



Democracy meets rangatiratanga: Playcentre's bicultural journey 1989-2011

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to trace the implementation of biculturalism in the New Zealand Playcentre Federation between 1989, when a public commitment to The Treaty of Waitangi was made, and 2011, when Tiriti-based co-presidents were elected.

Design/methodology/approach – The data were drawn from the *Playcentre Journal* and papers from Playcentre National meetings, as well as from the author's experience as a Pākehā participating in Playcentre. The events are analysed using democratic theory.

Findings – Despite a willingness to encompass biculturalism, the processes of democracy as originally enacted by Playcentre hindered changes that allowed meaningful rangatiratanga (self-determination) by the Māori people within Playcentre. The factors that enabled rangatiratanga to gain acceptance were: changing to consensus decision making, allowing sub groups control over some decisions, and the adult education programme. These changes were made only after periods of open conflict. The structural changes that occurred in 2011 were the result of two decades of persistence and experimentation to find a way of honouring Te Tiriti within a democratic organisation.

Social implications – The findings suggest that cultural pluralism within a liberal democratic organisation is best supported with an agonistic approach, where an underlying consensus of world view is not assumed but instead relies on a commitment by the different cultures to retaining the political association within the structure of the organisation.

Originality/value – Many organisations in New Zealand, especially in education, struggle to implement biculturalism, and the findings of this study could be useful for informing policy in such organisations. This history of Playcentre continues from where previous histories finished.

Keywords Education, New Zealand, Democracy, Biculturalism, Agonistic democracy, Aotearoa, Playcentre, Treaty of Waitangi

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The history of early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa/New Zealand is a story of community initiatives that have, over time, attracted increasing government funding and regulation. Playcentre is one of those initiatives, growing out of the progressive education movements of the 1930s and the need for mutual support for mothers during Second World War, a story well documented by Helen May (1997, 2009) and Sue Stover (1997, 1998a, b). Playcentre is a parent cooperative, where the parents are trained to manage the centres and be the educators on the sessions. It has a holistic approach where the education of the parents is valued as highly as that of the children, and therefore offers a parent education programme which can lead to the Playcentre Diploma in Early Childhood and Adult Education. This dual education focus has been present in the organisation almost since its inception (Stover, 1998b). In 1989, Playcentre was an accepted part of the diverse New Zealand ECE sector, along with kindergartens, early childhood care and education centres, ngā kōhanga reo and other Māori[1] language immersion centres, Pacific Island language nests, and playgroups.



Playcentres started in Wellington in 1941, and as soon as there were two centres the New Zealand Nursery Play Centres Association was formed. The idea of Playcentre quickly spread throughout the country, linking in with existing initiatives of similar philosophies, and soon more associations were established to support the growing number of centres. The associations ran autonomously, but came together to form the New Zealand Nursery Play Centre Federation (NZPF) from 1948 (May, 2009; Stover, 1998b). The Federation Standing Committee was the national voice and advocate for Playcentre, and the conferences set national policy and provided professional development for association personnel. Federation sub-committees developed to support associations with published educational resources, buildings and equipment requirement, the adult education programme, and public relations.

By 1989 Playcentre consisted of 639 centres which were affiliated to 29 local associations (seven in the South Island, 22 in the North Island^[2]) and a participatory democratic structure was well developed. Decision making at Federation level was seen as the responsibility of the associations, with Federation officers being directed in their roles by association delegates at national meetings. A similar structure operated at most associations, with elected officers being directed by centre representatives. Decisions were made using majority voting. The “grassroots” structure was highly valued within the organisation. It allowed a local flavour within a national organisation, and the ability to adapt to changing social and regulatory conditions.

Playcentre was vocal on social issues and its members were advocates for social change, particularly concerning the family. Stover comments on the way that Playcentre showed its social conscience:

Playcentres have taken on the flavours of their communities and the experiences of Playcentre over the past 50 years reflect the concerns and interests of their time. Recurring themes include the need for peace and non-violence; growing awareness of the ways in which humans thrive, and the converse awareness of how human capacities are restricted; and uniquely New Zealand issues surrounding the Treaty-based nature of New Zealand’s colonisation (Stover, 1998b, p. 7).

