

## **Chapter 5**

### **River Complexity**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter looks in detail at how the preschool as river metaphor was used to analyse the organisational change that occurred over a nine month period. The chapter begins with a discussion of what prompted this metaphor, how the river was constructed and how it operated as a tool of analysis. A meta-analysis of one training workshop and a turbulent event are then detailed. Davis & Sumara's (1997) theory of enactivism in education is used to analyse the data.

#### **Generating the river**

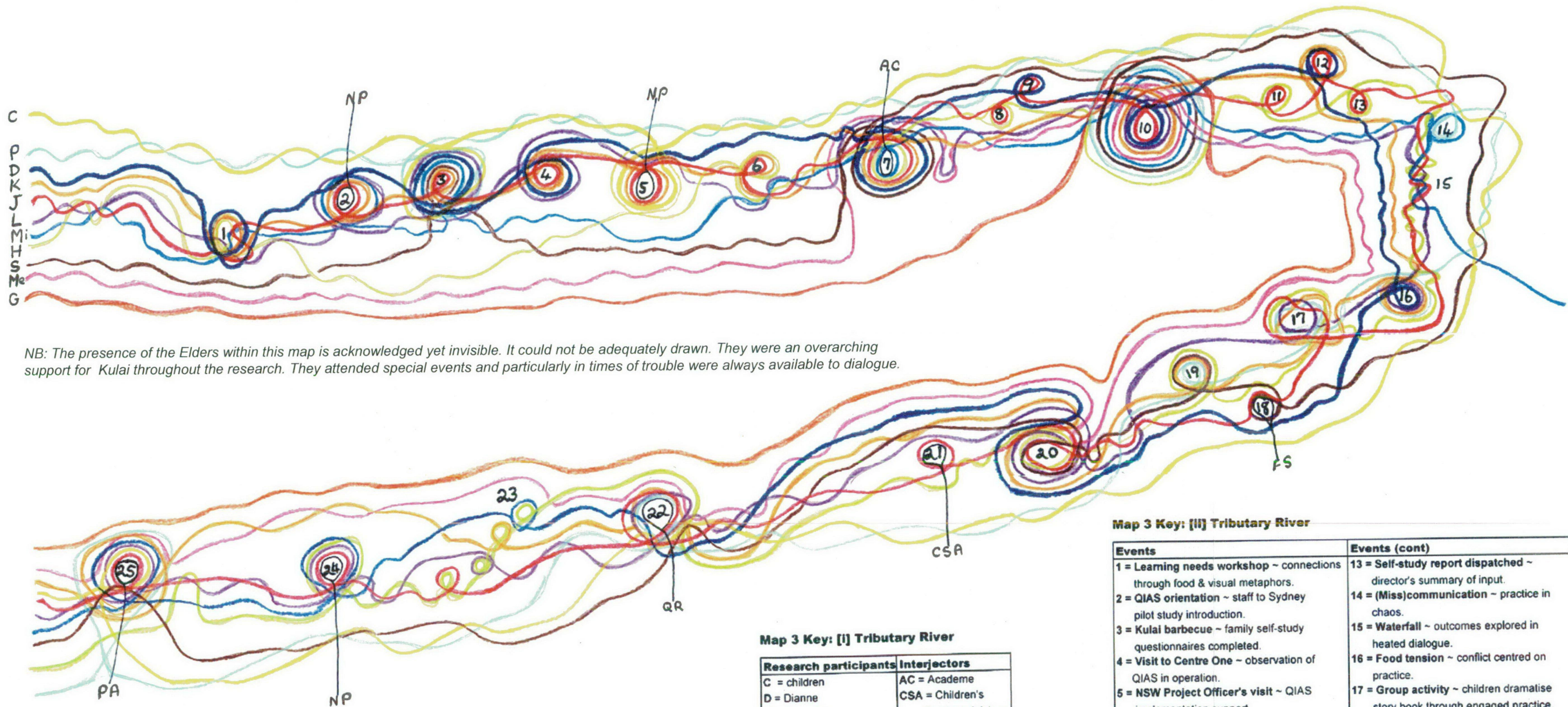
The stream in Map 2, as seen in Chapter 4, formed a frame to link the significant events across the period of the research and to illuminate the flow and changes of direction encountered by the Kulai team as a whole during this research. The simplicity and unilateral dimension of this stream seemed to deny much of the complexity of the interactions and layers of meaning making and learning, performed and operated at Kulai. I searched for another way to articulate this multiplicity and to symbolise the embodiment of people as they moved through country (Somerville 1995; 1999).

I selected a range of colours to represent the major players in the process and began to draw the process as tributaries, which coalesced to form a river. Two of the waterways which made up this flow, were different from the rest: one encased the children and another their family members. Smyth's (2002) research made me conscious of limitations caused by such a generalisation of stakeholders, as each child and family member made unique contributions to Kulai. The children and families appear in Map 3 below as groups to fix the primary focus on the preschool staff. The Elders were not drawn, but were there nonetheless, as

overarching directing and guiding forces, perhaps as unseen images that surrounded everyone, that forged routes for the river and contributed to its very dimensions and directions.

The metaphor of Kulai as river signifies the importance and dependence on country to everyone who connected with the workplace: the Elders, staff, families, the wider community, bureaucrats and others. The influence of place and spatial factors have rarely been considered by Westerners in understanding the complexities and interconnectedness existing in worksites (Turnbull 1993), such as preschools. Some Aboriginal educators, such as Julie Carey (personal communications 1999-2003), ChrissieJoy Marshall (personal communications 2000-2003) and Raymattja Marika (personal communication 1999), suggest that these knowledges and attachment to country have been passed down through their forbears. The movement of knowledge from one generation to the next thus could be seen to have accumulated from a base of thousands of years of belonging. Perhaps my understanding and capacity to map this process came from their sharing of knowledges in the space-in-between, as explained in Chapter 2.

The mappings of the river enabled me to examine and analyse the intricate relationships that occurred in this collective workplace group during the year 2000. The journeylines followed each person as they were drawn into confluences or avoided events in the immediate terrain. The act of mapping allowed me to express the relationships in a visual form, which facilitated a deeper understanding and imaginings of what these interactions might mean (Ingold 2000; Morgan 1997; Paulston 2000; Turnbull 1993; 2000; Zack and Graves 2001). To sketch the river allowed a juxtaposing of the information produced by my kinaesthetic, tactile, and visual senses. This alerted me to more diverse elements of the process.



