*Implications for teachers*
1988	*Education to Be More. The Report of the Early Childhood Working Group* (*ETBM*) (ECCEWG, 1988)	***Advisory document*** Identifies five areas for immediate improvement: the status of the sector, equity of access to services, self-determination of Māori, status of women, inequitable funding structures. Argues for increased government intervention and investment in ECEC. *ETBM* recommended significant changes to ECEC policy and administration of ECEC.	Suggests equal role and standing for childcare and kindergarten teachers. Emphasises the educational potential and purposes of childcare. Recommends increased training and development for childcare workers. Positions teachers as in partnership with parents, and as important to cultural transmission.
1988	*Before Five. Early Childhood Care and Education in New Zealand* (*Before Five*) (Lange, 1988)	***Government report*** Takes up most of the recommendations in *ETBM*. Focuses on equalising funding across ECEC services.	Suggests increased expectations for training and development of teachers.
1996	*Te Whāriki: He Whāriki mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum* (*Te Whāriki*) (MoE, 1996b)	**Curriculum document** The first national curriculum document for ECEC in Aotearoa. The result of wide consultation with the sector and a partnership between the writers and the Kōhanga Reo National Trust. Described as nonprescriptive, bicultural and sociocultural. Communities weave their own curriculum from four principles and five strands.	Arguably offers teachers increased status. Expectations that teachers understand and work with the complex underpinning ideas in *Te Whāriki* including sociocultural theory and bicultural pedagogies. Expectations that teachers work with families and communities to construct curriculum.
2002	*Pathways to the Future. Ngā Huarahi Arataki: 2002–2012. A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (*Pathways*) (MoE, 2002)	***Policy planning document*** First strategic plan for the sector underpinned by three strategic goals: to promote participation, to improve quality, and to enhance collaborative relationships. Introduced qualification targets and professional registration goals for teachers, centre-based research, self-review processes.	Focuses on the professionalisation of the sector through qualifications, research-informed practice and self-review processes.
2011	*An Agenda for Amazing Children. Final Report of the ECE Taskforce* (*Agenda*) (ECE Taskforce, 2011)	***Advisory document*** Commissioned by incoming National Government. The Taskforce was asked to "identify a future state for early childhood education" in Aotearoa and include recommendations that did not increase expenditure. Makes 65 wide-ranging recommendations for ECEC that focus on results-based targeted social funding.	The attendant implications for teachers were a tightening of accountability practices including internal and external evaluation processes as well as an emphasis on best-evidence practices, innovation and research.

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2017	*Te Whāriki: He Whāriki mō nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum* (*Te Whāriki*) (MoE, 2017)	***Curriculum document*** Retains the principles, strands and goals. Refreshed design, updated context, language, examples, and implementation advice. Fewer learning outcomes (118-120). Kaupapa Māori, Pasifika approaches and critical theories added to sociocultural theory as underpinning theories and approaches.	Teachers are referred to as kaiako. *Te Whāriki* includes a section on the responsibilities of kaiako which suggests that their primary responsibility is to facilitate learning and development.
2019	*He Taonga Tamaiti. Every Childhood A Taonga. Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* (*Action Plan*) (MoE, 2019)	***Policy Planning Document*** A ten year action plan, aligned with the strategic vision for the wider education sector. The plan as 5 main objectives and 25 actions centred around a focus on child and whanau wellbeing, recognition of culture and identity, equity of access and choice, quality of teaching and leadership, life-long learning and planned, sustainable provision.	Focuses on sustainability of the teaching workforce through recruitment, retention and development and mechanisms to improve salaries and work conditions. Diversity and cultural competence of teachers are highlighted as important. Renewed focus on returning to a fully qualified workforce.

Each of the policies in Table 2 is influenced by global and national social and economic discourses. They are part of and contribute to chains of discourse that overlap and seek to establish normative understandings (Fairclough, 2013). In turn, the boundaries and practices set in the policies analysed travel and are recontextualised through the production of a multitude of additional texts and resources, and these do further work to direct and persuade ideas about teachers and their work. These occur, for example, in the raft of national evaluation reports (e.g., Education Review Office, 2010); best-practice resources (e.g., Carr et al., 2004-2009); and competency frameworks (e.g., Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011). These kinds of texts are not included in the main analysis, but their messages and influences are considered as part of the implications of the policy discourses uncovered. Their relationships to the policies analysed and their work to create discursive closure around teacher identities is considered.