As part of this social conscience, issues relating to the Treaty of Waitangi^[3] became a major focus for the Federation from the late 1980s, a reflection of what was happening in the wider New Zealand society. From the 1970s there had been a Māori cultural renaissance (Hill, 2009) and an increasingly assertive Māori political voice. A recurring theme was that the government should honour the Treaty of Waitangi, which had legitimated the setting up of a British colony in New Zealand in 1840. The Treaty granted Britain the right to set up a government, the Māori the right to retain control over their land, culture and treasured things, and gave Māori equal rights with Pākehā^[4] as British citizens (Orange, 2004). After the signing of the Treaty there were many government breaches of this agreement, with the result that the majority of Māori were progressively dispossessed of their land, rights and resources, and reduced to poverty. The government set up the Waitangi Tribunal in 1976 to deal with grievances relating to the Treaty, and in the mid-1980s the government started incorporating reference to the principles of the Treaty in selected legislation. Tribunal reports on Māori claims were well publicised by the media, sparking much debate. As a result, in 1989 the Treaty was a topical social justice issue, albeit one which was poorly understood by the majority of the public^[5].

At that time the NZPF structure and processes were firmly based on Pākehā cultural principles. However, there were always Māori families involved in Playcentre,

particularly in the northern regions of New Zealand and in the rural areas, where the Māori population was greatest. Some of this involvement can be traced back to the 1960s, when the government set up the Māori Education Foundation (MEF) to promote education amongst Māori. Lex Grey, a Playcentre parent from Auckland, was employed as an ECE field officer and he was successful in supporting many Māori families to participate in ECE (May, 2009; Stover, 1998b). Although he did not specifically promote Playcentre, the family involvement with the Playcentre model aligned with the philosophical basis of Māori whānau[6], so that under Grey's influence and with the support of the Māori Women's Welfare League many predominant Māori Playcentres were opened in northern regions of the North Island. However, these Playcentres still had to operate within the overall Pākehā structure of the associations and Federation, and this caused a number of tensions. Therefore when the MEF field officers were disestablished in 1972 and support for these isolated centres was withdrawn, the Māori Playcentres decreased in number. A different initiative, by Māori and for Māori, started in 1982: Te Kōhanga Reo, or language nests, where the structures, processes and language of the organisation were based in a Māori world view. This was much more successful than previous efforts to involve Māori in ECE because it allowed for rangatiratanga[7] (Hill, 2009; Irwin, 2003; May, 2009) as opposed to trying to add a Māori dimension within a Pākehā organisation. Many of the earlier Māori Playcentres became Kōhanga Reo during the 1980s. Playcentre continued to involve Māori families, but on a lesser scale.

This was the context in 1989 when the Before Five ECE reforms, an integral part of New Zealand's neoliberal policy agenda, required all services to detail their commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi in their new charters[8] and Playcentre made a public commitment to biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi at their annual conference (Stover, 1998b). Over the next two decades Playcentre struggled to find ways to give effect to these commitments and to find ways to provide for rangatiratanga for Māori within the existing "democratic" structures. Many different proposals were put forward and debated, frustrations were high and superficial changes were many, and yet a fundamental change to biculturalism was slow in coming. Nevertheless, Playcentre persisted and in 2011 for the first time in its history Tiriti-based co-presidents were elected.

This article traces the Federation's bicultural journey from 1989 to 2011, from the commitment to the Treaty to the election of co-presidents. This is a story that has not yet been told[9], and the story I wish to tell is one that emphasises the emotion and turmoil that was experienced throughout this process. Democracy and rangatiratanga are both concepts which have links to fairness and social justice, and thus invoke strong passions amongst their supporters, but these concepts often appear to be incompatible with each other because of the discourse of "one law for all" (O'Sullivan, 2007). Every democratic organisation that attempts to become bicultural in a New Zealand context has to find a way to work through these tensions[10]. The emotional climate of the events is important as it affects both the decisions that are made at the time and long afterwards, as the emotion is remembered even when the specific arguments have been forgotten. Therefore this history of Playcentre is offered as a case study, as one way in which this conflict has been resolved despite – or perhaps because of – the strong emotions involved.

I will start by problematising democratic processes as an ideal, to show that democracy as practised by Playcentre was underpinned by a narrow understanding of the principles involved, and then outline the major events of the two decades under discussion. With the ground thus established, I will discuss how the democratic

processes of Playcentre were affected by attempts to introduce a greater degree of rangatiratanga both in the Federation structure and the adult education programme. The data have been gathered from the *Playcentre Journal*, the papers and minutes from the annual Federation Conferences and other national meetings[11], and previous histories of Playcentres (May, 2009; Stover, 1997; Stover, 1998a, b). The *Playcentre Journal*, as a widely circulated newsletter that tends to take a positive view of most events, whereas the minutes give more detail about the actual discussions that occurred. The minutes, however, do not seek to convey the emotional climate, an important part of any experience. These data therefore come both from my own involvement in Playcentre which has spanned 18 years at centre, association and Federation levels, and from multiple informal conversations with people who experienced these events first hand. As such, this is a predominantly Pākehā viewpoint, reflecting my own background and experiences, and it should be noted that a Māori viewpoint is likely to be very different (although hopefully complementary rather than contradictory).