NB: The presence of the Elders within this map is acknowledged yet invisible. It could not be adequately drawn. They were an overarching support for Kulai throughout the research. They attended special events and particularly in times of trouble were always available to dialogue.

Map 3 Key: [II] Tributary River

Events	Events (cont)
1 = Learning needs workshop - connections through food & visual metaphors.	13 = Self-study report dispatched - director's summary of input.
2 = QIAS orientation - staff to Sydney pilot study introduction.	14 = (Miss)communication - practice in chaos.
3 = Kulai barbecue - family self-study questionnaires completed.	15 = Waterfall - outcomes explored in heated dialogue.
4 = Visit to Centre One - observation of QIAS in operation.	16 = Food tension - conflict centred on practice.
5 = NSW Project Officer's visit - QIAS implementation support.	17 = Group activity - children dramatise story book through engaged practice.
6 = Policy review - explored policies & revised preschool time schedule.	18 = Spruce up - outdoor environment reinvigorated.
7 = Nutrition workshop - experiential approach to nutrition.	19 = Transport evaluation - bus feedback.
8 = Reflections on progress - discussed moves & incomplete changes.	20 = Action plan - review day roles.
9 = Last self-study - staff questionnaires mixing interpretations.	21 = DoCs licensing - meeting NSW regulations.
10 = Access new building - preschool activities relocated.	22 = QIAS review day - compliance with quality assurance principles examined.
11 = Self-study collation - action around 'unsatisfactory' & 'basic' principles.	23 = Research debriefing - individual interviews taped.
12 = ATSIECSAG conference - gathering Aboriginal early childhood educators.	24 = NSW Pilot Study closure - feedback from participants.
	25 = Performance appraisal - Kulai annual review & goal (re)setting.

Map 3 Key: [I] Tributary River

Research participants	Interjectors
C = children	AC = Academe
D = Dianne	CSA = Children's Services Advisor
G = Georgina	FS = Family Supporters
H = Helen	NP = NSW Project Officer
J = Julie	PA = Performance Appraisers
K = Katrina	QR = QIAS Reviewer
L = Leanne	
Me = Melissa	
Mi = Michael	
P = parents	
S = Sid	



I drew each person with blurred permeable boundaries to indicate their potential for openness to receive new knowledges. Wilmot (2002) and Morgan (1997) also indicate that open boundaries allow change to evolve from relationships where learning is shared and accommodated. Map 3 indicates how Kulai people's thinking is reshaped through intersection and interaction with others from the preschool, the wider Aboriginal community and bodies external to the community.

Whilst the journeylines in Map 3 are shown in a two dimensional plane, each line is surrounded by a third dimension or third space (Barrera & Corso 2002; Brown & Barrera 1999; Sonja 1999) large enough to accommodate and analyse the information received, leading to changed perceptions (Somerville 1995, 1999). These learning spaces have also been likened to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978, 1986 cited in Zack and Graves 2001). Lerman (1998 cited in Zack & Graves 2001: 232), for example, describes the zone of proximal development "as a kind of force field which the child carries around". Enactivist theory reveals that a similar force field surrounds adults as they continue to learn throughout their work life (Becket and Morris 2001). Within this space decisions are made about what, if any, materials will become integrated into new practices and become part of individual and/or organisational changes to world views. This space allows modifications to be made to existing information and for the discarding of some outmoded ways of thinking and operating.

After 10 years of action research in early childhood education, Barrera and Corso (2002: 103) conclude that a skilled dialogue approach, incorporating respect, reciprocity and responsiveness needs to be adopted for cross-cultural competency to be achieved. They identify experiential and cognitive understanding of diversity and the third space as central elements for skilled dialogue. For me the Kulai river as a place of dialogue, was illuminated by making visible the continual state of flux in which people existed. It also showed the movement that dialogue produced, always in some direction, but not necessarily forward or in

league with other water courses or outside influences. With dialogue, Wilmot (2002: 469) suggests that “the action of each person in a relationship magnify those of the other ... because they pick up a momentum that feeds back on itself.” The forces created by such intersection were particularly evident in the maps of learning activities at Kulai in this chapter.

These drawings emerged from my consciousness of the interrelationship between people and the environment working across blurred cultural boundaries. My awareness rose further by listening to Errol West (1998: 1) speak of his theory of ‘First Knowledge’ as

is that knowledge that is people constructing ... the core knowledge of the continuum of human societies, the credible and mystical discourse between two living, holistic tissues, that of the person and that of the environment, including land, sea, and the ether.

I was also influenced by Raymattja Marika talking about valuing Yolngu knowledge in her local kindergarten and school. My understanding grew again from examining her drawings of intersecting cultural waters which represented how Yolngu and Anglo-Australian peoples could work together “in a way where each one [culture] is preserved and respected” (Marika 1999: 113). I was also illuminated by descriptions of the process which operated between the First Nations People and University of Victoria, described by Alan Pence (2001):

[E]ach iteration represented a new and unique coming together of different ideas and interactors. The outcome of such a process can never be known in advance, indeed, the outcome is not singular but multiple – as diverse as the students, instructors and community members who participate. Typically those multiple outcomes are themselves mutable, provisional, transformational ... Not truth, but possibilities emerge from the generative process.

Semali (1999: 316) identifies the importance of recognising and working with the turbulence that can be created by such diversity:

There seems to be a notion that to acknowledge the concurrence of diverse cultures with differing opinions within a nation state will create some sort of divide. But in fact, this form of thinking is based more on political fear of powerless and voiceless people reclaiming power. It is this fear that results in different cultures being marginalized, minimizing the dialogues and exchanges between all ethnic groups.

The section of the river visible in Map 3 occupies only a part of the overall length and a portion of its life. Neither the headwaters nor where the stream empties into the sea is evident. At the left hand edge of the map, each person appears with her or his own unique genealogy, culture and biological makeup, which contributes a generative diversity to the workplace group. This diversity provides important dimensions to the make up and functioning of the team (Davis and Simmt 2003; Zack and Graves 2001). Across the Kulai community there are traces of shared genealogies, cultures, biological links and experiences which facilitate communication (Davis & Simmt 2003) and carry with them obligations of reciprocity.

I identified conflict, resistance and turbulence were integral parts of the non-linear course, in the maps in this chapter. This approach has similarities with the White (1998), Marika (1999), Pence (2001) and Appaduria (1990 cited in Grossberg 1996) models. The intertwining tributaries form “a geography of belonging and identification” (Grossberg 1996: 175); situated in place, which move through and beyond space into confluent events. The river metaphor provides as multiple lenses to follow the learning process at Kulai from a range of perspectives at the local level. The maps identify where regional, national and international flows, forces and interests impact to dislocate, relocate or transform

relationships and practices within the preschool. The maps occupy what Grossberg (1996: 173) describes as “the middle ground, a model of the entirely local ... [and] the model of a totalised globality”.