The analysis assembles seven prevalent and intersecting discourses: quality, human capital, social investment, innovation, privatisation, biculturalism, and democratic participation. Two prevalent teacher identities, The Professional and The Kaiako, emerge from the analysis, provide the structure for this article, and illustrate how policy creates discursive borders that attempt to shape the identities and conduct of an 'ideal' teacher (Archer, 2022). Each identity is nuanced and layered with complexities. I do not suggest that teachers can only take up one or the other or that these are the only two identities available, but recognise the potential for multiple alternatives, creativity and contestation in the ways that policies are interpreted and enacted in particular contexts and by individual teachers.

The Professional

The Professional is evident in the marshalling of particular ideas that constitute a professional ECEC teacher: skilful, qualified, quality-focused, innovative and accountable.

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This section begins with creating a singular ECEC teacher identity in policy, culminating in the acceptance of ECEC teachers as full members of the wider teaching profession. Next, the ways in which the discourses of quality, human capital and social investment, privatisation and innovation assemble and intensify across the texts are examined.

Constructing a professional early childhood teacher

The identities building task tracks shifts in nomenclatures and the positioning of teachers in policy. Prior to *Education To Be More* (*ETBM*) (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988), the sector was made up of a complex variety of services and titles including increasing politicised and unified childcare workers and kindergarten teachers. Each group was positioned differently, with different services maintaining a different focus. *ETBM* uses the term early childhood teacher to argue for the inclusion of care *and* education in all ECEC settings and for "skilled early childhood teachers" (p. 36) to optimise the many educational and social benefits of ECEC. The notion of a professional teacher continues in *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki: 2002-2012* (Ministry of Education, 2002), which sets out a strategy for a fully qualified sector and requirements for professional registration, pointing out that this requirement puts all ECEC teachers on the same level as "the schools sector and kindergarten" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 8). After fluctuations in government commitments to these ideals, they are picked up again in the *He Taonga Tamaiti: Every Child a Taonga. Action Plan 2019-2029* (*Action Plan*) (Ministry of Education, 2019), which renews commitment to the importance of moving towards a fully qualified sector, the necessity of teacher registration, and the associated accountability processes. The construction of a professional early childhood teacher in policy offers an elevation in status, inviting ECEC teachers to see themselves as a part of the wider teaching community with shared values, responsibilities and understandings of practice governed by a national body, the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (TCANZ), and defined in documents such as *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). Such alliances inextricably engage teachers in commitments to further regulation, measurement and accountability. They may also make it harder for teachers to critically engage with the limitations of standardised messages about teaching or with alternative priorities such as those shared with their communities.

Quality, human capital and social investment discourses

A repeated issue identified across the policy texts is the need for the "continuous improvement of quality" in ECEC (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 163). As Dahlberg et al. (2007) point out, the notion of quality itself is empty of meaning but becomes "inscribed with assumptions and values" (p. ix) as it is embedded in policy texts. *Pathways* (Ministry of Education, 2002) sets out five key strategies for improving quality, three of which are aimed at teachers. Issues of quality appear in eight of the nine key messages summarised on the first pages of *Agenda* (ECE Taskforce, 2011). They frequently occur in *Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019) that identifies "high quality early learning provision as the right of every child" (p. 13). The politics and connections building tasks trace how quality ECEC comes to be connected to promises of long-term economic and equity gains and how teachers are rapidly established as "the solution" to better quality through "greater professionalism" (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 3) across texts.

The human capital potential of ECEC is strongly represented in each policy text. Human capital discourses centre on the long-term social and economic benefits of

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participation in 'quality' ECEC creating a strong justification for government interest and investment. Human capital discourses saturate *Agenda* (ECE Taskforce, 2011), which argues that "early investment in citizens will increase their ability to contribute to society as productive adults, equipped and willing to give more than they take" (p. 3) but can be traced in all ECEC policy texts that talk about ECE as a "critical cornerstone ... to a strong foundation for later learning and for life" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2) and for "quality life outcomes" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2).

