

*Field-based teacher education at multiple sites:  
A story of possibilities and tensions\**

\*Based on a presentation to Teachers Council Forum, *Forum on Flexible Learning in Teacher Education: Assumptions, Values, Concepts and Realities* held in Wellington, 13-14 June 2002.

*Nancy Bell*

*Research and Policy Series No.2, 2004*  
*Series Editor: Val Podmore*

**Institute for Early Childhood Studies, Victoria University of Wellington**

Institute for Early Childhood Studies  
Victoria University of Wellington  
PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand

©2004 Copyright is held by individual writers over their own work  
Publishing rights are held by the Institute for Early Childhood Studies

ISSN: 1176-1849  
Research and Policy Series No.2, 2004  
[Series Editor: Val Podmore]

ISBN: 0-475-20071-3  
Field-based teacher education at multiple sites:  
A story of possibilities and tensions

## CONTENTS

---

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Prologue</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Field-based teacher education</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Field-based students bring diversity and life experience</b>	<b>7</b>
Field-based programmes attract applicants who are culturally representative of the communities they work in	7
Field-based programmes attract students with life experience	7
Field-based students have multiple identities	8
Principles: Transparency, authenticity, diversity and empowerment	9
<b>Field-based programmes allow 'formal theory' to be contextualised</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Field-based courses allow for rigorous and authentic assessment</b>	<b>14</b>
Because it regularly happens across a number of contexts	14
Because students are assessed in centres where they belong	15
Because assessments can always involve practice	15
<b>Multi-site delivery</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Teaching across multiple sites creates possibilities and tensions</b>	<b>17</b>
Multi-site delivery allows local voices and narratives to inform the course	17
Multi-site delivery allows us to utilise different expertise	17
Multi-site delivery provides the reason for dialogue	17
Achieving shared meaning through dialogue is problematic	18
Teaching can turn into 'delivery'	19
Introducing new knowledge is difficult	21
There are tensions between local and central accountability	22
Principles: Participation; access; consultation and accountability	23
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>26</b>

# **FIELD-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION AT MULTIPLE SITES: A STORY OF POSSIBILITIES AND TENSIONS\***

Nancy Bell

Chief Executive

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association

## **PROLOGUE**

In June 2002 I was invited by the Teachers Council to address a group of teacher educators at a national forum focused on 'flexible' delivery of teacher education programmes. The forum took place at a time when the Council's professional advisors, charged with programme approval, were wrestling with changes in the teacher education sector, once the preserve of the six Colleges of Education (previously Teachers Colleges) and now embracing some 33 institutions including universities, colleges, polytechnics, wananga, and private providers. The forum seemed based on the assumption that the old ways (i.e., university or college based, pre-service, face-to-face) were the best ways and hence provided the touchstones against which other forms of delivery could be judged. However, it was acknowledged that change was inevitable, and accordingly, by drawing upon the experiences of teacher educators involved in a range of delivery forms (including distance, open, e-learning and in our case, field based and multi-site) the Council hoped to distil some key principles to inform future policy.

It was in this context that I told our story as an early childhood organisation and 'other tertiary education provider' with a long history of providing field-based training (latterly 'teacher education') at multiple sites throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. This paper, which is based on that presentation, outlines the story with reference to theoretical underpinnings, historical trends, and aspects of policy implications.

---

\*Based on a presentation to Teachers Council Forum, *Forum on Flexible Learning in Teacher Education: Assumptions, Values, Concepts and Realities* held in Wellington, 13-14 June 2002.

## **Introduction**

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association was founded by Sonja Davies and Joyce Coss in 1963 as an organisation of members concerned to raise the standards of childcare in New Zealand, primarily so that women might participate more easily and equitably in all aspects of New Zealand society including the paid work force. Although initial efforts were focused on tightening the regulations governing childcare practice, it soon became apparent to the organisation that access to appropriate training was essential if childcare practice were to change for the better, and in the 1970s and 80s the organisation began a number of initiatives (some in partnership with the Colleges of Education) to enable people working in childcare settings to train on the job through what became known as 'field-based training'. In 1990, Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association was registered by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) as a Private Training Provider and our Certificate in Childcare received NZQA approval. In 1996, when it became possible for providers other than the Colleges of Education to deliver the Diploma of Teaching, Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association developed a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme which was subsequently approved by NZQA and the Teacher Registration Board in 1996. Since that initial programme was launched it has been subject to ongoing evaluation and review, leading to a complete re-write beginning in 2000 and completed in 2002.

In this paper I will tell a story of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association as a provider of field-based teacher education for early childhood practitioners at multiple sites throughout Aotearoa/NZ. It will also be a story of institutional change, as it begins 3 years ago at the time I began working at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, and assumed responsibility for an under-funded, 3-year-old Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme which had 'grown' from a certificate course and was seen by our Monitor to be lacking in academic rigour and missing key areas of content.