In describing learning at Kulai as a process operating like a river I embrace the multiple connections of the tributaries. The river as a living entity, changes in numerous ways, as constantly renewing itself, and creating a complex invisible force field. The flow alters in response to forces and pressures in and around it. The progress fluctuates as depth, speed, and direction change, which is particularly apparent as the waterway formed into whirlpools or eddies where it enfolds upon itself.

Every experience of the journey develops and (re)generates in the move through country. In the headwaters, some distance to the left of these maps, each tributary has a watershed. These tributaries each have an impact on the environment and the environment on it when viewed wholistically. Opportunities arise to blend and merge each segment into a common learning journeyline, as generative points are reached that facilitate forward movement within the banks of the river. Some opportunities are seized whilst others are avoided or resisted in an attempt to follow other routes. Those who engaged with learning, made changes to practice of some kind, ranging from slight alterations to broader transformative ways of thinking.

Escape paths into billabongs provide one option for those who view the movement in a dubious manner and hesitate or resist, take time-out to think or ponder, perhaps rejoining further downstream. Swamps and marshes provide venues for slow deliberation or even stagnation, in diversions designed for maintenance of the status quo. Turbulence is created by nature with its uneven ground, rocks and crags. In the preschool these interruptions to the flow come, at times, through the agendas imposed by outside agencies. Planned organisational learning events and unstructured experiences can also cause turbulence, and

generate whirlpools. Sudden uprisings or depressions can plummet the stream head-first into unknown territory, especially where waterfalls cascade to another level. The consequences and potential to recover are unpredictable, as the future is unknown, the routes unplotted. A segment of the flow can dissipate in the descent and spin off to another context, as becomes apparent in the waterfall sequence to the right of Map 3.

In Map 3 many of the events, such as group workshops, relate to significant points in the Kulai journey through quality assurance. A deeper level of operation, framed around relationships and meaning making, emerges during the process. The NSW pilot study provided a lever, in the form of a legitimising excuse, to begin to change the ways of working (Morgan 1997; Senge 1993). The key attached to Map 3 identifies the particular events which occur in each whirlpool. Whilst the primary events are encapsulated there were far too many twists and turns to represent all precisely or inclusively. The river however does show the journeylines left by Kulai people, drawn particularly from the perspective of the multiple lenses I focused on the process. These lines are drawn with some hesitation in recognition of Bailey's (2001: 298) warning that in operating from a self-perspective I will "run the risk of taking over authorship of the stories and colonizing the very voices [you] supposedly seek to represent."

Details of these primary events are presented earlier in the narrative in Chapter 3. This fleshs out the major occasions and participant interactions in the river and provides a somewhat more limited view of secondary operators and occurrences. The multiple layers of the river symbolically trace the journeylines followed by each person. At significant points some (be)come caught up in forms of turbulence, called whirlpools, eddies, vortices or even maelstroms. Many perceive danger in being sucked in and down into the turbulence. However, these junctures are also places for coming together, where knowledge can be engaged and enacted with, as centrifugal like forces of the learning process. When segments of the river (re)emerge they are energised with pressures which propel



them towards the next deviation; or might spin out to a backwater or escape to a new environment. Some choose to quietly glide on past, avoiding the upheaval, oblivious to the changes.

## **Details of confluences**

At Kulai I was amongst the first and most consistent of outside elements to join the river. This incursion altered the pressure balances and created other leverage points. Initially I operated as a researcher, came in, observed, disturbed the flow and then disappeared, like an underground waterway to (re)emerge further along the course. Ultimately I got caught up more fully in the river's confluences through obligations of respect and reciprocity. As a consequence I came to realise the way forward could be sustained at considerably more depth through allowing myself to be immersed in the preschool community. There were gains made from engaged learning. From this point I moved more freely about the preschool, but a different perspective was now available. The metaphor of the tributary river was an image of the space-in-between. I was still conscious of the intricacies and complexities within the river. This did not deny our differences, as each person had a unique culture and segment of the watercourse, but rather acknowledged a unity in the space-in-between. In that space we acted as co-participants, and most often negotiated whirlpools of upheaval and resettled rather than constantly being dissipated by conflict or avoidance.

Other outside elements which intersected along the course of the river included the project officer, the building site manager, children's services adviser, staff of other centres, supervisors, academe, the reviewer and moderators. Some embraced the flow and became part of the process of being transformed and transforming. Others went in and out for short periods, shared a contribution and resurfaced later. A few came from a university or distant parts for a day, their existence shown in photographs and the paper trails laid in their wake. The experience perhaps provided the visitors with a limited understanding of this

context and the people within the river's force field. The impact of such forces was felt over longer periods by those who remained in the workplace, or became memories to later erase, due to lack of local relevance (Pile 1997). Globally inspired tools and instruments, such as QIAS, disrupted the flow, with an enduring but intermittent force of influence throughout the research. Although quality improvement formed the base from which the research was generated, it made up a relatively small part of the whole picture of individual and organizational change.

In Map 3, I presented my multiple lens view of the intertwining ways people related in this small workplace group over an extended period. Whilst I recognise that many other layers of influence could occur away from the workplace, no attempt was made to account for these in this thesis. The river maps the entanglement and enfolding of each person's identity upon others and the environment. It demonstrates how two or more people could come together, where each could be enlarged and changed from the interactions that occurred through sharing the space-in-between (Somerville 1995, 1999). If the meeting was not just contact, but engagement, the participants entered into the third space, and new knowledges evolved. These occasions were often turbulent, with peoples' sensory systems in operation at heightened levels of awareness, drawing their bodies into action (Davis 1996). Davis and Sumara (1997: 110) note that such experiences

unfold within the reciprocal, codetermined actions of the persons involved ... a process of opening ourselves to others, at the same time opening the possibility of our understanding of the world – and hence, our senses of our identities that are cast against a background of that world.



Parents knew the workshop was happening but were not invited to participate. It was a day the children were home so their responsibility lay there.

Children were at preschool one day before and came again the following week. Their first day in July set up a food activity as part of the indoor program. This gave the children the chance to gain from the learning and further their knowledge of food and preparing their own snack.

Melissa was on the edge of things, in her role as administrative support worker. She was asked to participate and came primarily for that reason. She made sure the bills and wages were paid. It was not her place to express an opinion or participate in food preparation. She stayed on the edge and was only drawn into contact at morning tea and lunch.