Human capital discourse imposes a particular way of understanding the purposes of ECEC to economic ends. Persistent connections between human capital, quality and teachers suggest that teachers take up and be accountable to the economic priorities of human capital development as a critical focus of their work, setting the foundations for increased government interest in the activities of adults in ECEC centres. The result is a plethora of documents that define what quality ECEC looks like, and further govern teachers (e.g., Ministry of Education, 1996a; Education Review Office, 2016). Teachers are increasingly subject to managerial and performative technologies that focus their energies towards external processes and expectations (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2006; Education Review Office, 2013). These can seem desirable as they purport to offer teachers increased professional recognition and status and because the arguments that justify them draw on different discourses and agendas, including ideas about equity, well-being, choice and evidence-based practices (Biesta, 2017). Accountability can be understood in different ways; for instance, dialogically, as a relationship between teachers and the members of their community. While democratic orientations to accountability are also evident through messages about partnership and shared decision-making, the importance of such practices is weakened in policy texts which simultaneously direct teachers towards compliance with externally imposed expectations. The CDA reveals how governing bodies, such as ERO and TCANZ, increasingly take up neoliberal meanings of accountability through associations with predefined and standardised notions of quality. The significant tensions between democratic and neoliberal orientations in policy and the tensions these create for teachers are discussed later in this article.

Privatisation and choice discourses

Neoliberal discourse is also evident across policy texts through the assumption that a market approach will deliver the best services for children and families. Choice, organisational flexibility and diversity of provision are consistently presented as valuable features of the sector. Starting with *ETBM* (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988) statements about "real choices for families," "flexibility and diversity," and "responsiveness to consumer needs" (p. 5) are constructed across policy texts as a desirable social good. The rhetoric of a market-based approach to ensuring a diverse sector is unquestioned including in the revised *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), which explains that the "diversity of services and ownership structures" (p. 8) and "the large scale expansion of the early childhood education and care" (p. 8) has allowed parents and whānau to choose based on their "needs and preferences" (p. 8). The discourse of choice is underpinned by an assumption that provision will occur in a perfect exchange paradigm with well-informed consumers and an ethical, responsive marketplace. In *Agenda* (ECE Taskforce, 2011), problems with equitable access and poor quality are acknowledged, but the solution is to support parents to make better choices and through better regulation of teachers work. In *Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019) issues of equity of access and uneven supply are problematic because they impact parental choices.

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Action Plan (Ministry of Education, 2019) explicitly aligns with the Government's 10-year objectives for the wider education system, including a "world-class inclusive public education" (p. 15). However, this objective is interpreted differently in ECEC, where the focus is on a sustainable and "actively managed network" of private and community-based services to "maintain choice" for families (Ministry of Education, 2019 p. 15).

Ball (2007) warns that privatisation transforms conceptualisations of professionalism, including introducing entrepreneurial and managerial orientations to teaching work. The identities building task reveals how discourses of privatisation and choice actively construct ECEC centres as services for consumer parents and teachers as service providers. The policies analysed were silent about the issues that arise for teachers and families due to this dynamic despite these being well discussed in the scholarship (Vincent & Ball, 2006; Brooker, 2016; Osgood, 2014).

Innovation

Across policy, innovation is presented as a core educational value and practice. Innovation first enters the policy lexicon in *Pathways* (Ministry of Education, 2002) through statements that call for "ingenuity and innovation" (p. 15) in practice as the proposed solution to social and educational problems. Innovation is a significant measure of quality in *Agenda* (ECE Taskforce, 2011) where an attitude of innovation in teachers is proposed as the missing link to quality practice: "By innovating, individuals and organisations … learn to do better …. To move from a good early childhood system to a great one, we must all play a part in promoting, supporting and disseminating innovation" (p. 162). In *Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019): "The ability for teachers and leaders to innovate and improve, by drawing on new ideas and evidence of effective practice, is at the core of high-quality provision that contributes to equitable outcomes" (p. 23).