It is a story of life at the margins, for it involves young children in childcare settings, the people (mainly women) who work there without recognised qualifications for low wages, their lecturers, once early childhood practitioners themselves, struggling to develop a more academic culture whilst also battling to improve standards in early childhood centres, and an organisation, recognised as an “Other Tertiary Education Provider” (OTEP) by the Ministry of Education, that came into being with an emancipatory agenda and continues to provide services, in this case field-based teacher education, to groups of practitioners at sites deemed unviable by larger providers. The costs are high, the rewards are often intangible, and the outcome uncertain.

### **Background**

In my early days (1999) as programme director I visited each of our 13 teaching bases and heard that our lecturers (often sole appointees in their local areas) felt distanced from the central office of the organisation and instead identified strongly with their local communities. I was particularly struck by the way that our lecturers and students had been disempowered by the course development process and had come to see ‘doing the course’ as a process of ‘working out what Wellington wants’. They had been at the receiving end of change and felt ill-informed, under-resourced, and powerless. However, I was also struck by the way these lecturers accepted their difficult working conditions as the price that had to be paid for their communities to access teacher education. Their criticisms of the organisation were couched in forgiving terms. They recognised the marginalized position of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association as an inadequately funded ‘other’ training provider. But they also believed passionately in the potential of the organisation and themselves to make a difference in the lives of practitioners and children in early childhood settings, themselves marginalised. It is important to acknowledge this passion as it is one of the defining features of field-based early childhood teacher education in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In this context my early priority was to develop stronger relationships between the lecturers at our bases and those of us who work in Wellington. This was made easier in

2000 by access to EFTS funding and hence the opportunity to make some strategic appointments and better resource our programme. It was also necessary to initiate changes to the course and hence my account of field-based and multi-site delivery has been set in a context of writing and teaching a new Diploma of Teaching (ECE) course with some new content, higher and more explicit academic standards, and a stronger emphasis on linking theory to practice.

In many ways our programme is completely unremarkable, as it traverses by-and-large the same territory covered by any other New Zealand diploma of teaching programme with an early childhood focus. It is organised into four broad stands: Learning and Development; Contextual Studies; Professional Practice and Te Puawaitanga o te Kakano (te reo me ngā tikanga Māori). There are two aspects of our programme that I will elaborate upon, however and these are the field-based nature of the programme and the fact that it is taught at multiple sites throughout New Zealand. I will address firstly, the issue of field-based teacher education, and secondly, the experience of working across multiple sites, although in the context of this case study it may be that the two aspects are at times linked. This will be a story about possibilities – and tensions – and one that has no conclusion.

### **Field-based teacher education**

Field-based programmes have been a traditional route to a qualification for Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood practitioners in the child care sector, allowing them to train ‘on the job’ (Working party on Field-Based Training for Early Childhood Education, 1988). In a sector where the supply for childcare spaces has been unable to meet demand, and the legislative requirements for qualified staff have increased, such staff are in short supply and field-based study has been an attractive option, allowing centres to remain open and staff (whose wages post-diploma remain low) to continue to earn.

Our own programme leads to the Diploma in Teaching (ECE). It is three years in length, full-time, and involves a one-day face-to-face tutorial, one day of independent

study, and 15 hours of supervised practice in the student's own centre each week, plus a three-week practicum in another centre each year. We offer this programme at 13 sites where it is taught by local lecturers.

Although this model has been popular for 20 years within Aotearoa/New Zealand, there has been remarkably little evaluation of its effects. The international literature on field-based teacher education, while of interest, is not directly relevant as it tends to report initiatives involving enhanced field experience for pre-service or graduate students (e.g., Duquette, 1996; Munby, 1999), rather than the model familiar to us here where working in an early childhood centre is the main criterion for entry. There is another significant difference between field-based teacher education here and overseas: overseas the model typically involves placement in a carefully chosen classroom or school endorsed by the programme provider; here, in early childhood education, the majority of students entering the programme are already in employment and it is their place of employment that becomes the context for much of their field-experience. These contexts can be supportive models of 'good practice' but it is often the case that they are not especially so and this leads to a relationship where our lecturers are attempting not only to effect change in students' practices, but through their students, to effect change in their centres as a whole. There is a further body of research that has some relevance and this is the literature about alternative forms of certification, that reports various creative initiatives overseas to address acute teacher shortages through field-based programmes (e.g., Feistritzer & Chester, 1991; Lunnenberg, Snoek & Swennen, 2000). As one might expect such initiatives have both proponents and adversaries (Schulman, 1992).

Those of us who have taught for some years in pre-service, field-based, and in-service/post-diploma programmes in Aotearoa/New Zealand have, of course, formed a set of beliefs about field-based teacher education and it is these that I would like to share with you.