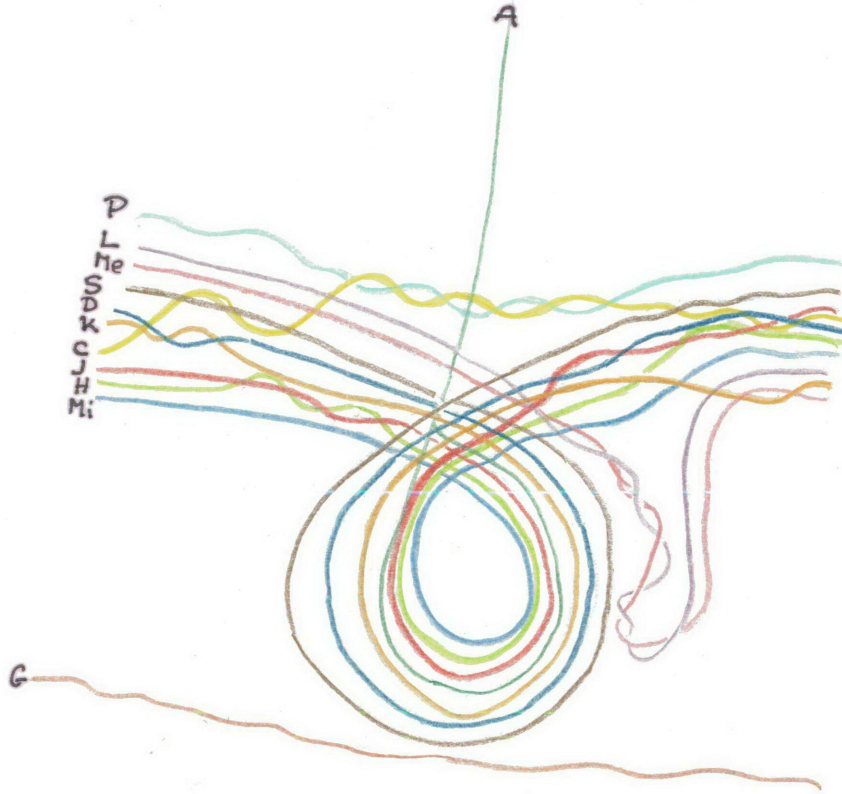
Leanne was second-in-charge but tended not to assume responsibility whilst ever Julie was in the building. She had not been party to the decision to participate in OIAS and saw little purpose in the preschool taking part in it. Food preparation was not her job. There was a cook employed to do that. She was at the workshop because of contact staff were told to come. Normally this was a day for program preparation of materials for the following week - the cookshop saved to disrupt that routine. She was on the edge of the discussion, but only interacted to partake of food at morning tea and lunch.

Sid's primary role was to drive the bus to bring the children in for preschool. On special days when a barbeque was held he was in charge of the cooking. He was a grandfather figure to many of the children. At the workshop he participated enthusiastically in the food preparation and consumption. He smiled a lot, joked a bit and generally appeared to enjoy the experience.

Di and was the preschool cook who prepared morning tea and lunch for the children. She and Katrina had just completed a TAFE Techniques in Food Handling and Hygiene course on slides. The teacher had shown her in the workshop in making a portion of the materials ready for everyone to enjoy. She was a little bit shy initially but relaxed and joined willingly in all the activities.

Katrina's primary role day-to-day was bus assistant, who spoke to the family as the child got on and ensured his/her safe travel to the preschool. She was very excited about OIAS and being on the local organising committee. She was keen to assist in any way she could to make the workshop a success. She contributed some quite vivid details of the unsafe practices they had been told to avoid and the slides shown during her TAFE course. She was keen to respond to any questions that were asked and play her part in food preparation enthusiastically.

Academe spent some time talking to me to learn about the preschool and its people. Together we explored possible content and experiential approach. Constructed a list of resources perishable and non-perishable, plus equipment. We drove to and from the university carrying the resources and equipment in. It was marked off as community service and student supervision as a secondary outcome.



Georgina did the cleaning of the preschool, after hours when everyone was gone. I guess she knew about the workshop but I am not sure. Maybe she avoided it as she did not see that it would assist her to do her job, possibly her young family were given priority over self-education activities. Quite possibly she glided on past the workshop oblivious of its occurrence.

Michael arrived in a jovial or enthusiastic mood which he carried throughout the workshop. He had met Academe on several occasions and engaged keenly in conversation with her. He was ever ready to ask questions and pose his ideas on what was being discussed. He was just as much a part of the food preparation and consumption of the finished product.

Julie as director had been instrumental in putting the OIAS system in place and was keen to develop everyone's skills in whatever way were practicable. She had cited increase awareness of aspects of nutrition as a significant learning need for the staff. She was keen for all staff to be involved so the ideas could permeate throughout the program. When Di and was away she had to step into the food preparation role so needed to know. Julie spelled us warmly when we arrived and assisted in the setting up and food preparation. She tended to hold back from answering questions posed, but encouraged other staff to respond. She and I spent time in the weeks prior to the workshop talking through the as as that might be appropriate to cover. When the children came to preschool the following week she set up activities based from the workshop. The children participate keenly in Julie modelled the skills and demonstrated to the staff the value of such activities. As soon as it was over she telephoned me to feedback on its success.

Helen came with Academe to the workshop and made introductions to all the staff except Julie and Michael who were known as students at the University. Helen had spent time with Academe planning the day and particularly conscious of meeting the needs surrounding nutrition knowledge Julie and other staff had articulated. Helen organised and set up much of the consumables and equipment in readiness for the workshop. She joined in the workshops as an active participant, pausing occasionally to take photographs and make notes about the event. She encouraged Leanne & Melissa to join in the food preparation without success.



In the process of this research, events were occasioned through the use of skilled dialogue (Barrera & Corso 2002), but the mapping revealed how little control was possible once events were in progress. Davis and Simmt (2003) state that when complex emergence occurs it is necessary to decentralise control to the group. My experiences at Kulai indicate that until control is from a bottom-up position a number of staff would attend planned sessions but would subsequently avoid engagement with organisational learning events. These staff were conscious that attendance was expected (Senge 1993), but demonstrated their power in controlling participation through resistance (Hewitt 2001). An example of this was seen in Map 4a above of the Nutrition Workshop, where several staff remained on the edge of activities throughout the day, apart from meal times. Senge (1993: 172) indicates that making training compulsory or expected is “probably the most sure-fire way to impede the genuine spread of commitment to personal mastery in an organization”. Avoidance of (inter)action captures just one form of the endless list of techniques of resistance used with effect in the workplace (Pile 1997).