The license to be innovative has the potential to free teachers from issues of compliance and accountability, to be experimental and research focused and to address issues relevant to their local communities creatively. However, the language of innovation increasingly used in education policy travels from the business and private enterprise sectors linked to social *and* economic change in public and private services (Moffatt et al., 2016). As a discursive practice, innovation directs the attention of teachers to developing, replicating and disseminating practices that are evidence-based with assumptions that these can be applied equally successfully across populations and contexts. The dominance of innovation discourse in policy directed at teachers has led scholars such as Biesta (2017) to warn that evidence-based practices should not outweigh teachers' contextual knowledge and professional judgements. In policy, the possibilities for growth in innovative practice are promoted as endless, but opportunities for perceiving educational problems and for creative, experimental and responsive teaching practices are potentially narrowed.

In addition, when innovation intersects with the discourses and practices of the private sector, expectations that teachers also act in entrepreneurial ways to resolve the problems of provision and competition also arise. My own doctoral work (Gould, 2021), as well as that of Karmenarac (2019) suggests that many teachers now consider finding innovative ways of balancing the needs of the business and the needs of families and children as a significant focus of their practice and an important measure of their professionalism.

The discourses and discursive practices that construct The Professional resonate with Biesta's (2017) argument that the rise of neoliberal forms of governance in education

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has led to "three post-democratic distortions" (p. 319): the transformation of democratic conceptions of accountability into technical-managerial conceptions; the transformation of students into customers (or, in the case of ECEC, parents into customers); and the transformation of professional knowledge into "evidence," linked to evidence-based practice. Taking up the Professional Teacher identity encourages teachers to think of themselves as vital to policy success and to be highly accountable, forward-focused, innovative and consumer aware. In turn, teachers are rewarded through promises of increased recognition and status. The Professional Teacher identity, reiterated over time in policy and related documents, comes to be seen as a credible way to organise the sector and to understand professionalism. Increasing neoliberal and economic imperatives and the accompanying constructions of teachers make it more difficult for teachers to consider the historical, social or political factors that come to bear on their work because these fall outside the boundaries of neoliberal discourse and are less easily counted as important to good teaching.

Neoliberal representations of purposes, relationships, and practices in ECEC are only part of the policy story. Other ways of representing ECEC and teachers also exist. These discourses are more socially orientated, based on relational and participatory ideas about ECEC with roots in the histories of Aotearoa. These discourses' coexistence, interanimations and implications for practice and identities are examined next.

The Kaiako

This section presents and discusses findings related to constructing a teacher identity named The Kaiako. The policy analysis traces the construction of The Kaiako from the intersection of two additional prevalent discourses: biculturalism and democratic participation. Kaiako is also the preferred nomenclature, for individuals working in ECEC settings, of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). An additional analytical task in this section is to examine the use of kaiako in the curriculum, reveal the different ways its use positions teachers, and consider the implications for teacher identities. Although The Professional and The Kaiako are presented separately in this article, they are not considered entirely dichotomous. The layered meanings revealed through the two identities illustrate how teachers are positioned in multiple and, at times, contradictory ways across the policies. The section begins by examining statements in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) relevant to the use of kaiako. Primarily using the identities, practices and politics building tasks, I problematise the use of the term kaiako and reveal it to be a contested identity.

Who is The Kaiako in Te Whāriki*?*

The 2017 iteration of *Te Whāriki* picks up the nomenclature kaiako to replace "adults" used in the earlier iteration. Various definitions of kaiako are provided in the document. Kaiako is translated in the *Glossary of Māori and Pasifika Words* as "teacher" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 66). At first glance, such a direct translation might not warrant further examination. However, adopting a Māori term in a sector that is still largely monocultural in its make-up and practices is problematic. One danger is that the cultural meanings inherent in the word kaiako may be lost in its adoption by the sector, leaving the inclusion of the term in the curriculum open to criticisms of cultural appropriation or tokenism. Without careful explanation, shared understandings, and buy-in from across the sector, kaiako risks being imbued with the same hegemonic neoliberal versions of teachers and teaching work addressed earlier.

