



Early Childhood Field-based Initial Teacher Education in New Zealand. A Valid Choice?

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an insight into the background and philosophy of field-based teacher education in the early childhood sector. Throughout, we discuss why such programmes should be considered as a valid choice for both students and ITE providers.

INTRODUCTION

Field-based teacher education (FBTE) in New Zealand has been a part of the educational landscape of early childhood education (ECE) since the 1960s. The history of FBTE is grounded in many important early childhood education narratives including the women's movement, the growth of the childcare sector, and the development of early childhood education specific teaching qualifications. Yet, the story of FBTE seems to be relatively unknown by those in the early childhood and teacher education sectors. The lack of research pertaining to field-based teacher education is a point which is also highlighted in the work of Brennan, Everiss and Mara (2011). In their report, *An Exploration of Field-based Early Childhood Teacher Education in Aotearoa New Zealand*, the authors discuss that field-based teacher education 'is an area which little is known about' (p. 5). Zeichner (1999) highlights that the lack of research pertaining to field-based teacher education is due to social prejudices that exist deriving from historical views of teacher education. Zeichner provokes teacher educators to open their minds to new ways of teaching, highlighting that field-based teacher education offers the chance for new ways of enquiry-based learning.

Furthermore, the on-going contribution of the field-based sector to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in New Zealand is largely invisible in educational literature. The existence of FBTE outside of the school sectors and its predominance in the ECE sector has perhaps contributed to this situation. Research about all teacher education has largely concerned itself with mainstream, traditional approaches; therefore, models such as the field-based model have been largely ignored, or described as problematic to quality (Kane, 2005).

The aim of this article is to tell the story and strengthen the voice of FBTE through its history and explore the pedagogical underpinnings of the model. In doing so, we hope to respond to criticisms of the field-based model that have emerged from New Zealand publications about teacher education (e.g., Kane, 2005; Rivers, 2006). There is a perception across the ECE sector that such criticisms have arisen out of a need to address teacher supply issues and that ITE fails to prepare teachers for the realities of teaching and being a teacher (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006). In this article we advocate for FBTE programmes to be seen as legitimate alternatives in ITE, sitting alongside the more traditional campus-based teacher education programmes.

DEFINING 'FIELD-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION'

The authors of this paper share a common view of what defines a contemporary field-based model of teacher education. We later reveal how the definition has evolved over time alongside the evolution of the early childhood education sector. Field-based teacher education is often confused with other models of teacher education such as distance and flexible (or mixed-mode) models. However, contemporary FBTE has some key defining features. Essentially, we understand FBTE to be a programme of teacher education that requires student teachers to gain regular and sustained experience in an early childhood education centre (practicum centre), with a qualified teacher in support and with attendance at lectures within the field-based institution. The requirements for this field-based component differ between programmes but typically involve a minimum of 12-16 hours of experience weekly in a 'home' practicum centre. It is also interesting to note that although some teachers are employed by their practicum centre, an increasing number of students are choosing to meet this requirement in a voluntary capacity in a range of early childhood settings including kindergartens. In addition to this *sustained* relationship with their practicum centre, students on field-based programmes may also be required to undertake a range of block teaching experiences in other early childhood settings (this is where students spend perhaps 3, 4 or 5 weeks in a different ECE service to that of their own practicum setting). Field-based programmes are distinct from distance programmes and solely online delivery programmes where learning mostly occurs away from the host institution, and where the requirement for a sustained relationship with a licensed early childhood service may not be a monitored or a key component of the programme, to the same extent as FBTE programmes.

Field-based initial teacher education programmes *immerse* students in early childhood education settings and allow them sustained opportunities to reflect and apply knowledge. This is established approach to preparing teachers is advocated by the authors as it assists student teachers to associate theory with practice. Students develop applied skills and knowledge, participate in communities of practice and build an understanding of early childhood education through the exploration of the inter-relationship between theory and practice (praxis). Alongside the subject knowledge required to teach in early childhood education, FBTE programmes tend to be underpinned by the belief that 'how' to be a teacher is of equal importance. This is supported by Goodfellow and Sumison (2000), who state that 'learning to teach involves learning how to be a teacher rather than simply learning to do the work of a teacher' (p. 247).

Therefore, such programmes develop skills and knowledge for students to explore 'who' they are as a teacher, utilising a range of adult learning and teaching approaches.