In educational planning, Davis and Simmt (2003: 147) indicate that there is a need to frame events around organized uncertainty, where rules can be set as boundaries, but with “sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and varied responses”. What was apparent at Kulai was that unpredictable and unexpected outcomes emerged during events, just as Morgan (1997) and Wells (1999 cited in Zack & Graves 2001: 233) report. Morgan (1996) recognises the fluid and chaotic nature of change and the need for learning to continually emerge. In regard to resistance Pile (1997: 14-16) reaches the conclusion that resistance is

less about particular acts, than about this desire to find a place in a power-geography where space is denied, circumscribed and/or totally administered. The implication is that resistance comes from a place outside of the practices of domination ... Resistance, then, not only takes place in place, but also seeks to appropriate space, to make new spaces.

Morgan (1996: para 94) also expands on the importance of examining how metaphors, and the journeylines which surround them, help to make visible space in organisational change:

The whole point about metaphor is that it gets you into new space. You can't invent the new organization by talking about it in old ways. If you want to create an innovative experience in your school you have to get people into new ways of thinking about things – new space ... The key is to find useful metaphors that allow us to create new knowledge, action and possibilities ... [these are] starting points but the thinking has to continue to evolve.

Recording stories of people's journeys through early childhood education has an important place in the reconceptualisation of the profession, according to Bailey (2001). Amongst the most challenging and perhaps dubious aspects of such a process is to analyse the multiple meanings involved. In the following section I will demonstrate how I approached this task.

### **Micro-analysis of new space creation**

Morgan (1996) suggested it could be useful to put organisations under the microscope, which was my primary purpose in Maps 4a and 4b. These maps are built around a section of the larger river in Map 3. The maps portray the Nutrition workshop and stories of the event that relate to each person. The narratives begin in Map 4a and extend further in Map 4b that follows below.



Parents continued their business as usual activities on a Friday, when the children were home and their responsibility the whirlpool was undisturbed by the children.

Children prior to the workshop were the primary focus of most staff when the preschool was operational. They interacted with staff prior and post workshop during the event they joined with their parents in a flow oblivious of a change at the preschool. They benefited from the outcomes when staff experimented with the new knowledge gained.

Melissa level of engagement suggested she had attended because it was an obligation, not to gain knowledge she might later apply. She remained on the side of what was happening, but not caught up by the enthusiasm echoed by many of the other Kūiahi people. She shared in the food but restricted her interactions mainly to a simple evaluation of the workshop was similar to Leanne's.

Leanne came to the workshop and stood on the edge watching and listening to what was going on, but not contributing. She joined in to share the food that had been prepared. On her written feedback sheet she indicated the workshop was very worthwhile and could be improved with more time allocated to the activity. She is drawn on the edge of the activity and her primary interaction with Melissa is shown as a tension throughout the workshop.

Sid sees all the children each day with their families and takes a grand fatherly interest in their development and wellbeing, expressed most often in knowing non-verbal mannerisms. He appeared somewhat unexpectedly at the workshop - he is generally invited to such things but doesn't often come. He got into the flow of the whirlpool, contributing to the food preparation. He also happily consumed the products of the workshop. He gave very positive feedback on his son's participation, saying a food taster had been particularly helpful and had nothing needed to change.

Diane was very stressed about the requirements of the TAFE course and depended on Kaminia's support to find her way through. The course had just finished prior to the workshop. She seemed to come in with some new confidence about herself and being a part of the action and knowing what to do. My journal recorded: "Diane was more confident and happy than I have seen her." Perhaps the tension in the lead up to the workshop enabled Diane to open up to fresh ideas back in the comfort of the safe place provided by the preschool. The food served on Reimov Day demonstrated that Diane had integrated knowledge gained from the workshop in her practice.

## Positioning

Academe is shown as dropping into the preschool for the day and then withdrawing again just as quickly. Several days were committed prior to the workshop planning what and how to present with Helen. Nutrition in early childhood settings was the base of her PhD thesis and some subsequent research and publications. She had an extensive depth of knowledge and resources to draw on and was confronted with the challenge of selecting which bits of this could be of value to share with the Kūiahi people. Together we mapped a plan of the workshop, but the actual event only matched this in general terms. Several weeks after the event Academe was given eight photographs of segments of the workshop beside which she wrote her reflective comments which included: "Overall, I believe the morning of food education possibilities was well received by all staff. The interactive, hands on nature facilitated interest and plans to try ideas with children. The depth of the reflections expressed seem to indicate the workshop impacted and impacted little on the busy schedule of an Associate Professor."

Katrina and Diane intersected for several evenings prior to the workshop doing a TAFE food services course together - this training was required by the Regulations for staff who worked in the kitchen. Katrina participated keenly and eagerly share her new knowledge during the workshop. This was in part symbolised through the distribution of disposable gloves for everyone to wear during the food preparation. Katrina stayed close to the centre of action throughout the workshop.

Georgina had no reason to come in to the preschool on that day. She continued her routine undisturbed by the whirlpool. She generated across much of the river. She gained nothing and contributed nothing to the event.

Michael is shown in the centre of the whirlpool. Right from the time he arrived he was taking in an animated way and the centre of attention. He acted in a familiar way with Academe as he had met her on several previous occasions. In his evaluation written at the end of the day he was confident enough to express aspects that need improvement and extension. He seemed like he came and had an enjoyable day interacting in all aspects of the workshop but no impact on his practice was revealed in his subsequent programs with the children.

Julie seemed quite relaxed about what was happening. She made us feel welcomed and assisted to get things in place during the workshop she listened and placed Dianne in an interested largely non-verbal way. It seemed she was holding back from an articulation of her ideas. Staff to present their ideas. When we reflected on the outcomes talk it was obvious that Julie had watched closely the way staff were interacting. She was pleased by the involvement and delighted with her level of participation and also Dianne's. Her time depended on the whirlpool as a driving, knowing force of the workshop prior to and post-workshop. The children in her path and food, don't link into what is being said, she navigated on a path that didn't relate to Academe or each other. She navigated on a path that didn't relate to Academe or each other. She navigated on a path that didn't relate to Academe or each other.