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Further examination of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) suggests that kaiako has been adopted to promote particular values and understandings of teaching practice. The use of kaiako is not exclusively applied to teachers (contrary to the suggestion in the glossary) but refers to "all teachers, educators and other adults, including parents in parent-led services, who have a responsibility for the care and education of children in an ECE setting" (p. 7) signalling a more collective intention. The revision of *Te Whāriki* occurred in the context of a considerably more professionalised sector. Teachers are asked to embrace a collective definition of kaiako while navigating their work and identities in a highly regulated sector, shaped by market demand and with a history of policy that has failed to commit to a fully qualified sector. In this context, the collective intent of the term kaiako risks conflating the knowledge and skills of qualified teachers and their unqualified colleagues. It obscures the issue of qualifications that have been ongoing in the sector. The different sets of expertise that teachers, parents and whānau bring to an ECEC setting are also downplayed.

The intentional and political choice of the term is further revealed in the statement that explains that the choice of kaiako was based on the "reciprocal nature of teaching and learning" it conveys "which is valued in this curriculum" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 7). Ako (kaiako) refers to both teaching and learning and conceptualises teaching as a reciprocal act that occurs in a relationship with the learner. Understandings of kaiako are further nuanced when they are placed alongside the choice of mokopuna (grandchild) to sometimes refer to children. Mokopuna is used to emphasise the "intergenerational connectedness" (p. 66) of the child to their whānau and tīpuna (ancestors). Together, kaiako, mokopuna and whānau position ECEC teaching practice within the relationships and contexts of the ECEC centre community and signal the valuing of Māori worldviews. Understood through these statements, the choice to use kaiako in the document is aspirational, connected to the bicultural and democratic discourse woven throughout.

Representations of kaiako in *Te Whāriki* shift again and are uncovered through the practices building task that reveals the kaiako to be a relational professional with recognised expertise and professional knowledge. The *Responsibilities of Kaiako* section in the curriculum document describes a teacher who is knowledgeable about "learning and development … the theories that underpin effective pedagogy … play-based curriculum and pedagogy [and] … domains of knowledge" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59). These statements clearly describe a qualified teacher positioned within Western pedagogical discourse, undermining the collective notion that anyone in a centre can be a kaiako. Kaiako are also "culturally competent: developing proficiency in the use of te reo and tikanga Māori" and "able to form responsive and reciprocal relationships," (p. 59) an "inclusive environment" (p. 59) and to "engage in dialogue with parents, whānau and family" (p. 59). Kaiako are positioned through multiple discourses and practices, each of which seeks to shape the identity of a kaiako in particular ways. Kaiako suggests a different position for teachers than "staff," the preferred and managerial nomenclature of *Agenda*, and opens up additional possibilities than the highly professionalised and regulated "ECE teacher" of *Pathways* and *Action Plan*.

Bicultural discourse

The term kaiako in *Te Whāriki* is also connected to the bicultural discourse prevalent across the policy texts analysed. Bicultural discourse includes expectations that teachers engage with Aotearoa's colonial past/present to promote particular values and practices.

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Bicultural discourse is threaded through key policy texts, governing practices and identities by holding teachers accountable for bicultural development and practices.

The prevalence of bicultural discourse in policy texts can be understood by examining the situated meanings which permeate the discourse. These are historic and political and include partnership arrangements in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the legacy of colonisation and contemporary neocolonial practices (significantly expressed through neoliberalism) and the negative impact on the wellbeing of the Māori people, language, culture and land (Skerrett et al., 2013). The influence of bicultural discourse in ECEC policy texts marks a shift away from the assimilatory and deficit discourses that have previously shaped policy approaches (Lourie, 2016). Bicultural discourse confronts and seeks to address historical injustices and the problem of monoculturalism embedded in the education sector. Such a shift is evident in *ETBM's* statement that ECEC is an essential site for "cultural survival and transmission" (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988, p. 6) and in both versions of *Te Whāriki,* which are explicitly political in their intent to assert the rights of Māori to maintain their language and culture, and to determine their own lives. The most visible indicator of this political commitment is in the bicultural structure of *Te Whāriki* which recognises the "distinctive roles of an identifiable Māori curriculum that protects Māori language and tikanga, Māori pedagogy, and the transmitting of Māori knowledge, skills, and attitudes through using Māori language" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 12).