The research of Brennan, Everiss and Mara (2011) highlights that three key features of a field-based teacher education programme are:

- The authenticity of experience (shared experience and understandings);
- The student is already a teacher (providing authentic and equitable learning encounters between the lecturer and the student); and,
- Rethinking 'transfer of knowledge' in teacher education (linking theory to practice and practice to theory). (p. 2)

Field-based teacher education provides an opportunity for students to extend on and critique theory whilst contextualising theoretical learning within their day to day experiences in an early childhood education service. Conversely they are able to theorise practice in an authentic environment where they are not merely student visitors, but integral members of the environment's community of practice.

THE ORIGINS OF FBTE: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

There has been some suggestion by the early childhood education industry that field-based teacher education has arisen solely out of a need to address teacher supply issues. Kane (2005) perpetuates this idea in her report on initial teacher education in New Zealand through statements such as, 'The 1990's were marked by an increase in the number of private providers outside of the traditional college of education sector, as private providers and polytechnics tapped into the increasing demand for trained early childhood teachers...' (p. 4). In reality, FBTE has a much longer history that reveals the commitment of many of its providers to quality early childhood settings, qualified early childhood teachers and to the particular pedagogical framework afforded by a field-based model.

Early history

Particularly important to the story and history of field-based teacher education in the early childhood sector is the contribution of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/ New Zealand Childcare Association (TTPOoA/NZCA; In July 2014, a resolution was passed at the Association's AGM to change its name to Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand). The history of TTPOoA/NZCA, and the commitment of this organisation to the early childhood sector, has been well documented elsewhere (May, 2003; Von Sturmer & Carpenter, 1981). However, for the purposes of this review it is worth noting that Sonya Davies and Joyce Coss established the New Zealand Association of Child Care Centres (later New Zealand Childcare Association) in 1963 with the two-pronged aim of raising the quality of conditions for childcare workers and raising the quality of experiences for children in the centres. Sonya Davies worked hard in the 1960s and 70s to convince Government that teachers colleges should be the venue for training for those who worked in childcare centres (May, 1997). When Government failed to respond, TTPOoA/NZCA set up its own field-based training. Bell (2004) explains:

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 practices were to change for the better, and in the 1970s and 80s the organisation began a number of initiatives (some in partnership with Colleges of Education) to enable people working in childcare settings to train on the job through what became known as 'field-based training'. (p. 3)

The 1989 *Before Five* policies saw the responsibility for childcare moved to the then Department of Education and traditional early childhood teacher education found a place in the Colleges of Education with 'integrated early childhood diplomas that would provide training for both childcare and kindergarten services and for working with children from birth' (May, 1997, p. 23). The story of FBTE does not end here, however, as this new qualification did not necessarily attend to the many untrained teachers already established in centres.

Department Of Education Working Party (1988)

A little known but critical account of FBTE in NZ can be found in a 1988 report from the Department of Education. The Department of Education Working Party (made up of representatives from the Department of Education, NZ Childcare Association, NZ Free Kindergarten Association, NZ Playcentre Federation, the Early Childhood Workers Union, Barnados New Zealand, Te Kohanga Reo, Kindercare Learning Centres, and the Association of Teachers College Councils) was set up to investigate the establishment of field-based training within Colleges of Education to enable those already working in early childhood centres to become qualified.

Within the report, field-based teacher education was defined as 'a system of training whereby people employed to work with children in early childhood centres use that work and those centres as the basis for their training' (Department of Education Working Party, 1988, p. 2). Positive aspects of the field-based approach were seen to include 'immediate benefits to centres and communities' and 'the ability to cater effectively for a diversity of trainees who might otherwise not be able to undertake early childhood training' (p. 2). A field-based model was also seen to 'acknowledge the advantages of the direct application of theory to practice' as well as allowing 'for a flexible pattern of training to take account of the range of cultural, ethnic and socio-economic variables of the centre and the trainee' (pp. 6-7). Among the recommendations in this report were that:

- field-based training be developed alongside traditional training as an integral and continuing part of early childhood teacher education training;
- field-based training have equality with traditional training in all respects;
- the special character of field-based training be recognised and valued; and that,
- suitable measures be taken to ensure that this special character is preserved, developed and enhanced. (pp. 6-8)

In the same year, the *Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group: Education to be More* (Department of Education, 1988) recommended that teacher education should 'allow people to obtain training in a variety of ways – such as traditional and in-service, field-based and extramural, full-time and part-time, or any of these as required' (p. 61). It is unclear why the suggestions made in both reports were not widely taken up by Colleges of Education. However, these documents do reveal that many in the early childhood sector at that time viewed a field-based model of teacher education as worthwhile companion to the traditional campus-based models of teacher education.