Helen lay awake for several nights prior to the workshop worrying about how it might work out. Although closely involved in the planning I realised the delivery and much of the interrelatedness that would go on, or not, during the day was beyond my influence. When we got to the preschool, after personal introductions and cooking equipment in place. I was driven by a nervous energy, at once excited and at the same time fearful of what if it doesn't work, that staff don't participate, don't like to cook, don't link into what is being said, don't relate to Academe or each other?"



The maps in combination aim to insert a sense of oral story telling to enable the drawing to come alive and to make additional insights visible in the analysis process (Cleary and Peacock 2002). Creation of new spaces through engagement and enactment, or through avoidance and resistance is particularly visible through close inspection of each person's response during the Nutrition Workshop. Their responses, ordered alphabetically were:

*Academe* was shown as dropping into the preschool for the day and then withdrawing again with minimal impact on her day-to-day operation. What was not evident was that she spent several sessions prior to the workshop planning the occasion with me.

*Children* were the primary focus of the staff pre- and post-workshop, but during the event they joined their parents in a sector of the stream that was oblivious to the workshop generated whirlpool. After the event, they had the opportunity to draw from the outcomes when staff experimented with new activities as part of the preschool program.

*Diane* linked closely with Katrina in an intensive food handling course at TAFE just prior to the workshop. The course operated in the mainstream, outside familiar and safe cultural surrounds with consequent stress and reluctance to attend. A new confidence surrounded Diane at the workshop as she shared stories of what was learnt at TAFE. She participated actively in the experiential activities of the nutrition workshop. Perhaps the unsettling prior experience enabled her to be open to new ideas from the workshop in the safety of Kulai. Over time the impact of the learning experiences was evident in changes to the food made available to the children at mealtimes.

*Georgina* continued her routine activities at home, oblivious to and undisturbed by the whirlpool.

*Helen*: I talked to staff about their learning needs prior to the workshop and shared these with Academe in the planning phase. I moved about restlessly at the commencement of the workshop, driven by nervous energy to set up the materials and resources. I observed keenly the interactions, listened and contributed in the experiential exercises. Much private responding and reflection occupied me as I silently asked: "What if it doesn't work, staff don't participate, like the food, or link into what is being said?"

*Julie* welcomed everyone and assisted in the set up. She listened and participated in an engaged, largely non-verbal way. She watched the

interaction of staff and encouraged their participation. Her reflections with me pre- and post-workshop indicated an increasing intertwining of our paths. She shared and experimented with what she had learnt in subsequent activities with the children.

*Katrina* and Diane intersected for several evenings at TAFE prior to the workshop, learning food handling and hygiene procedures. Katrina helped set up, participated keenly in the workshop and eagerly shared snippets of knowledge gleaned from TAFE. She stayed close to the centre of action throughout the Nutrition Workshop. The influence of new knowledge was apparent in her subsequent activities in the kitchen.

*Leanne* came and stood on the edge of activities watching, but not contributing. She joined in to share the food, but generally interacted with Melissa. She returned to the flow of the stream after the workshop, seemingly unchanged.

*Melissa* attended through obligation. She remained on the margin of what was happening, apart from sharing food and interacting with Leanne.

*Michael* was in the centre of the whirlpool from the time he arrived. He talked in an animated and familiar way with all present. He seemed to enjoy the experiences and participated actively, but there was little evidence of any impact in the subsequent programs he developed for the children.

*Parents* continued their business-as-usual Friday activities with the children who were at home for the day. Their part of the stream was undisturbed by the Kulai whirlpool, as they intersect with the children and a world beyond the preschool.

*Sid* was invited to the workshop but was not expected to attend. He came and participated enthusiastically, though largely non-verbally, in all activities. His active participation in these events led to changes in the way he was perceived by other members of the group and altered expectations of his future contributions to learning activities.

In previous research Zack and Graves (2001: 258) spell out the “importance of building upon each other’s ideas”. These researchers generated their thinking on the basis of Bakhtin’s investigation (1986 cited in Zack and Graves 2001: 258) of how individuals experiment with other people’s ways of doing things and emerge with patterns that suit their practice needs. An example of this is apparent in Map

4a, looking at Julie's actions several days after the Nutrition workshop where she constructed food activities for the children based around the workshop learning experience. She modelled a new practice performance for other staff, which was picked up, particularly by Diane and used subsequently. Modelling has been recognised as a core element of learning (Senge 1993: 173) as one of "the most positive actions an organization can take to foster personal mastery". Thelen and Smith (1994: 323) report similar findings in regard to people's engagement in complex learning, as acting to "solve problems within our cultures of home, work and community."

Wilmot (2002: 478) accounts for such occurrences, with the term 'communication spirals', where: "Participant's behaviors interlock so one's behavior influences the others and the mutually conjoined behaviors intensify the other's reactions." This statement highlights the multiple directions behaviour can take in learning experiences. Fjortoft (2003:1) reports that when workers believe they are expected to attend professional development activities this "may reduce the individuality of the worker, and promote and support the corporate personality". This statement by Fjortoft seems to deny the power of personal agency and choice involved in learning. However, Senge (1993: 172) suggests that such expectations by management are "guaranteed to backfire". At Kulai, by examining participants' levels of engagement and interaction, much more could be learnt from experiences, particularly where dissonance was a central focus. Take for example the incident of the waterfall, illustrated on the right hand edge of Map 3, which shows a period of major turbulence which led ultimately to transformative learning.

## **Micro-analysis of dissonance**

A distressed mother and child at the start of the day, led into a series of interactional spirals that built into a turbulent meaning making session between some Kulai staff at the end of the day, as described in Chapter 3. When I came to draw this event I looked for ways to show its pivotal nature in the change experience. I came to the edge of the page in Map 3 and was confronted by a fracture in my drawing, which interfered with the continuity of flow. I decided to attach extra paper, to accommodate the altered direction. Prior to this event the river had flowed relatively calmly. Then the body of a large waterfall emerged in my sketch and plummeted down into unknown territory, seemingly free falling in white water without control. One person opted to leap out into an alternate space, a new job and place of working, whilst the rest ultimately sat for a time, exhausted and becalmed in a pool below. The ramifications of this event and the energies it produced radiated across the Kulai community for a substantial period.

Zack and Graves (2001: 234) consider the impact of “resistance and difference” as vital to “our understanding of intersubjectivity and its importance for the joint construction of knowledge”. In the waterfall incident the initial responses of staff to the distress of a child and the subsequent challenge to her safety, triggered an intense discussion about early childhood education practices in general, with particular emphasis on responding in ways appropriate to the principles of performance outlined in the QIAS. The leverage of the QIAS principles provided a focus which allowed it to be talked about in a depth not previously apparent (Morgan 1997). Emotions were high as past conversations collided with the current episode and continued on towards the impending QIAS review day.