## **Field-based students bring diversity and life experience**

*Field-based programmes attract applicants who are culturally representative of the communities they work in*

Overall, 68% of our students identify as European/Pakeha, 16% as Māori, 13% as Pacific Nations people, and 3% as 'other'. Usually these students belong to the communities that use the early childhood facilities they work in, where many will have begun as a parent help or volunteer and eventually have been offered paid employment. For many, the move to gain a teaching qualification is something previously unanticipated which happened only when someone in their workplace 'tapped them on the shoulder'. Thus, based on anecdote, we believe that applicants for field-based programmes are a somewhat different group from those who enter a pre-service programme, following a conscious choice to invest in a career (although this pattern will differ in communities where there is no pre-service alternative). This could be seen as negative or positive, depending on the position one takes on who enters teaching. We choose to see it as positive, primarily because we believe that children and their families/whanau benefit when their teachers are able to share more than their centre or school world of experience. We also value the breadth of perspectives that our students bring, perspectives that have often been missing or under-represented in pre-service institutionally based programmes.

*Field-based programmes attract students with life experience*

All of the students in our programme are over 20 years of age, 56% are over 30, and 30% are over 40. In practice this means:

- Our students are able to bring a broad range of life experiences to their learning context. For example in a recent class focused on children's transitions to formal schooling, students recalled and examined transitions they themselves had experienced, which included leaving home to live with other family members, leaving the Pacific Islands to seek a job in Aotearoa/New Zealand, marrying, divorcing, being widowed, becoming a parent, changing jobs, becoming a student and moving cities.

- They are rather more 'streetwise' than they might have been once, and are vocal in challenging their lecturers (and the organisation) when they feel this is warranted. They are unwilling to give time to anything that is not seen as relevant and expect delivery of their course to be of a high standard.
- They may have been away from formal study for some years and may be classified as 'second chance' learners because they have previously failed to gain formal qualifications. These students may bring gaps in their knowledge about how to study, accompanied by the well known anxieties of adult learners, anxieties that are exacerbated when one is already employed and there is potential for failure to become a public process in one's place of work.

The primary reason that a field-based programme attracts mature students is that it enables them to meet their financial commitments whilst studying. In a best case scenario, the relationships at the centre (and often, the pressure for the centre to meet regulations) also provides a crucial incentive to keep going; important for mature women (99% of our students are women) who experience a multitude of competing demands on their time and are unused to putting themselves first. In a worst-case scenario however, the competing demands (including those imposed by employment) overtake the mature student, causing drop out and failure.

*Field-based students have multiple identities*

As well as being students they are parents, sons and daughters, partners, employers, employees, ministers' wives, school trustees, and so on. Sometimes the challenges simply arise from the need to meet responsibilities arising from different roles, e.g., studying and parenting and the fact that these cannot all be satisfactorily accomplished within a time frame. This is a particular issue for students with significant cultural responsibilities.

There is also potential for the roles themselves to generate conflict, for example the student/employee who is the agent of change in the centre. This conflict is usually most evident when students are assessed in, or about, practice.

On the positive side, the uncertainty that arises from the juxtaposition of multiple identities can promote rich and fruitful dialogue. For example, a student in a professional practice course examining working with parents was able to call upon her experiences as a kaiako, mother and whanau member, and as a daughter retelling her own parents' stories of cultural alienation. When students are able to give voice to such experiences, there is the opportunity for them to engage with formal theory on a new level, one which involves the questions 'is this true for me?' and 'in what circumstances?'

*Principles: Transparency, authenticity, diversity and empowerment.*

Out of this perception of our students come some principles that influence our practice:

- Faced with a pool of applicants, many of whom are 'second chance learners' it is crucial to get the student selection process right (or as right as it can be) as it is difficult to fail any student but more particularly so when that student is already in employment and working with children in your community. The fact that students are already employed also makes selection problematic.
- The dialogue at the time of selection needs to be very 'real' so that applicants and their centres know what will be expected of them. A field-based course can look like a part-time commitment but we know that unless students have significant amounts of time for independent study they will fail. In this context we have learned to say 'no' to some requests for further 'flexibility' in delivery modes (e.g., teaching in the weekends).
- The course must be written, taught, and assessed in ways that validate and gives voice to the diverse life experiences that our students bring and spaces must be created in which students can examine alternative narratives, where uncertainty is valued over certainty, and complexity over simplicity.

- The lecturers we employ need to be able to ‘cut the mustard’ with mature students. This means that they need (collectively) to represent the diversity they teach, and individually to know themselves and their subject matter well and be professionally confident enough to be able to articulate, justify, and change their own practice. They need to be willing and able, also, to demystify the process of academic study and make explicit both expectations and strategies. Working with mature students requires lecturers to give up some power and control but not to abandon this altogether – nor to pretend to be ‘equals’ in a relationship which is, by its nature, unequal. Because of the complex nature of this relationship, lecturers need continual access to sound professional support and supervision.