This early history, and in particular the report of the Department of Education Working Party on field-based training for early childhood education, supports the perception that field-based programmes exist in New Zealand only to provide a qualification pathway for those existing ECE 'workers'. However, organisations including Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), Waikato Institute of Technology (WINTEC), Unitec Institute of Technology (Unitec), Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT), and Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/ New Zealand Childcare Association (TTPOoA/NZCA) have since developed ITE programmes which employ a field-based model for philosophical reasons which are separate from the demand for qualified early childhood teachers.

From the early 1990s, a three-year diploma in teaching for early childhood was developed in the Colleges of Education that had equivalent value to other teacher education qualifications. TTPOoA/NZCA continued to develop and deliver field-based programmes specifically for those already working in the field (Bell, 2004; Burgess, 2006) and the tertiary sector also began to offer diplomas with the first field-based diploma accredited in 1997. The move to a three-year diploma offered a window of opportunity for ITE providers in the tertiary sector to change or even drop the field-based aspect of their programmes at this time. It is significant that they did not – but instead re-affirmed their commitment to the field-based model.

Current provision of field-based teacher education

According to the Ministry of Education, there are seven ITE providers that now offer a field-based programme (Brennan, Everiss, & Mara, 2011, p. 5). The actual number of students enrolled across these seven ITE field-based programmes appears to be difficult to ascertain. However, these authors suggest that there are approximately 1700 students enrolled across the seven providers.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

One of the aims of this paper is to review the existing literature that informs field-based teacher education programmes. To begin, we examine the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of field-based teacher education programmes. Although there are certainly aspects of different programmes that make them unique, there are several themes that underpin all field-based programmes that are well supported by a wide range of literature on initial teacher education. These include three broad and interrelated themes:

- A commitment to situated and experiential learning;
- The development of critical and reflective teachers through the centrality of praxis; and,
- Andragogical principles of adult learning.

A commitment to situated and experimental learning

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of field-based programmes is the requirement for students to be involved in sustained 'practicum' in a licensed early childhood centre, alongside a qualified early childhood teacher (where 'practicum' means students complete perhaps 10 plus hours per week in a centre during the academic semester). Students, then, are expected to actively engage, over a sustained period of time, with the practices, policies and concerns of the centre. This includes developing relationships with parents, whānau and the community, and experiencing the tensions, joys and dilemmas of teaching. This requirement acknowledges the relationship between experience and learning. It recognises that students must be engaged in their work for learning to occur (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Students in FBTE programmes see themselves as having agency in the teaching process because rather than learning how to teach, they are learning to be teachers (Goodfellow & Sumison, 2006).

The sustained relationships students engage in with their practicum centre are distinct from the kind of learning that occurs on a 'teaching experience' employed by other types of ITE programmes. Firstly, students build on the relationships with teachers, children and families in these settings over an *extended* period of time. The setting itself can become a community of learning where the student teacher is a member of that community. This allows the student to gain an 'insider' perspective (Rogoff, 2003). As an insider in their practicum centre the student teacher is an active participant within a larger community of practice, and over the length of the teacher education programme experiences a corresponding increase in responsibility and full engagement in the role of being a teacher and in teaching tasks. In contrast, 'teaching experience' students experience being an 'outsider' where they are often only allowed access to some teaching practices and may gain a limited experience of the role of teacher. To experience both roles provides opportunities for a more holistic understanding of teaching and opportunities for critical reflection.

An on-going concern about teacher education is that it typically fails to prepare teachers for the contemporary realities of teaching and of being a teacher (Borko, Liston & Whitcomb, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2006), for example, strongly promotes the idea that '...teacher education must venture further and further from the University and engage even more closely with schools in the mutual transformation agenda, with all the struggle and messiness that implies' (p. 302). Maharey (2006) concurs, arguing that 'student teachers will become members of a profession that is complex and demanding' (p. 4) and challenges teacher education to be equally as demanding. Students in FBTE programmes are immersed in these complexities and demands of teaching. This personalised experience is then used to help students construct their own professional knowledge, to negotiate and shape the curriculum and to make links with theory (Zellermayer & Tabak, 2006).

Peter Kelly, from the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom, discusses teacher learning. In his 2006 article, Kelly highlights that socio-cultural learning, whereby the student is able to apply practice to theory and theory to practice, supports the construction and reconstruction of professional knowledge (2006, p. 509). Kelly talks about knowledge in practice being a 'dynamic process' which is the result of a student and qualified teacher working together in the early childhood education centre (Kelly, 2006, p. 510). Kelly (2006) highlights that it is practice and participation in the early childhood education centre that develops expertise (p. 511).