Problematising democracy

Democracy means literally “rule by the people” (Birch, 2007), with “the people” supposedly including everyone in the polity and not just an elite group. It “entails the twin principles of *popular control* over collective decision making and *equality of rights* in the exercise of that control” (Beetham and Boyle, 1995, their emphasis). Nation states or organisations can be more or less democratic, depending on a large number of factors (Crick, 2002; Young, 2000). In particular, where conditions of structural inequality exist, the exercising of equal political rights by all is severely compromised and whole groups of people can be marginalised in the democratic process (Andersen and Siim, 2004; Beetham and Boyle, 1995; O’Sullivan, 2007; Young, 2000). Theorists advocating a radical democracy take as their premise the idea that democracy is the best political system for promoting social justice, but that it should be deepened to be more inclusive of all people in society and not just the dominant group (Mouffe, 1992, 2005; Young, 2000).

The processes of democracy have a significant influence on who is excluded. Robert Shaw (2011) argues that the phenomenological essence of democracy, as most people experience it, is the practice of voting. It is a way of making collective decisions where the important result is that the decision has been made, rather than the imperative that the decision is rationally arrived at or is the best decision in terms of the common good. Voting, as Shaw describes it, belongs to the aggregate model of democracy where decisions are made by aggregating individual decisions (Mouffe, 2005; Young, 2000). In contrast, a deliberative democratic model emphasises the dialogue and discussion that occurs in the political sphere that exists between political identities. The participants’ political identities are constructed in their actions and speech as they participate and receive feedback from others, which makes the political sphere a vulnerable place to be and involves a high level of emotion (Todd, 2011). For underrepresented groups this can be particularly difficult terrain, and therefore the passions aroused can be quite intense. Further, the norms of communication in the western-style democratic political sphere tend to privilege “an identification of reasonable open public debate with polite, orderly, dispassionate, gentlemanly argument” (Young, 2000, p. 49). Other forms of communication – passionate pleas, angry demonstrations, and emotional arguments – are discounted as not being valid. Again, this can be difficult for cultural groups whose modes of communication differ from that of the dominant culture.

Deliberative democracy has been critiqued for the assumption that a rational consensus is always possible and desirable. By emphasising harmony and unity, the role of dissent and difference in providing real choice in political decisions is overlooked or ignored (Jones and Hoskins, 2009; Mouffe, 2005; Young, 2000). Rather it is suggested that real change only occurs in the space that is opened by disagreement, and hegemony is only challenged when the consensus is fractured. Differences between groups may become invisible with some forms of deliberative democracy, but they do not disappear. The danger is that such suppressed differences will later erupt into antagonism in varying degrees of violence (Mouffe, 2005), something which is not generally a desirable outcome.

A third model of democracy which accounts for the inherent conflict of different groups within the polity is termed “agonistic” democracy (Mouffe, 2005), although some theorists see this as an approach within the deliberative model (Young, 2000). In an agonistic democracy, the idea of the possibility of a rational consensus is rejected. It postulates the presence of plural conflicting parties who see themselves as adversaries who challenge one another, as well as the hegemonic order, but not as enemies that must destroy each other; a struggle between adversaries who acknowledge the legitimacy of their opponents and recognise that they belong to, and are equally committed to, the same political sphere (Mouffe, 2005). The political sphere becomes, in Sharon Todd’s (2011) words, “not so much a space for conflict resolution, or for conflict aversion, but one for conflict articulation” (p. 111). An agonistic approach to democracy offers the possibility of a truly pluralistic system where differing groups can be fully included in the political decision-making process.

Overview: Playcentre from 1989 to 2011

Democracy in Playcentre

Playcentre has a long tradition of democracy. The features of democracy as enacted by Playcentre at the beginning of the 1990s included a strict adherence to formal meeting procedure as outlined in Renton (2005) and a flat hierarchical structure that theoretically gave equal input into decision making for everyone (Burke, 2011; May, 2009; Stover, 1998b). However, despite the rhetoric, not everyone felt that they had influence on the decision-making process. For example, the simple majority voting meant that on any issue where South Island’s seven associations differed from the North Island’s 22 associations (as they often did), the northern view would prevail. This injustice was keenly felt by many South Island delegates. As late as Conference 2004 it was still remembered that “[d]uring the early 1970s the Associations of the South Island felt that they were unable to make an impact at Conference, because of the structures of decision making at that time”[12].