The English version of *Te Whāriki* includes many statements asserting the need to address Māori identity, learning, development and wellbeing issues. Expectations that teachers include Māori whānau in decision-making, and promote and affirm Māori culture and language, are frequent throughout. As an example, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) notes that "particular care" (p. 40) should be taken to ensure that adults in ECEC settings "understand" (p. 40) and are "willing to discuss bicultural issues" (p. 40) and "seek Māori contribution to decision making" (p. 40). The revised *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) requires that curriculum design "recognises Māori as tangata whenua, assumes a shared obligation for protecting Māori language and culture, and ensures the Māori are able to enjoy educational success as Māori" (p. 6).

ETBM, Pathways, Action Plan, and both iterations of *Te Whāriki* include many statements that outline expectations that teachers incorporate te reo and tikanga Māori into their daily practices, illustrating that this has been a long-established expectation for teachers in ECEC. *Pathways* (Ministry of Eduction, 2002) sets out the expectation that teachers be "competent in te reo, at least being able to pronounce Māori names correctly" (p. 14) and that they "understand and acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori cultural values" (p. 14). *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) outlines a "shared obligation to protect Māori language and culture" (p. 6) by "developing increasing proficiency in the use of te reo and tikanga Māori" (p. 59). These agendas and priorities are affirmed in *Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019), which notes that increased accountability processes "will also help integrate te reo Māori into all early learning services" (p. 27).

The sign systems and knowledges building task illuminates the foregrounding of a Māori worldview in practice. Policy texts frequently promote practices that reflect a Māori worldview. This expectation is particularly strong in *Te Whāriki*, underpinned by a Māori philosophical and conceptual framework. The design and text of the original document make strong statements about the recognition of Māori children and families in all ECEC settings, the inclusion of Māori whānau, hapū and iwi in decision-making, and the promotion and protection of Māori language, values, and culture. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of

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Education, 1996b) elevates Māori knowledge, including "Māori views of child development and on the role of the family" (p. 41), "Māori definitions of health and wellbeing" (p. 46), and "Māori ways of knowing and making sense of the world" (p. 82). The revised *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) reiterates such messaging through the frequent use of whakataukī, more elaborate explanations of Māori ways of knowing and practices that explicitly highlight Māori considerations. The addition of Kaupapa Māori theory strengthens claims in the document about the central place of "Māori ways of knowing and being" (p. 61).

Through these consistently expressed expectations, the use of the Māori language and tikanga become officially sanctioned practices, the acceptable and desirable ways to be a teacher in Aotearoa. The choice of the nomenclature 'kaiako' potentially keeps these expectations to the fore of how teachers organise and understand their practices. However, performing the identity of The Kaiako is a significant challenge for teachers, many of whom are not sufficiently culturally competent to do so. The challenge is heightened because teachers' energies are also directed towards compliance with a range of other accountabilities, including those outlined earlier.

Bicultural discourse is further normalised in a raft of additional documents which outline specific expectations (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2012; 2020). In these documents, bicultural discourse intersects with the discourses of quality, human capital, and social investment through numerous statements that link bicultural commitments to ensuring that students "grow into confident, successful, culturally intelligent, bilingual adults who will make a positive contribution to New Zealand" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6).

Bicultural practice has become a performative expectation to which teachers and centre leadership are held accountable. The extent to which teaching practice is governed through bicultural discourse is evident in the development of competency standards for teachers, including *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011), *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017), and in strategies such as those outlined in *Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019) that "students in English-medium ITE (initial teacher education) programmes are assessed by the ITE provider on their competency in te reo Māori" (p. 27).

Bicultural discourse establishes normative and measurable values and practices based in ethical commitments to and relationships with Māori, their language, values and ways of knowing, being and doing (Ritchie et al., 2014). Such commitments are promoted as necessary to repair the previous marginalisation of Māori that has led to inequities. Bicultural discourse locates ECEC centres as important sites of bicultural development that ECEC teachers will facilitate. Bicultural discourse, particularly in *Te Whāriki,* suggests that teachers take up an identity that is localised, grounded in Aotearoa's particular histories and contemporary issues, but also in the unique mix of whānau and community matters in each ECEC setting. An important expression of this commitment is the inclusion of Māori whānau in dialogue and decision-making. The prevalence of bicultural discourse across the texts suggests that these ways of working are critical professional responsibilities for ECEC teachers to which they are held accountable.