The development of critical and reflective teachers through the centrality of praxis

Schön (1983, 1987) advocates that when students are able to continually reflect in context they are able to draw on their knowledge in and knowledge of practice. This knowledge can only be developed in the context of the student's practice (cited in Kelly, 2006, p. 509). Kelly (2006) states that 'knowing-in-practice is the internalisation of the student's experience of participation' (p. 510). This internalisation then becomes the base from which the student reflects and develops their own knowledge of practice, thereby providing pathways to more complex and diverse ways of teaching and learning (Kelly, 2006).

In many field-based programmes, students are able to bring both positive and negative ECE experience of the 'real world' to the class context. FBTE programmes can use these experiences as learning contexts, although it is important that care must be taken to ensure that there is sufficient rigor, credibility, and justification for the theories that arise through practice or from students' experiences. The field-based model, then, places an emphasis on 'knowledge in practice' (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Bransford et al., 2005). As Hammerness et al. point out, the notion of knowledge in practice suggests that 'much of the knowledge of accomplished teachers is practical, situated and acquired through reflection upon experience' (p. 382). Such engagement by students in an early childhood setting is informed by theory but also generates its own theory. Students have the opportunity to implement reflective practice techniques; not merely linking practical experience to theory but also theorising real-life experiences in a meaningful way.

When students use reflective practice, teaching can be viewed as a form of research and the student can develop theories about teaching practice (Keesing-Styles, 2001, p. 148). When students engage in a self-review process, where they test out these theories in practice, they learn to theorise their everyday teaching experiences (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). During sustained practicum, students have the opportunity to apply critical thinking skills to explore both their espoused and lived theories. When students can apply learning directly to their own experiences they are more likely to learn in a critical and reflective manner (Wadlington, 1995, p. 76).

Moreover, the literature relating to FBTE programmes emphasises that it is important not to separate theory and practice as this creates a false dichotomy that often privileges theory over practice and ignores the integral relationship between the two. Despite the divide between theory and practice still appearing, many writers now seek an integration of the two equally significant components of teacher education. The distinction between the two is perceived as a false dichotomy and there is growing acceptance that theory is implicit in practice and the relationship is, in fact, a continuously interactive one (Keesing-Styles, 2001, p. 148).

This approach views the relationship between practice and theory as 'praxis' and the student as a reflective and active practitioner. Bell (2006), for example, acknowledges that praxis is fundamental to FBTE and argues that: 'It is the notion of praxis that is central to our programmes, along with a commitment to developing students' critical consciousness' (p. 10). FBTE programmes, therefore, develop their curricula around the concept and belief in praxis, and enable students to undertake sustained practice within an early childhood setting in order to support and reinforce the practice of action and reflection. Praxis, then, involves the indivisible unity of reflection and action. As such, ideas need to be adjusted

and refined through applying them to concrete or real experience. Praxis is required if new answers to problems are to result in altered states of thought, be they alterations in values, attitudes, knowledge or understanding (The Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1983, p. 40).

Consequently, the learning process within FBTE places praxis as central. Students are able to see theory as part of and deriving from practice, rather than viewing theoretical knowledge as separate from and privileged over practical knowledge. This is a notion that is increasingly being promoted in the literature addressing ITE. As Darling-Hammond (2006) puts it, 'Programmes must help teachers develop the dispositions to continue to seek answers to difficult problems of teaching and learning and the skills to learn from practice (and from their colleagues as well as to learn for practice)' (pp. 304-305).

Andragogical principles of adult learning

The final theme that informs field-based teacher education programmes is the andragogical principles of adult learning. The key andragogical principle considered in this last section is that learning for adults cannot be separated from their life experiences, and indeed, it is this experience that is their greatest resource (Warren, 1998, p. 219). As we have already discussed, rather than being primarily 'subject centered', FBTE programmes are generally 'life centered, task-centered or problem centered' (Delahaye, Limerick & Hearn, 1994, p. 188).

For many students there is a need and desire to contextualise their learning in a way that has meaning for them in the diverse roles they carry out. Students who participate in FBTE often come from diverse backgrounds and can have multiple identities. They are not just students but also income providers for their families, parents, partners and active participants in their communities with significant cultural responsibilities (Bell, 2004, p. 8). Although this sometimes presents challenges both for students and for FBTE providers, it also allows many opportunities to contextualise learning in the 'real world'. Bell (2004, p. 9), for example, acknowledges both the complexity and opportunity in these situations when she writes, '... the uncertainty that arises from the juxtaposition of multiple identities can promote fruitful dialogue ... When students are able to give voice to such experiences, there is opportunity for them to engage with formal theory on a new level, one which involves the question is this true for me and 'in what circumstances?'. This form of FBTE approach to adult learning lends itself to the contextualised relationship between the student and their learning. Students in field-based programmes are in the ideal situation to see their learning within the context of their real lives. The students' practicum allows them to have both conceptual and concrete experience of the application of knowledge within a relatively immediate timeframe.