Therefore although the decision making was democratic it was not being fully inclusive, with structural inequalities meaning that the same voices were always being subsumed by the majority vote. There was little opportunity, working within the system, for an underrepresented group to bring about change. This situation was not unique to Playcentre, as noted by theorists such as Shaw (2011) who warned of the disadvantage that Māori as a group have in a democracy dominated by voting, and Iris Young (2000, p. 35) who observed, “[f]ormally democratic processes in societies with structural inequalities seem as likely to reinforce injustice as to promote greater justice”. The complexity of the system also contributed to the exclusion of some groups from effective participation in decision making. This was highlighted by an external auditor in 1999, Marion Wood, who was reported as saying “the structures of

Playcentre were very complicated within the Constitution and they rely on familiarity with the Constitution". She went on to suggest that "it was not only Māori who were disadvantaged by the decision-making processes, it was all newcomers to the organisation, who would find the processes in the formal meetings very bewildering"[13].

The first decade

The NZPF Conference 1989 decided to make a commitment to biculturalism and publicly endorse the Treaty of Waitangi. One of the first Pākehā responses was to focus on Treaty training for all Playcentre members, additional to the adult education programme. At that time there was little awareness of the Treaty within the wider society of New Zealand (Graham, 1997; Harrison, 2002; Hill, 2004), and the Playcentre adult education programme was focused on topics such as child development and leadership. Pākehā Treaty Education Workers were established in associations from 1992 and at Federation level from 1993. These positions became contentious by the end of the decade with many associations feeling that their specific role additional to Playcentre Education was no longer necessary.

In another Pākehā response, a working party was set up to "ascertain areas of Playcentre that are culturally inappropriate and to suggest improvements" (Working Party on Cultural Issues, 1990, p. 9). The Working Party produced a set of recommendations to Conference 1990 which included Māori representation on Federation's Standing Committee. The recommendations on Māori representation were debated for several years without any decisions being made, creating a sense of frustration for many people. A different approach in 1993/1994 saw both Treaty partners[14] being allowed to attend as delegates at national meetings. Then in 1996, Conference decided to conduct a Tiriti audit. Accordingly, YWCA Consultancy was contracted to audit the Federation constitution against the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (YWCA Consultancy Group, 1999). The findings were presented to the 1999 conference and recommended dual tangata whenua/tangata tiriti positions for president and vice-president, echoing the 1990 Working Party recommendations. Although this was the second time it had been suggested, the organisation still did not act upon the recommendations, but continued to debate the issues.

Meanwhile the initial Māori response to the bicultural commitment was to gather together for support. The first meeting in 1991 was controversial because it was open only to Māori and not to Pākehā parents of Māori children, a debate that continued to cause divisions over the next few years. In 1992 the group named themselves Puriri Whakamaru, obtained Federation funding for coordinators, and suggested that their group be added to the constitution – a move that was unsuccessful as the Federation found it hard to define the group according to the pre-existing definitions. The new coordinators, as well as the Treaty workers, increased the number of Federation officers substantially. This had a major impact on budgets and led to many disagreements.

Frustrations came to a head at the 1999 Federation conference when some associations used tactical non-voting to drop participation below the set quorum to force invalid votes. They felt they had no other way of getting their voices heard, and that their actions were justified because they were representing the interests of Māori in their own associations. However, in the case of electing the Puriri Whakamaru representatives, this was seen by many Māori as interference in what should be a Māori decision and as such undermined their rangatiratanga or autonomy. Roy

Hoerara, the Wellington Association Māori delegate, passionately stated that “Puriri Whakamaru was a Māori initiative, and had merely come to Conference to endorse what had been discussed on the marae through hapu, whānau and iwi[15] structures. Why should people have to go through another stream to ratify what had been ratified by their own people?”[16]. Māori delegates led a walk-out from the conference in protest. Negotiations ensued and Māori eventually returned, but the conference is still remembered more than a decade later for its heightened negative emotions.

In the following year the conference was discussed in detail in the associations and through the *Playcentre Journal*, with everyone trying to analyse “what went wrong”. The balance of power was seen to be an issue, but this tended to be seen differently from different perspectives. For example, in a view typical of many Pākehā, Māori were seen as having too much power: “I wonder if Playcentre is frightening some of its non-Māori clientele away [...]. Our Conference was hijacked and/or sidetracked – intentionally or not – by issues Māori” (Brown, 1999). In contrast, Māori felt that they were buffeted by the democratic processes and still had little say in the end results: “Māori who attended Conference were helpless spectators, shown how fragile it was to be Māori” (Hoerara, 1999). There was, however, a realisation that change was necessary for the organisation to thrive, and maybe even to survive. Playcentre had become, in Sue Stover’s (1998a) words, “increasingly immobilised by the complexity of the organisation and the issues that present[ed] themselves to it” (p. 38). The 1999 conference provided the impetus for change because no one wanted to repeat the emotion of the earlier experience.