Blaming, shaming, fear, anger, affirmation, conciliation, and frustration were all elements apparent in the exchanges at the end of the day. New information about what the QIAS Reviewer would expect were explored and referenced back to the ‘waterfall’ incident. We looked at options for meeting these expectations in

discussion. If the incident with the child had been glossed over or even ignored because the consequences of confrontation seemed worse than meeting the issues head-on, a significant opportunity for learning would have been lost (Barrera and Corso 2002). Life would have gone on, but perhaps with quite different outcomes for the Kulai community. A more detailed exploration of the journey experienced by those negotiating the waterfall is presented in alphabetical order below.

*Helen:* In the lead up to the waterfall incident I worked on the margins of the preschool program. I drove down from the university on a fairly regular basis, ran some workshops, shared food and had light hearted exchanges with staff. These exchanges were important to me in developing trusting relationships. Whilst enthusiastic about the opportunity the QIAS offered for research I was unsure of what role to play in the workplace. I had lengthy and in-depth conversations with Julie about Kulai's past, present and future operation. I often acted as a sounding board for Julie, particularly in instances when we were troubled or unsure how to proceed. Every moment at Kulai was a learning experience for me and my identity changed as I sought to operate appropriately in an unfamiliar culture. I studied the QIAS staff and family self-study questionnaires, collated the responses and assisted Julie in the construction of the centre's report. To this point, I seem to be perceived by other staff as Julie's stooge, whose role was to observe their actions and report these back to the director. When asked, I offered ideas for operating differently with a top-down 'expert' approach. These suggestions were subsequently ignored or resisted as irrelevant to local needs.

*Julie:* The offer for Kulai to be involved in the QIAS pilot study was taken up by Julie as an opportunity to bring about change. She was committed to her work and deeply involved in the wider Aboriginal community and extended family obligations. She regularly reflected with people around her. Some people became additional resources, who worked with her towards her goals of identifying leverages to change practices within the preschool. She organised learning events she felt would be of benefit to her staff, but during these events she often held back from voicing her position, whilst encouraging others to express ideas. She completed her QIAS staff self-study questionnaire and then sat with Dianne over a number of sessions to assist with the interpretation of each principle and to talk through response options. In general she had a fairly laissez-faire way of managing the staff, but used top-down approaches to resolve problems or on matters where she wished to control the direction in which the centre moved.

*Leanne:* In the lead up to the waterfall incident Leanne showed a determination to maintain the status quo. She attended work and organisational learning events, as she was duty bound to do. Her level of involvement was often to the degree necessary to satisfy her position as teacher, but was accompanied by little enthusiasm. Learning events did not engage her and her identity seemed little changed by the day-to-day operation of Kulai. She resisted completing the QIAS staff self-study questionnaire until the last minute, and then only after considerable discussion with me about what impact her responses could have for her and the organisation in general. She seemed disillusioned about her job and identity as a worker in this context.

*Michael:* Prior to the waterfall Michael showed some interest in what was happening around QIAS and particularly how it might help with his university studies. Though he attended work fairly regularly, his interaction level with the children and staff varied from enthusiastic to distant disinterest. His responses to learning events were similar. For example on the day of the learning needs workshop, he floated in and out, and contributed only a little to the discussion. He completed the QIAS staff self-study questionnaire quickly with limited thought apparent in his evaluation. He entered into little discussion about what the principles might mean for his or the organisation's practice. The flow of Michael's performance fluctuated between being eager to please those around him, to one of boredom with the routineness of preschool activities.

On the day of the waterfall incident, Julie comforted Shanisha and her Mum when they arrived at Kulai in a distressed state. Mum went home, Julie took Shanisha to Michael and left the centre to attend a meeting. I moved about the preschool to observe and record the performance of several children, including Shanisha. I relayed my interpretation of events to Julie when she returned. This led to a detailed conversation about the meaning of these observations of Shanisha and how to proceed from here. Julie called a meeting with teaching staff at the end of the day. An overview is presented alphabetically below.

*Helen:* When I entered the meeting I was still troubled by the earlier observations. For much of the day I had gone over the events surrounding the child with Julie and tossed ideas around in my mind. I tried to come up with a range of solutions to avoid a reoccurrence of such incidents. I began in the meeting to listen intently in an embodied way to the exchanges between Michael and Julie. When Michael began



to attack her performance as Director, I interjected to defend Julie. This behaviour was quite out of character for me, as I had always tried to be supportive of everyone in a calm, relatively non-intrusive manner. The momentum of the dialogue drew me into acting differently and to a changed identity in the workplace. After the meeting I shared with Julie, my need to get out onto the floor of the workplace to relate directly to staff, working at elbow on the things that needed to change.

*Julie:* At the start of the meeting, Julie made it clear that she was deeply troubled by the performance of the teaching staff. She spoke intensely with her feelings echoed through her body. There was something of a synchrony working between her body and voice. On a typical day she approached even important matters quietly and calmly. This was not her position at the meeting, rather she was so distressed, so concerned about the implications of the incident with the child that she lost her 'cool'. She expressed concern later to me about how she had felt out of control at that point. Although she experienced much discomfort, it likely marked her transformation to a new way of thinking, of realising the need to share more with staff in regard to how she felt. The new approach enabled her to get more in touch with the staff and the base from which they worked. As a consequence of the meeting she spent more time working beside staff to facilitate changes to emerge.

*Leanne:* The way Leanne used her body, demonstrated she was listening intently, in an engaged manner at the meeting, though she offered little verbal response till near the end. At this point she contributed practical suggestions for reframing staff routines to enable them to be more available and responsive to the children. Leanne's performance in the meeting seemed to indicate she had opened or blurred her boundaries to allow engagement with changing practices. In subsequent encounters, she reached out and asked for opportunities to share learning experiences. She actively challenged other people's ideas in conversations over such things as how to structure the environment and what tools would work best to record the children's development. The activities she set up for the children reflected what she was learning of their interests and skills from a closer observation of their behaviour. It seemed she knew them better and responded more intently, whilst drawing the children into communication spirals, each took up the momentum generated (Wilmot 2002). When the group performed 'The little mouse, the red ripe strawberry and the big hungry bear' (Wood and Wood 1984/1996), she and the children were so engrossed in activities that they lost sight of the time. Leanne worked longer hours and took materials home to work on in the evenings. Her performance was validated by Julie and me, by way of taking photographs and giving affirming feedback.