Biculturalism poses some significant challenges. To have an effect, bicultural discourse needs to be taken up and enacted in ECEC settings and by individual teachers. There is evidence that teaching practices in this country are still largely monocultural (Education Counts, 2021). Bicultural discourse challenges teachers to move beyond their

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own cultural perspectives and "the hegemonic safe zone of traditional teacher-dominated practices" (Chan & Ritchie, 2016, p. 289). The expectation that teachers acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonisation is implicit in bicultural discourse but is an issue silenced in future-focused and individualised neoliberal discourses also present in ECEC policy. Further, the contingent nature of policy interpretation and enactment at both a centre and individual teacher level mediates the degree to which bicultural discourse can influence teacher identities (Ortlipp et al., 2011).

The Kaiako as a democratic worker

Bicultural discourse articulates expectations that teachers facilitate the inclusion and participation of whānau, hapū and iwi. These expectations are congruent with other messages about the purposes and priorities of teaching practice identified in the policy texts analysed. The politics and practices building tasks uncover the promotion of teaching values that focus on human and citizenry rights and equity expressed through inclusion, active participation, dialogue and collective decision-making. These values and practices reflect a discourse of democratic participation that is especially prevalent in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b; 2017). Practices that focus on participation and dialogue position teachers as democratic workers, an identity that aligns with the image of a kaiako expressed in bicultural discourse.

Working collectively and reciprocally with all the members of an ECEC community is a long-established expectation for ECEC teachers in Aotearoa. In *ETBM,* practices aligned to the values of democratic participation are found in statements such as "The ability to talk and communicate, share ideas, to interact on the basis of common understandings and trust is the ultimate tie that bonds us all together as a society" (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988, p. 15). In *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), expectations around decision-making and participation are also explicit, repeated throughout the curriculum document in statements such as "Working together for the common good develops a spirit of sharing, togetherness and reciprocity" (p. 36) and in expectations that each setting will weave a "local curriculum in collaboration with the centre community" (p. 7). These messages construct different relationships with families than those promoted through privatisation and quality discourses. In contrast, creating opportunities for dialogue and participation are produced as core teaching priorities, and promote discursive truths about the rights and capabilities of children and their connectedness to their families and communities as central ideas in the conceptualisation of teaching work.

Teaching is represented as a cooperative venture, an ongoing engagement with the unique blend of children and families, histories and wider contexts that infuse each community. Therefore, understandings of quality cannot be externally imposed, and best practice cannot be universally defined. This discourse produces the purposes of education, and the core responsibilities of teachers, to be about preparing citizens to actively participate in discussions and decision-making, honouring children's right and capability to be active participants in their own lives and education as they experience it. ECEC settings are constructed as spaces for "respect and reciprocity" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 62). In democratic discourse, understandings about teaching and curriculum are co-constructed in relationship with the members of the ECEC community, including children, opening spaces for contestation and debate about a range of critical and ethical questions. Successful democratic practice requires teachers that are in touch with and curious about their centre community, able to facilitate dialogue and

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participation and "work with others within and beyond their specific ECE context to enact curriculum" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 62).

These discursive constructions of teaching and teachers suggest a shift in how relationships between teachers, children and families are positioned. Children and families are not individualised consumers of education, and teachers are not tasked with responding to consumer demand. The purposes of ECEC are connected to wider issues related to equity and participation. They suggest high levels of professional trust and autonomy, a significant contrast to the image of technical and accountable professionals uncovered earlier. Such ideas sit uncomfortably alongside the construal of teaching as a highly regulated activity, with best practices defined through research and applicable across contexts.

Summary

The CDA traces how policy is used as an increasingly powerful way to organise and govern the work and identities of teachers (Archer, 2022). It demonstrates how each policy text is an arena "of multiple voices and forces" (Press & Skattebol, 2007, p. 182), resulting in multiple discourses and identities and subjecting teachers to multiple, intersecting and sometimes contradictory expectations. These complexities have been discussed by highlighting two prevalent identities: The Professional and The Kaiako. The distinctions and interanimations of these two identities are represented in Figure 1.