### **Field-based programmes allow ‘formal theory’ to be contextualised**

There is a huge literature around the centrality of field experience (or ‘practicum’) in teacher education programmes, much of which arises from a pragmatist account of knowledge and belief in the value of learning through experience (Dewey, 1938), which has given rise to a view of education as *praxis* and the teacher as a reflective practitioner (e.g., Schon, 1983, 1987), constantly constructing and re-constructing his or her own ‘working theories’ through action and reflection leading to further action/reflection – and so on. It is this notion of education as *praxis* that underpins our programme, along with a commitment to developing students’ critical consciousness (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Smyth, 1989; Zeichner, 1989).

When they apply to enter our programme, our students have already worked in an early childhood centre for at least 6 months, with the average period of time worked being 4 years. These students are not interested in ‘survival’ – they have achieved this already. What they do want to know is how to improve their practice, for example, how to plan a programme, how to manage children’s challenging behaviours more effectively, and/or special educational needs and how to prepare them for school – questions arising from the ‘now’ of practice. They are also interested in knowing how to justify their practice

to parents and other staff. Many are wanting to achieve positions of greater power in their centres and believe that a recognised qualification will give them status and voice.

Hence these students come with considerable prior experience and on this basis have decided that they want to know more. They arrive with real questions and are motivated to find answers. The subsequent dialogue around problems in practice allows lecturers to engage with students' thinking and find ways to take it further. This dialogue sets the scene for the next 3 years where students move between the weekly tutorial and the centres in which they work and are prompted to interrogate practice in the light of theory and vice versa, to examine theory (both formal and one's own) in the light of practice. Lecturers who teach in field-based programmes speak with immense satisfaction of students whose prior informal learning is challenged – or confirmed and whose practice changes – or consolidates as the result of such experience. The structure of the programme allows for this to happen in a context of immediacy; what happens in class this week is explored in practice tomorrow and revisited next week. Through this process, students become able to make their working theories more explicit and to refine these, so that their practice becomes more and more theorised.

Our experience suggests, however, that simply bringing practitioners into class (or the reverse, sending students out into practice settings) each week is not in itself sufficient to ensure that practice becomes *praxis*, nor to generate critical dialogue about the purpose and outcomes of education, for several reasons:

- The process of the individual practitioner making their own 'truth' out of experience is problematic in a context where ideologies prevail and some voices are privileged over others. Particularly is this so if one sees education as having an emancipatory aim. In other words, individual reflection has its limits.
- While the intention of the lecturer may be to shed new light on students' practice (and theories), sometimes it seems that the reverse occurs and instead our students appropriate formal theory to support what they already believe and do,

even when this is clearly inconsistent. Considering the multiple identities of these students (e.g., student, 'teacher', and employee) and the different power relationships they exist within, there is every incentive to do this. In other words, individual reflection may be based on mis- (or missing) information.

- Some students are more reflective than others (for a range of reasons, including the interest and ability of other staff at the student's centre to engage in reflection).
- Students' own centres vary in their interest and ability to engage in reflection.

Because of this we believe that field-based programmes need to be carefully designed to promote rigorous dialogue about practice within a community of learners (Wells, 2001) including the students, their centres and the communities they serve, our lecturers and the wider cultural, professional and academic communities with which we are affiliated. We attempt to do this in a number of ways:

- The course is written to provoke questions about practice through weekly in-centre tasks, assignments involving integration of theory and practice, and sessions involving structured debates around issues.
- In-centre tasks and assignments involve students in dialogue with members of the centre community.
- In-centre tasks and assignments are used as basis of a classroom dialogue where different students share their experiences and reflections with the each other and their lecturer.
- Students keep an individual journal focused on critical incidents that forms the basis of weekly dialogue between themselves and their lecturer.
- Through the course, students are exposed to relevant theory, research, and perspectives through carefully selected texts and readings, visiting speakers, etc.
- Each year students undertake a practicum experience in a centre other than their own, under the supervision of an Associate Teacher.

- The lecturer not only teaches in the tutorial but also teaches in the student's own centre through regular visits to observe, support, and assess the student's practice.

It is this final point, the way in which the student's centre becomes a teaching context for the lecturer that is perhaps the most powerful feature of a field-based programme. Lecturers *know how it is* in the workplaces of their students. Once you have been there it is impossible to remain 'abstract' in the tutorial; lecturers are compelled to be authentic when planning weekly tutorials, not only to make the content relevant to the realities of these students' working lives but to make it possible – and if not possible in the 'here and now' then to begin a dialogue about 'why not' and 'where to from here?' Dialogues about what is, and is not, possible lend themselves well to a programme focus on understanding the contexts (historical, social, political) within which early childhood practice has emerged and in problematising the taken-for-granted knowledge that underpins current practice. The prevalence of this kind of dialogue in our tutorials suggests that New Zealand early childhood practitioners need access to courses informed by a critical pedagogical framework (McLaren, 1993), alongside the more traditional underpinnings from cultural and developmental psychology.