The second decade

In the next decade radical changes were made to the decision-making process of the NZPF. Consensus decision making had already been trialled from 1998, and from 2000 major decisions were made at the two smaller National Executive meetings and merely ratified at Conference. Regions were allowed to elect their own regional officers, which allowed the South Island associations to opt out of creating some positions. This had a flow on effect, and by 2006 no regional positions were left.

Puriri Whakamaru or other rōpū[17] continued to exist autonomously within associations, without national coordination. From 2000 a national Māori hui[18] was funded by the Federation, becoming an automatic annual event in 2002. Again, this was open only to Māori, even where the association Māori whānau groups had opened their membership to Pākehā parents of Māori children. However, there was not the large debate about this amongst the Pākehā as there had been in 1991, indicating either a growing acceptance of rangatiratanga for Māori initiatives or an unwillingness to challenge them so as to avoid negative consequences. Māori also started to meet before Conference and before National Executive meetings, and were recognised as a separate caucus within these meetings for the “two-house” model of decision making introduced in 2006. National Māori Caucus came to be the name used to refer to this rōpū. However, like Puriri Whakamaru before it, it had no constitutional status.

The structure of the Federation and Māori representation within it continued to be a topic for debate, but still without decisions. The Tiriti Audit Working Party (2001-2004) made recommendations on how to implement the audit’s recommendations, and the Structural Analysis Working Party (2003-2007) articulated the current situation and some possible new models before the president reported in 2007 that “there was overwhelming support for the current structure to remain in place and for a review of the Constitution, Handbook guidelines and policies to support the structure”[19].

Although this view had been disputed, it was obvious that the organisation was finding it difficult to commit to change. Advocates for structural change persevered, however, and another structure was proposed in 2009; but again the organisation was unable to agree on how to reorganise or even if it was necessary to do such a thing. Some smaller steps were implemented, but no major changes.

Events of 2010 finally motivated the Federation to commit to restructuring. At the October National Executive the Federation Property Team resigned en masse and another Federation officer was in tears during the meeting. Here the tension in the Federation structure was made obvious in visible emotions, and this persuaded the organisation where rational appeals had not that something had to change. The March 2011 National Executive meeting was dedicated to developing a new structure for the Federation based on previous proposals. Māori representation in the new structure included co-presidents and co-convenors of the two teams, who were elected at the conference in May. The representation that had been suggested by the Working Party on Cultural Issues (1990), again by the Tiriti audit in 1999, and in many other ways in between, had finally been achieved.

Rangatiratanga challenges to democracy

Separatism or rangatiratanga?

Playcentre's commitment to biculturalism and the Treaty had the potential to offer some degree of rangatiratanga for Māori who used this opportunity together to support one another and to discuss issues in a uniquely Māori way. Not all Pākehā accepted this desire for Māori rangatiratanga, and objected to being excluded from a group within their own organisation, something that had not happened before. This is typified by the response to the initial meeting of Puriri Whakamaru which was of "overwhelming support [...] mingled with concerns regarding the separate nature of the group at present", with one association stating that they "felt they could not endorse separatism and still support biculturalism" (see footnote 16). The two issues that were seen to be at stake here were the democratic principle of political equality and the unity of the organisation.

Political equality in Playcentre was taken to mean that any member could be included in any decision making, at least nominally. That structural and process inequalities often negated in practice the realisation of espoused political equality was not generally considered and certainly not publically acknowledged. Nor did many Pākehā in the early 1990s realise the impact of their cultural background on their interactions in a group, considering themselves as neutral and without a definable culture and therefore not understanding the power and privilege that they wielded simply by being part of the dominant culture. This was later addressed through the adult education programme, but at that time the "non-culture phenomenon" (Bishop and Glynn, 1999) was prevalent. Therefore the existence of a distinct Māori group was seen as a privilege not available to everyone, and this was unacceptable to many people.