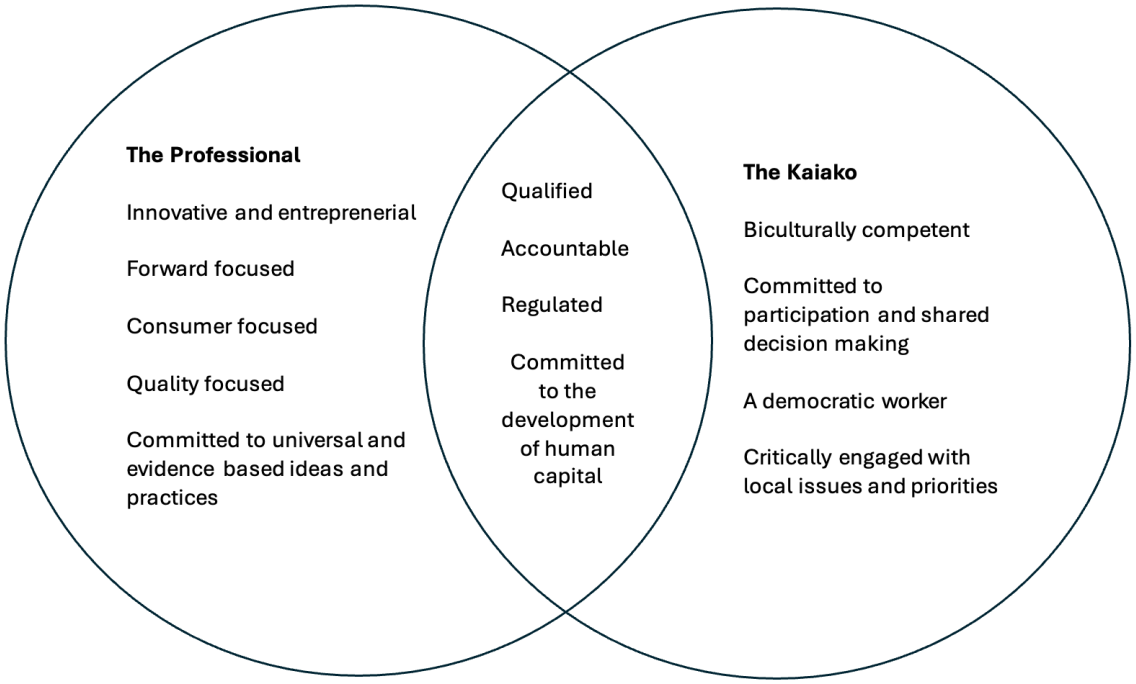

Figure 1. The Professional and The Kaiako

The Professional represents the prominence of neoliberal discourse across policy texts that invite teachers to be part of a global policy landscape in which the primary purpose of ECEC is to develop human capital. Teachers are invited to take up a specific construction of professionalism that focuses on qualifications, quality, and compliance with imposed accountabilities and consumer demands. The Kaiako is constructed through the prevalence of bicultural discourse and is evidence of a local policy story that imposes additional accountabilities and priorities. Bicultural discourse requires teachers to disrupt

the current power relations in which they are embedded, invite partnership and shared decision-making, and advance alternative knowledges. The intersection of biculturalism with a discourse of democratic participation offers teachers an identity grounded in local concerns and priorities and focuses on inviting participation and shared decision-making. Complications also occur through intersections between biculturalism and neoliberal rhetoric, which connect the bicultural agenda to ideas about human capital and social investment and draw bicultural practice into an accountability framework (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). The CDA reveals teachers are subject to the push and pull of these intersecting approaches. The extent to which teachers take up elements of The Kaiako identity or the identity of The Professional or align to different priorities altogether depends on their individual commitments, understandings of Aotearoa's histories, and the discursive resources available to them in their places of work. Previous scholarship has called for multiple, complex and critical conceptualisations of being a teacher (Archer, 2022; Ardnt et al., 2018). The critical negotiation of professional identities is possible when teachers understand their positioning within a range of discourses and can conceptualise alternative ways of being and doing. This policy CDA contributes to a sector able to engage critically with their positioning in policy, opening up spaces for alternative, multiple and inclusive ways of being a teacher.

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