Working with students in and outside of their centres, lecturers find themselves in dialogue with students who want to know 'what is possible for me, working with these children, now, in this context'? These questions, arising from real-world experience, hold potential for learning that is difficult to replicate in a pre-service 'classroom scenario'. The downside, of course, is that what has been learned through experience is often difficult to unlearn, hence our lecturers have both powerful and powerless moments, for students also bring 'bad habits' which they are unwilling to change.

In this sense, it is important to revisit my earlier statement that it is possible for field-based students to interrogate practice: while this assumption underlies our programme it is also tempered by the recognition that there are many reasons why this cannot happen. Students have other interests which lend themselves to maintaining the status

quo; they are valued employees, already ‘teachers’ in the eyes of their communities; they are people who have found satisfying employment that accommodates their other roles and responsibilities; they themselves value and are invested in the very practices now up for grabs; they have invested in the relationships within their workplace, relationships based on complicit acceptance of ‘the ways things are done here’.

Hence it is also sometimes the complaint of field-based students that their lecturers, seeking changes in practice, ‘do not understand how it is here’, further, some resist being portrayed as either unknowing or powerless, choosing even to fail the course rather than submit to the knowledgeable ‘other’.

This brings me to the observation that notions of ‘dialogue’ are always far more problematic than we (in positions of power relative to the student) realise. As a group of teacher educators this is something we need to be thinking and talking about. It is a particular issue for field-based programmes where lecturers can become caught up in trying to change early childhood practice through their students – a mission that is fraught for all.

### **Field-based courses allow for rigorous and authentic assessment**

We believe that the assessment that occurs in a field-based programme is both rigorous and authentic for three reasons:

#### *Because it regularly happens across a number of contexts*

In our case, it occurs through group discussion in the tutorial, through observation and professional discussion in the student’s own centre and the practicum centre, through the reflective journal dialogue, and through academic assignments. In our model students work with one lecturer around a specific module for one term and hence will be involved in numerous discussions in several contexts over a sustained period of time. In this context lecturers gain a good sense of how students think about their practice and what they consider to be possible.



*Because students are assessed in centres where they belong*

When writing the assessment for the course, we are always struck by the limited demands we can make of our students when they go on practicum in their ‘other’ centres compared with what we can expect of them in their own centres where they have long standing relationships with children, parents/whanau, and the wider community. This is a theme that our students reiterate when they return from practicum, relieved to be able to assume full responsibility again in their own centres after the ‘hands off’ world of someone else’s centre.

This is not to negate the importance of working in, and being assessed in, another centre. Assuming a good supply of Associate Teachers, the practicum in another centre allows us to carefully match a student with an appropriate professional mentor – something that we have no control over in the student’s place of employment. Practicum in another centre is a vital part of the process of widening the professional horizons of our students and provides a crucial opportunity to ensure that they can meet current professional expectations in a range of early childhood contexts. However, if our students were to be assessed only in other centres, we would be much more limited in what we could expect to see for several reasons: the amount of time on practicum in another centre is relatively brief, the legal status of a ‘student’ is different from that of an employed practitioner, and most importantly the relationships formed on practicum between students and children, parents, and staff are necessarily much more limited than in their own workplace.

Of course there can be a disadvantage to being assessed in your workplace when that context does not endorse the practices you are being taught, or allow you to give voice to your aspirations, and for students in such a predicament the practicum in an other centre provides an essential space to try out ‘being themselves’.

*Because assessments can always involve practice*

Because our students are working in centres, we are always able to design assignments which require students to demonstrate links between formal theory, relevant literature,

and practice. As I have discussed, we have consciously developed an assessment process which takes advantage of students' access to sustained practice.

There are issues around assessment in field-based programmes, however, and I have alluded to one of these, i.e. the professional dilemma faced by lecturers when students fail to meet the standards yet remain in employment. There are two other issues:

- Collaboration with associates in the field (particularly those in the student's own workplace) around assessment can be difficult in a context where qualification levels remain low.
- In the face of students working in very different cultural contexts and a growing awareness of the hegemonic nature of the discourses surrounding early childhood practice (Canella, 1997), we find ourselves less certain about what counts as "good practice". This uncertainty has the potential to generate fruitful dialogue within a community of practice, however for many reasons, it is difficult to establish such community in which all can participate.

Issues around assessment tend to be exacerbated by multi-site delivery and I will return to this thought shortly.