The unity of organisation, thus seen to be under threat by a Māori group that only spoke for Māori, was autonomous, and was external and additional to the associations, so therefore unconstitutional. Although the idea of associations being autonomous was well entrenched, they were seen as democratic because they purported to represent all their members regardless of their culture or background. Acceptable representation for Māori was seen as something within the current structure, not anything parallel, separate, or organised along different lines. Such views reflected the assimilationist

and integrationist perspectives that the majority of Playcentre members had grown up with, even though the official position of the state and of Playcentre itself had changed to biculturalism (Hill, 2009). This position, that it is individuals, not groups, which must be recognised within a democratic structure, has also been argued by theorists such as Rata and Openshaw (2006). Such a structure, however, did not allow for rangatiratanga for Māori and so was not acceptable to Puriri Whakamaru as a viable solution. Biculturalism, for them, was not sufficient without rangatiratanga as well, which is a recurrent theme in indigenous politics (Durie, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2007). Puriri Whakamaru remained as a Māori-only group at Federation level, but did not get the representation they sought. For the pragmatic reason that any representation was a good start, a different approach was tried.

Agonistic democracy

In 1993 it was proposed that associations should be able to bring one of each Treaty partner to national meetings. This was a generally acceptable idea to Pākehā, because it could be accommodated within the existing structure, but it did have major implications for budgets and logistics of national meetings and therefore was seen to need thorough debate before any decision could be made. This was seen as more delay by Māori who were getting increasingly frustrated at the continual procrastination, and increasingly vocal in their protests. The *Playcentre Journal*, usually the bearer of only good news, briefly mentioned the “direct confrontation” meeting at the National Executive in November 1993 (Stover and Bowker, 1994). At this meeting, several associations arrived with both Treaty partners regardless that it had not been agreed to. When the extra people were asked to leave (the extras being the Māori delegates), they sang loudly outside the doors and performed loud action songs and dances. The next day one woman wore a t-shirt with the words “I was evicted from Nat Exec” printed on it, angering a number of the delegates[20]. Whilst delegates to that meeting were very uncomfortable with the events and also with personal comments directed at them from the protesters, they were equally sure of the mandate that they carried as representatives of their associations. They were not prepared to act unconstitutionally! The remit to allow both Treaty partners was carried (not unanimously) at the following Conference in 1994, by an unprecedented secret ballot, another indication to many that relationships were deteriorating.

These direct actions caused much negative feeling within the organisation, especially because they were outside the norms of polite political communication (Young, 2000), and also because some of the actions were not respectful of people, an implicit value of the organisation that had long been unproblematically accepted as being reflected in its practices. The disagreements had become antagonistic and not necessarily constructive. And yet, these tactics might well have been the only way to get the organisation to act. Attempts to get Māori representation over the previous few years had shown that reasoned debate simply resulted in the status quo. In hindsight it seems that emotional and open disagreement was necessary to effect change because in the NZPF structure at that time there was no space where Māori and Pākehā could agree to disagree.

According to Chantal Mouffe (2005), in order to transform destructive antagonism into constructive agonism the conflict between political groups needs to be accepted and given symbolic space in which confrontation may take place. The groups are still in conflict, but their common bonds and political alliance are also acknowledged so that the unity of the organisation is preserved. In arguing for a productive

understanding of the conflictual relationships between Māori and Pākehā, Jones and Hoskins (2009) suggest that recognition of the difference between the two peoples opens up a space for uncertainty, ambiguity and emotional responses – a space that is necessary to create more equitable relationships. The objective of dialogue is to hold the tension arising from contestation, to let this generate multiple and innovative solutions, rather than shutting down the possibilities too soon by choosing the easiest or most known route. However, there is a fine line between developing a constructive agonistic approach where the possibility of consensus is not assumed and differing modes of expression are tolerated, and falling into a destructive antagonistic approach with its violent and disrespectful actions. Finding the balance is a continual work-in-progress.

Who makes the decisions?

Even though Māori gained some representation through being allowed specific delegates at National meetings, it was still the case that the whole organisation made decisions for all of Playcentre and did not allow for Māori – or any other grouping – to manage their own affairs. This principle was being challenged by 1999. South Island associations for example, were objecting to being forced by the more numerous North Island associations to create a position of South Island Regional Treaty Worker, a position they felt they did not need. Further, the Northern Region associations had split into two Māori rōpū, and wanted both to have representation at Federation level, but associations from the rest of the country were not prepared to fund that. As discussed previously, the heightened emotions at this conference contributed to the motivation to allow regional-only and Māori-only decision making. Once again, it was the open conflict that created a space for change, disrupting the idea that consensus would automatically be reached. The importance of these changes was that people became used to the idea of different groups (and not just Māori) within the Federation having some limited autonomy. This allowed time for Pākehā attitudes to Māori rangatiratanga to soften towards greater acceptance.

