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Playcentre is a parent-led Early Childhood Education (ECE) model in Aotearoa New Zealand wherein parents can build relationships with other whānau while being present to educate their children. Playcentre has a long-standing tradition of empowering parents and children to undertake education together. Māori parents' experiences of Playcentre represent a unique perspective on the bicultural underpinnings of Playcentre and the national ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki. This research opens a conversation about different cultural perspectives within Playcentre. It is a timely conversation as ECE is increasingly becoming an outsourced job, where funding favours teacher-led services. Focussed through a kaupapa Māori lens, this research explores Māori parents' experiences of Playcentre, their reasons for choosing Playcentre, and their understandings of the bicultural ECE curriculum Te Whāriki. Data was collected through six interviews, as well as an interview I conducted with myself using a narrative inquiry approach, and was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. This presentation looks at a key theme of this research which showed that positive partnership between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti is paramount to Māori parents' feelings of empowerment as Māori in Playcentre. The importance of whakapapa both to te ao Māori through genealogy and to Playcentre through familial connections is explored, as it is a key factor in Māori parents' decisions to join Playcentre. I will also discuss the importance of Māori resilience, and how my participants were able to turn feelings of whakamā into whakamana within the Playcentre context. Playcentre is a setting where Māori parents who have been disenfranchised are finding a space to reclaim their identity as Māori and build resilience; however, that relies on positive partnership. To be able to thrive in Playcentre, Māori parents need to be better supported, understood, and celebrated in that environment.

Keywords

Māori; parent; Playcentre; Te Whāriki; early childhood education; whakapapa; partnership; Te Tiriti o Waitangi