### **Multi-site delivery**

I will now elaborate upon the other aspect of our course that I identified earlier – namely, that it is developed centrally and taught at 13 sites throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. Students attend weekly tutorials at a teaching base at one of these 13 locations and receive course outlines and readings prepared at our national office (Wellington) by a course writer. Lecturers (who usually live locally) also receive a comprehensive set of teaching notes and a collection of recommended texts to support delivery. Both lecturers and students receive a national library service which is provided by mail. At each teaching base there is a small group of lecturers (from 2-5) who communicate with national office and their colleagues at other bases by email or phone, meeting together in person twice a year at national hui.

## **Teaching across multiple sites creates possibilities and tensions**

From our experience we believe that there are both possibilities and tensions in teaching a course across multiple sites. Some of the possibilities are as follows:

### *Multi-site delivery allows local voices and narratives to inform the course*

Early childhood communities in places such as Gisborne and Dunedin (for example) are constituted very differently and bring their own ‘gifts’ – and issues – to our programme. Because we work with 13 different local communities, we gain a myriad of perspectives which are used to inform our course, and enable a deeper analysis of early childhood practice in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. This happens in a number of ways, for example through input into the course development process. However, we also look for informal opportunities to exploit this feature of our programme e.g., by sending lecturers to work alongside colleagues at other teaching bases.

### *Multi-site delivery allows us to utilise different expertise*

Within a large teaching staff, different people have particular research interests and areas of professional strength. Multi-site delivery enables us to involve a range of lecturers in developing aspects of the course relevant to their expertise under the guidance of our centrally based course writer who ensures that the course is comprehensive, coherent, and technically well-constructed.

### *Multi-site delivery provides the reason for dialogue*

Because the course is developed nationally and taught at 13 locations there is both opportunity and necessity to engage in dialogue about its focus and philosophy, what should be included, and how it should be taught and assessed. The intention of the dialogue is that we form a community of practice (Fleer, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991) who share a vision for our course and our students. The dialogue, when it allows for all voices to be heard, has the potential to enrich significantly the programme and the lecturers who teach it.

There are, of course, large challenges in writing a course that someone else teaches (or in teaching a course that someone else has written). Some of these, expressed as tensions, are as follows:

*Achieving shared meaning through dialogue is problematic*

Achieving shared meaning is no small undertaking as our lecturers (like others in the New Zealand early childhood teacher education community) come from different geographical, professional, academic, and cultural backgrounds, hence it is dangerous to assume shared experience, values or knowledge.

Indeed it is probably a myth that we can ever completely achieve ‘shared meaning’ within the organisation about what should be taught and how, and increasingly I find myself troubled about how much I would want to achieve this. As we in the field of early childhood education come to recognise the ways in which dominant discourses have shaped our thinking and practice, it becomes less and less possible to arrive at ‘truths’ to guide our practice or to believe that a consensus of equals is possible. This is apparent to me already through the way that our lecturers choose to enter the dialogue (or not) and with whom, what they feel able to say, and what is not said. At the present moment, I am aware that there are many possible other accounts of our programme that will be different from mine depending on who is telling them, to whom, and why, and these will include tales of resistance as well as compliance.

As we in Wellington go about the re-development of our course, we are aware that some of our lecturers – and associates opt to have little input to the dialogue for various reasons – workload, other responsibilities, beliefs about what can and can’t be said and a sense that what they say may make little difference anyway. Some have (bravely) expressed feelings of inadequacy in the face of higher academic standards, new knowledge, and the language that goes with it, some are frustrated by the post-modern imperative to problematise everything and opt instead to give clear statements about ‘best practice’ in the local early childhood context of low standards and little professional accountability.

The problematic nature of dialogue notwithstanding, we have developed some strategies to maximise the participation of our teaching staff in the process of developing and reviewing the course, as follows:

- All teaching staff are consulted on learning outcomes and there is a process of negotiation.
- Teaching staff are consulted throughout the writing process through face to face presentations at staff hui and by receiving course materials in draft form for review.
- Teaching staff at bases write parts or all of some of the modules.
- Teaching staff are represented on the programme advisory committee.
- Teaching staff are encouraged and supported to undertake further academic study relevant to the programme and/or to attend conferences (and where possible we send more than one staff member).
- Lecturers and students provide formal evaluations of courses to the course writer and the programme director at the end of each module, and these become the basis for the module review.
- The course writers and I teach in the programme.

These strategies do not provide a solution to the issues around dialogue, but they provide a starting point.

*Teaching can turn into 'delivery'*

Since beginning the programme re-write we have been very aware that our lecturers needed support if they were to teach a new programme competently. Over the past 2 years we have trialled various strategies and discovered some pitfalls particularly around giving too much support which, in spite of our entreaties to 'teach it your way', had the effect of undermining our lecturers' confidence so that they became distrustful of their own knowledge. In other words, we wrote them out of the course.