Consensus decision making also contributed to changing attitudes, deepening the democratic processes by allowing all people at a meeting to participate and by necessitating discussions of the reasons behind different groups' stances (Young, 2000). As a Federation life member recently commented about decision making prior to 1998:

At times I was representing a minority view and while I could vote against something, no one seemed to want to find out the reasons for our stance. I came from an association that was entitled to six votes and it didn't take long to learn legitimate voting strategies that could influence/manipulate outcomes – there was no thought about trying to understand other views/ideas, just a win-lose mentality (Burke, 2011).

As noted earlier, there is a danger that an emphasis on reaching consensus assumes its inevitability and discourages the expression of dissent, foreclosing the opportunity for an agonistic approach and leaving no outlet for legitimate disagreement (Jones and Hoskins, 2009; Mouffe, 2005; Young, 2000). As Playcentre learnt to work with the consensus model of decision making it had to learn that this did not always result in total agreement, and that unless the disagreements were voiced and debated the possibility of being able to make a decision was low. Many doubted the effectiveness or usefulness of the model when it was first introduced, but by 2011, during one difficult conference debate, the only thing that everyone agreed on was that a reversion to voting was not going to be considered. Consensus decision making had become the norm.

Developing pluralism through adult education

The organisation struggled with the idea of pluralism: incorporating different groups with their separate priorities within the one organisation. Although the associations had always operated autonomously the concept of the indivisible sovereignty of the Federation had been unquestioned. By 1999 this was starting to change, as summed up by a delegate who said “they had finally started to hear, and began to understand that the model we had was not working for everyone”[21]. The adult education programme had much to do with this growing awareness.

By the new millennium, many more people were aware of the Treaty than previously. Some were now joining Playcentre with prior knowledge, and those who had been part of Playcentre for a while had had exposure to many Treaty discussions in one way or another. By 2000 it was part of the adult education at all levels, with the beginning stages of the programme focused on the student’s own culture, whatever that was. As a Pākehā Playcentre diploma graduate said in 2011, “[I learnt] I have a culture: the stunning realisation that it’s not only people from other countries that have cultural practices, beliefs and worldviews” (Clark, 2011). This learning, a common reaction, was significant to the wider organisation’s understanding of biculturalism. Pākehā in Playcentre came to see that the way things were done was a Pākehā way, rather than simply the best or most common sense way of doing things; in other words they started to recognise the operation of hegemony. In the same way that Māori came to see themselves as Māori when the Pākehā arrived, as opposed to identifying as different iwi (Orange, 2004), so now were the Pākehā realising that they too had a specific and identifiable culture. It appears that it is not until you can see yourself from another’s point of view that this realisation can occur, and so it took an acknowledgement of Māori as Māori for Pākehā to define themselves.

I believe this awareness gave rise to an increasing understanding of pluralism within the organisation and resulted in new initiatives that were more successful than previous ones. In 2005 the two-house model was introduced to national meetings, where separate discussions were held in Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti Caucuses. Division was by self-identification and preference, with some Māori preferring to participate in the Tangata Tiriti Caucus, creating their own unique political identities as they did so through their words and actions (Todd, 2011). Often it was evident in the discussions’ feedback how different the cultures were, by the different emphases that each caucus had, even when discussing the same question. An example of this was at March 2011 National Executive when the new structure was being discussed. Tangata Tiriti Caucus worked on the detail of the structure, assuming that Tangata Whenua Caucus were having similar discussions in terms of Māori representation. However, Tangata Whenua did not feel they could do that until they had been recognised constitutionally so that they had status equivalent to an association or a national meeting and to be able to bring remits in their own right. When Tangata Whenua Caucus gave their feedback, Tangata Tiriti Caucus were very surprised at the request, although were happy to respond positively. Most had not realised this recognition was lacking as they had not been involved at Federation level in the 1990s and the changes that had been made (such as the two-house model) were now considered to be the norm. It was described at the time as feeling like the two caucuses had just got married after having lived together for so long (Woodhams, 2011).

The Federation philosophy statement (NZPF, 2011) was more evidence of the growing acceptance of biculturalism over assimilation or integration. This statement

was developed in separate caucuses, with the intention that the two statements would stay separate and different although consistent with one another. In that way they were seen as expressing the same philosophy from different world views, making use of different concepts, and thus reinforced the idea of the manageability of different approaches to the same question. Such a successful resolution of a problem using the two-house model promoted shared decision making within a bicultural democracy as a workable concept, and the good feelings thus engendered acted as further positive reinforcement.