*Michael:* Tension was at a high level for everyone in the meeting, but Michael's presence was particularly angry as he verbally lashed out in response to the matters raised. Perhaps he felt shamed by the incident and failure to respond to obligations to care for a member of his extended family. Other staff could have played a greater part in meeting the child's needs, as Michael suggested. He seemed unwilling to listen to or consider solutions others offered. The reality of what was required of all staff in the quality improvement process may have not been clear until it was presented in the heat of this meeting. It was possible he did not wish to be part of the problem solving and changes to practice needed for involvement in QIAS. However he also had another option of employment that he perhaps perceived as more desirable and which would mean a change in context and role for him. The meeting provided him with a venue to ventilate his personal frustrations with the job and the workplace.

On reflection Julie and I agreed our top-down approach to change had only been successful in creating a double resistance to change: "resistance to power, resistance for power" (Pile 1997: 24). An inversion or re-position of power, to a bottom up approach was worth trialing to gauge if staff would respond differently. Senge (1993: 289) suggests that top down approaches "thwart learning, failing both to harness the spirit, enthusiasm, and knowledge of people throughout the organization and to be responsive to shifting conditions".

Although the waterfall incident was the pivotal point for substantial change, this event alone did not generate it. A review of prior events, shown in Map 3, demonstrates a series of resistant actions by staff. Reflection on these prior events unsettled Julie and me, and provided energies to reconsider and rethink creatively our ways of working. People who resist or question management have often been labelled as trouble makers. Leaders typically use "defensive routines" (Argyris 1985 cited in Senge 1993) to counter the apparent threat and fail to learn from the experience. What we learnt from the Kulai experience in the lead up to the waterfall incident seems to be captured by Zack and Graves (2001: 265) in their report:

It has been significant for us, both as teachers and as researchers, to have this example of how learning resides in the interaction ... knowledge, individual or collective, is dynamically co-constructed in the context of the activity, the participants, and the mediational tools.

This further affirmed Davis' (1996: 51) conclusion that intentional hearing can have a powerful influence on both the listeners and the listened to in the process of intersubjectivity, where "we are intertwined in our being and becoming; we co-emerge". Barrera and Corso (2002: 112) explains this response in relation to dealing with tension through movement into the third space:

listening and observing without judgement ECSE [early childhood special education] practitioners start the process of finding the current space of another individual ... oftentimes when tension exists ENC [Euro-American normative culture] state that their first reaction is to minimize this tension. In creating 3<sup>rd</sup> space, it is important to stay with the tension, even when significant contradictions are identified.

The third space seemed to permeate more of the operations at Kulai after the waterfall incident occurred. Now there was a sense of moving together, to cope with the struggles encased in this zone of complexities (Haun et al 2002: 459).

### **Building on knowledge gains**

The journeylines of this research follow Vaill's (1996: 45) description of the fluidity of learning and existing in this world, where he proposes an analogy of navigating and exploring a river:

It is the non-explorers who rather naively assume that once they have a clear sharp picture of where they are going, they can trust that picture through to the end. To be an explorer is to not know

where, precisely and concretely, one is going ... The explorer feels your uncertainty and your fear and even sometimes your fury. However, he or she does not think these states of mind can be escaped. Instead they are part of what the explorer explores.

Vaill (1996) consistently emphasises the value of incorporating multiple world views into practice. Through a creative approach to learning people are able to explore new ideas without being overwhelmed by the complexities involved. The theory of enactivism as applied to education by Davis and Sumara (1997) helps the further examination of organisational change. They suggest that enactivism allows the conceptualisation of knowledge-in-(inter)action. The centrality of relationships to the generation and accommodation of new knowledges, became apparent as the intertwining tributaries of the Kulai river were followed. An understanding of the complexity of the (inter)actions provided a way to think and plan differently for learning activities in the workplace. What Senge (1999) demonstrates with the application of ecological models to enable more effective planning and choreographing of learner's responses, was affirmed by the outcomes at Kulai.

In examining links to the centrality of relationships, Barrera and Corso (2002) indicate that when working in a cross-cultural early childhood setting that it is critical to integrate elements of respect and reciprocity with responsiveness, to craft appropriate and productive engagement. My experience of working in a range of health, juvenile justice and education workplaces, would suggest that the same principles can be usefully applied across a range of settings, whether or not the operation is within or across cultures.

Sumara (1999: 594) reports on the value of deconstructing narratives to build an understanding that "human consciousness is [a] multilayered and recursive" structure that continues to emerge from juxtaposing past knowledges, with current perceptions and future goals. Sumara (1999: 597) concludes:

one's identity cannot be contained by one's skin. Instead ... the human sense of self is part of a much larger system of interrelation, one that is likely more complex than can ever be fully known by human cognition.

Interpretation of people's professional journey in a preschool context provides an opportunity for early childhood educators to look for likenesses and differences, in a comparison with their own experiences. Mapping the process at Kulai exposed some of the contributions made by each tributary to the overall operation of the preschool to help others pursue and reflect on their own journeys.

## **Conclusion**

It was challenging, and at times terrifying, when turbulence occurred at Kulai. However the capacity to ride through (dis)harmony while remaining engaged as learners, meant the potential knowledge gains were more likely to be realised. We were conscious as Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian early childhood educators negotiating the river together, that a blending of knowledges enables us to operate in both worlds; it cushions the journey. New knowledges came from those accumulated in the past, built on to current experiences to navigate optimum journeylines ahead. We came to accept that degrees of conflict and miscommunication were inevitable pressures whenever change processes were generated. It was the build up of tension in the space-in-between participants that moved each of us forward into new spaces of meaning making.

In an effort to work with, rather than against, the turbulence of organisational change at Kulai, commitments were made to listen, watch and work in partnerships. This led over time to cultural confluences with tangible and mutual benefits. To record and analyse the process it was essential to listen was essential to use every sense to observe my own and others behaviour. I watched,

concurrently aware of the tastes, smells, touch and feelings of the environment accompanied by the vocal sounds permeating my body.

Many Anglo-Australians have attempted to navigate cross-cultural courses with (dis)oriented understandings of their identity and belonging. I too had entered these streams with reluctance and hesitation, fearful of where the journey could lead, aware of inevitable mistakes and the possibility of getting out of my depth, even drowning. Fortunately I had some awareness passed on by my forebears, who had taught me respect of knowledges and the importance of listening and learning with Aboriginal peoples. The friendships I formed and the meaning making processes engendered with the Kulai people were equally important to me, as we navigated and constructed the river in collaborative ways.