Our course has always been centrally developed, although that process has been handled differently at different times with different outcomes. In its first 3 years, lecturers at the

bases received a course outline that stated the learning outcomes, set texts and recommended readings, a very brief outline of content to be covered and some suggestions for assessment, based around students providing evidence that they had met learning outcomes. These lecturers reported having to work very hard to interpret the intentions of the course writer/s. However, once they had taught a module, these same lecturers tended to develop a sense of ownership, based on their experience of constructing their own course. Sometimes these 'own courses' included out-of-date perspectives or they were pitched at a lower level than we expected. Especially was this the case when the group of students entered the course with additional learning needs e.g., they were second (or other) language speakers of English.

In our subsequent re-write we attempted to reduce the lecturer's workload and ensure that material being presented was current and relevant by providing detailed teaching notes and resources (e.g., recent journal articles) for each tutorial session. We also attempted to address the concerns about level (in part) by providing a set of assessments for national use. The response to this was mixed: some lecturers were grateful to have easy access to relevant and up to date resources and set about creating a course around these. Others struggled with the prescriptive nature of the new material, feeling that they had lost the ability to be creative or to work within their student's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Some could not make sense of the new content or the assessments or felt that they were too academic. Some taught the old course anyway. Some left.

We are now in the third year of the programme re-write and through consultation with our teaching staff have yet again revised our approach to what we provide, which still includes centrally written assessments and collections of relevant resources, but rather less written 'scaffolding' than previously. On the other hand, we have recognised the need for a lot more dialogue between writer/s and lecturers and hence have made this support available (via staff hui, email and phone). In some cases this has involved the course writer planning and de-briefing after each tutorial with a new lecturer throughout a ten week module.

The feedback from some of our staff suggests that we are slowly forming a community of practice, and that this is valued by many as a context for supporting their work, especially when this work involves coming to grips with new content or dilemmas around supporting and assessing students. We have observed also that our lecturers are becoming more involved in challenging the content and assessments in the course, suggesting that they are less interested in working out ‘what Wellington wants’ and feel more ownership of the course. The point must be made, however, that all this comes at a price and the cost – of providing central support people, bringing staff together at hui, long-distance phone calls and so on – is significant. In the face of budgetary restraints it is tempting to search for a ‘virtual’ solution, yet our experience suggests that no one method of communication suits everyone and further that reducing face to face contact would diminish the ability of Māori and Pacific lecturers to participate – and yet it is with these perspectives we wish to engage.

*Introducing new knowledge is difficult*

While our lecturers have individual areas of professional strength and interest, there is also a need for all to come on board with new perspectives and paradigm shifts when these influence the course. For most, simply receiving texts and readings is insufficient, and there is a need for a great deal of dialogue with more knowledgeable others over a sustained period of time. This is an issue we face currently in attempting to introduce concepts from the field of critical pedagogy and cultural psychology to a teaching staff who have been trained in a different tradition (mostly developmental psychology). While some utilise their professional development entitlements to pursue higher degrees which relate to the course, it is unlikely that relevant papers will be available to all. This creates some challenges for us as we set about writing a new course.

*There are tensions between local and central accountability*

Lecturers teaching in a centrally developed programme often find themselves between a rock and a hard place when it comes to reconciling their belief in, and commitment to, their locally based students and the centres they work in, with their responsibilities to maintain standards established by a somewhat more ‘faceless’ national organisation.

This is a particular issue for lecturers teaching students at the margins (for example students for whom English is a second or other language or those in unlicensed centres who desperately need qualified teachers in order to achieve licensed status and access funding), who struggle to achieve a passing standard in the face of huge obstacles. The position of these students within discourse about 'raising academic standards' creates dissonance for their lecturers that is not easily addressed in the context of national accountability and external agencies.

Three years ago it became apparent that we had some issues around achieving consistent standards across sites. Mostly these issues centred around the academic skills we required of our students, skills that were not made explicit in the course materials and hence assumed 'shared understanding' on the part of our lecturers. It was our experience that the standards achieved by students tended to reflect the expectations of a particular lecturer, modified by the ability range within the local group of students.

To address this we have implemented several strategies:

- Student selection is managed nationally with local input.
- Course expectations have been more explicitly stated and assessment standards described.
- An internal and external moderation system has been implemented.
- All lecturers are assigned a peer moderator from another teaching base for each module and exchange samples of each written assessment. One third of the course is externally moderated each year (on a rolling cycle) and students' assignments are compared.
- Each year, as programme director, I spend time in each lecturer's tutorial to get a sense of who they are teaching and what issues they bring.

There is of course, a price to be paid for our desire to control lecturers' work and the methods of surveillance that we employ. I am aware of the way this constrains the relationships that are possible between us in Wellington and them out there and it partly



for this reason that the Course Writer and I also teach in the course and require our colleagues to moderate us.