A focus in programmes primarily on subject knowledge can ignore the reality of how students interpret and apply the knowledge they learn both on practicum and in their own lives. As Mezirow (1996) argues in an examination of the relationship between experience and subject knowledge:

Making a distinction between the experiencing agent and the object of experience is misleading. The agent brings her own frame of reference which is an integral element constituting the experience. To understand others, one must gain access to their lived experience so as to clarify and elucidate the way they interpret it. (p. 160)

Students, then, in FBTE programmes should be encouraged to make meaningful understandings of subject knowledge through life centered, task centered and problem centered experiences.

In sum, the ideas underpinning the three themes of this section – andragogy, situated learning and the centrality of praxis – are therefore closely related. As Stein (1988) puts it:

Learning is essentially a matter of creating meaning from the real activities of daily living. By embedding subject matter in the on-going experiences of the learners and by creating opportunities for learner to live subject matter in the context of real-world challenges, knowledge is acquired and learning transfers from the classroom to the realm of practice. To situate learning means to place thought and action in a specific place and time. To situate involves other learners, the environment, and the activities to create meaning. (p. 1)

All ITE programmes acknowledge that practical experience is an essential component of learning. Kane (2006) also emphasises that professional practice experience is ‘critical if student teachers are to have opportunities to make sense of how theory and practice are interdependent’ (p. 173). However, as Sachs (1997, cited in Goodfellow and Sumison, 2000) points out, ‘Traditional conceptualisations of the respective roles of university-based and field-based teacher educators have privileged theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge’ (p. 245). Crucially, in FBTE programmes, practical experience and the knowledge that derives from this is afforded an elevated status in the curricula due to these three themes. Students’ teaching experiences are therefore sustained, fully integrated and a part of the students’ life-centred experience.

WHERE TO FROM HERE? FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Despite what we believe are strong theoretical underpinnings, FBTE models in New Zealand have been challenged. In particular, this challenge has surfaced in the report *Initial Teacher Education: Policy and Practice* (Kane, 2005). As previously mentioned, this report suggests that FBTE is a temporary model existing only to meet the current demand for qualified teachers and teachers in remote and rural areas and that its structure potentially places students in conflicting dual roles. We hope that this article goes some way in addressing these misunderstandings. A close examination of the report reveals nothing to suggest that field-based teacher education is problematic as a model in and of itself. Rather, assumptions about how field-based teacher education might be problematic centre on how this model is or isn’t enacted and organised by different providers. The number of providers, and the pressure this consequently places on early childhood centres, is mentioned as problematic, as is the complexity of organisation for those providers who offer multi-site delivery.

The following statement demonstrates that alternative pathways to teaching qualifications, such as those offered by FBTE providers, are still viewed with suspicion in New Zealand despite the potential advantages of such programmes:

These multiple pathways can be viewed as both a positive and a negative feature of ITE. In a positive sense, the multiple pathways reflect the ways in which providers have sought to meet the diverse requirements of potential teacher education students across New Zealand, offering ITE to students who may not otherwise have been able to access tertiary study. Alternatively, the multiple pathways have contributed to the widely held sense of proliferation of providers over recent years and associated challenges about the quality of teacher education. (Kane, 2005, p. 21)

It should also be noted that Kane (2005) comments that no polytechnics (now called Institutes of Technology) offer undergraduate degree options. This is no longer the case as many ITE providers based in Institutes of Technology now offer undergraduate degrees. In addition to some doubts about the model itself, there has been some speculation about the future of field-based teacher education.

Finally, Kane singles out FBTE as requiring a research base with regard to 'the specific contributions and issues surrounding them' (2005, p. 237). We believe that all forms of ITE require rigorous examination and agree that the research base regarding FBTE needs to be strengthened. Another future direction is to encourage government agencies and other stakeholders to further invest in research that considers the strengths and challenges of all models of ITE, including FBTE. In the words of Zeichner (2006), 'It makes no sense to defend college-and-university-based teacher education programs as if they are necessarily better than alternative pathways to teaching' (p. 330).

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