A bicultural democracy?

From 1989 to 2011 there were many changes in attitudes, processes, and structures within Playcentre. There was a move from a formal system where it could truly be said that the experience of democracy for most members was voting (Shaw, 2011) and where structural inequalities meant that minority groups had little influence, to a more inclusive democratic organisation based on consensus decision making and with a Tiriti-based structure. Most of the major changes were accompanied by negative emotions and strong “conflict articulation” (Todd, 2011), lending support to the idea social justice can be achieved through an agonistic democracy where plural factions confront each other as adversaries, rather than a system that has narrow norms of political communication and emphasises a homogenous polity. In 2011, when Tiriti-based co-presidents were elected, a new era of working together in partnership was ushered in. This will bring a new period of uncertainty and will require some “courageous conversations” (Woodhams and Pilkington, 2011) as new processes are worked out. However, Playcentre has shown that it is up for the challenge. “We are not the kind of organisation that stops because it’s too hard or too political”[22].

Notes

1. Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. Ngā Kohanga Reo are Māori language immersion ECE centres, started in 1982 by Māori although over the years they have gained government funding (and regulation).
2. NZPF Conference book 1989.
3. There are two versions of the Treaty of Waitangi, one written in English and one translated into Māori, and they are acknowledged as being different on several key points. Playcentre initially made a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi in their constitution, but changed to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* in 1994. *Te Tiriti* specifically refers to the Māori version. In this paper I use the term “Treaty” unless referring to the Māori version or to the terms Playcentre used.
4. Although the precise meaning is debatable, Pākehā in this paper is used as a general term to denote New Zealanders whose ancestry traces to European (predominantly British) settlers.
5. This is a greatly oversimplified version of a major aspect of New Zealand history. As an overview of this topic, see Claudia Orange (2004), which is a classic text, and Richard Hill (2004, 2009) who analyses the history of Māori-State interactions in the twentieth century.
6. *Whānau* means family in a very wide sense, and encompasses generational and lateral familial (and sometimes non-familial) links.
7. *Rangatiratanga* means autonomy/self-determination, usually relating to Māori.
8. The Before Five policies were a major reform of ECE in New Zealand. All services which could meet the new regulations, and established an approved charter agreement with the Ministry of Education, could be licensed and eligible for bulk funding on a per child-per

session basis – regardless of whether they were Playcentre, kindergarten, childcare, Kōhanga reo, or other type of service. Much has been written about these reforms and their effects on the ECE sector (childcare and kindergartens in particular). May (2009) provides a comprehensive overview of these reforms and subsequent effects on the sector as a whole.

9. The 50-year history of Playcentre covered the period 1948-1998 (Stover, 1998a, b), and May's (2009) version of the history of ECE in New Zealand during this time period made little mention of Playcentre and no mention of the internal struggles that had occurred regarding biculturalism. Some material has appeared in the *Playcentre Journal* (e.g. Leggett, 2000; Woodhams, 2011), but these take the form of brief summaries without analysis.
10. Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association had a similar rocky road to biculturalism, as outlined in May (2003).
11. Although there is a national archive of minutes in Hamilton, which is managed by the NZPF Secretary, I was able to access the minutes at my local Playcentre Association, of which I am a life member and still actively involved – as librarian, amongst other roles.
12. NZPF Conference minutes, 2004, p. 61.
13. NZPF Conference minutes, 1999, p. 27.
14. The original Treaty partners were some Māori chiefs and the British Crown representatives. In deciding who are the “Treaty partners” in Playcentre in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, a number of different terms have been used: *Māori*, or *Tangata Whenua* (people of the land); and *Pākehā*, *Tauīwi* (new comers/visitors), *Kawanatanga* (governorship), and *Tangata Tiriti* (people of the Treaty). In this paper for the sake of consistency I will use *Tangata Whenua* and *Tangata Tiriti* as these are the current terms used in Playcentre.
15. A *marae* is a Maori community/communal centre symbolises ancestral links to the land. The *whareniui* which is central to the *marae*, is the home meeting place, where decisions are generally made. *Hapū* means sub-tribe, *whānau* means family, *iwi* means tribe – these are important groupings within Māori society.
16. NZPF Conference minutes 1991, p. 11.
17. *Rōpū* means group(s), generally used to refer to a Māori group.
18. *Hui* means gathering or meeting.
19. NZPF Conference reports, 2007, p. 34.
20. P. Gibbons, personal communication, 2 September 2011.
21. NZPF Conference minutes, 1999, p. 19.
22. NZPF Conference minutes, 1996, Te Akoranga Association report.

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