*Principles: Participation; access; consultation and accountability*

In summary, the principles that we would see underpinning multi-site delivery are as follows:

- There must be both formal and informal opportunities for all involved (lecturers and students and their communities) to participate in the development and review of the course.
- Lecturers teaching the course need ongoing access to a community of practice.
- There need to be consultation around the level and type of support provided.
- Standards must be explicitly stated in a number of ways and maintained across sites.

**Conclusion**

Which brings me to the end but not the conclusion. We exist in a time and place where the education of young children is still largely in the hands of anyone who wins a job in an early childhood centre, where there is insufficient funding to pay early childhood teachers a decent wage, and where employers struggle to recruit qualified teachers or to support unqualified staff to study. It is argued that early childhood educational practice will only be improved when teachers in this sector attain the status of their primary and secondary counterparts who are required to qualify prior to employment. As an organisation, we support this argument and look forward to a time when gaining a teaching diploma is seen as a beginning and not an end. Mindful of our emancipatory beginnings, we question our current role and wonder whether we are unintentionally contributing to the domestication of early childhood practitioners? Yet we are fearful to walk away, fearful that something important will be lost.

Our story is one of students valued by of their communities and rich in experience, facing huge and often conflicting demands associated with multiple identities including those of student and employee. To be an ‘untrained’ practitioner in early childhood

context in Aotearoa/New Zealand is to exist on the margins of the teaching profession. The choice to enter a field-based programme is often determined by other imperatives. In this context there are inspiring stories of change and some discouraging stories of conservatism.

Our diverse group of lecturers work in a context of change, control and surveillance focused on achieving consistent standards and maintaining external approval. To this context, they bring their desires to empower children, parents/whanau, their teachers and the communities they serve. We value their voices and their passions.

Field-based teacher education, as we know it in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, arose as a practical solution to an endemic teacher shortage. Those of us who work within this model are encouraged by the opportunities it provides to contextualise students' learning and the way in which these lend themselves to critical pedagogy. However, given the large number of early childhood teachers who are qualifying in this way, it clearly warrants further research if we are to understand fully the impact on early childhood practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We invite the teacher education community to join us in addressing this space and to answer the question, 'if not this, then what'?

## **Epilogue**

The redevelopment of the Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme was completed in late 2002 and the programme re-approved by NZQA and the Teachers Council.

In 2003 Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association celebrated its fortieth anniversary. This provided an opportunity to look back on our history, captured and re-told by Professor Helen May, eminent early childhood academic and past Council member of the Association in the earlier days when training for people working in childcare settings was not widely available through the mainstream providers, prompting the Association to develop its own Certificate in Childcare (1980 - 96).

*Concerning women considering children: battles of the Childcare Association 1963-2003* (May, 2003) was launched at our annual conference in July 2003 and elicited considerable interest and reminiscing, as many of the current early childhood workforce have at some time been associated with Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association (or NZCA as it was previously known) either as members, Council members, Area Training Supervisors or trainees, or more recently as Lecturers/Pouako or students.

In 2004 our programme will be offered at 15 sites throughout Aotearoa/NZ.

## References

- Bloomfield, D. (December 1997). *Theoretical frameworks for the practicum*. Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference, Brisbane.
- Canella, G. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education. Social justice and revolution*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier.
- Duquette, C. (1996). Conflicting perceptions of participants in field-based teacher education programmes. *McGill Journal of Education*, 32(3), 263-272, Fall 1997.
- Feistritzer, E. & Chester, D. (1991). *Alternative teacher certification: A state-by-state analysis*. Washington, DC: National Centre for Education Information.
- Fleer, M. (April 16, 2001). *Early childhood education as a “community of practice” or as lived “social reproduction”?* Draft keynote paper presented at the Teacher Refresher course, Massey University, Palmerston North.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lunnenberg, M., Snoek, M., & Sweenen, A. (2000). Between pragmatism and legitimacy: Developments and dilemmas in teacher education in the Netherlands. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 23(3), 251-260.
- McLaren, P. (1993). *Life in schools. An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman.

May, H. (2003). *Concerning women, considering children: Battles of the Childcare Association 1963-2003*, Wellington: Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association.

Munby, H. (1999). Planning, implementing, and evaluating a field-based teacher education program: An introduction. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 26(2), 5-9.

Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Schon, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the profession*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Schulman, D. (1992). Alternative to certification: Are we on the right track? *Policy Briefs*, 17, 6-7.

Smyth, J. (1989). Developing and sustaining critical reflection in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(2), 2-9.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wells, G. (Ed.). (2001). *Action talk and text: Learning and teaching through inquiry*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Working Party on Field-Based Training for Early Childhood Education. (1988). *Report of working party on field-based training for early childhood education*. New Zealand.

Zeichner, K. (1989). Preparing teachers for democratic schools. *Action in Teacher Education*, 11, 5-10.