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EMPOWERING TEACHERS: USING TEACHING IMAGES TO UNDERSTAND SELF

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ABSTRACT

During a professional development program, teachers working in child care centres reflected on their images of teaching and their images of self as teacher. Teachers explored their images by engaging in conversation, drawing, metaphor and journal writing. Insights provided by these reflective strategies enabled teachers to experience greater self-understanding, awareness and knowledge and reduced feelings of isolation common to teachers who work in child care centres. This renewed awareness was empowering leading teachers to feel more certain and confident about their complex teaching roles and their teaching decisions. Feeling better equipped to deal with ongoing complexity, the teachers were able to imagine new possibilities for their work and felt liberated to progress in new directions.

Introduction

This paper proposes that teacher education needs to give much more emphasis to helping students and teachers understand decision making within the complexities of real teaching situations and to take a more holistic view on what it means to teach (Fang, 1996; Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995; Kuzmic, 1994). Narrative inquiry is one way of achieving this, as it invites attention to complexity. It acknowledges that teachers know their situations in unique and personal ways and recognises the interconnectedness of the personal and the professional in teaching decisions (Beattie, 1995). This type of inquiry also recognises the importance of teachers' lives, their prior learning and how past experiences shape them as knowing beings.

Current literature has too few accounts to assist teachers' understanding of the significance of practical knowledge and teaching images for informing decision making (Beattie, 1995; Briscoe, 1996; Freppon & MacGillivary, 1996). Part of the problem may be that traditional ways of inquiring into and reporting on practical knowledge do not adequately portray teachers' ways of knowing. In order to identify what teachers need to know to teach, it is necessary to employ methodologies which value teachers' ways of knowing and make use of reflective tools such as conversation, drawing, metaphor and journal writing to assist reflection on knowledge used in teaching situations.

The next section of the paper identifies concepts and methods that featured in a professional development program that I facilitated for teachers working in child care. The voices of teachers from this program are woven into the discussion of these tools to illustrate how using conversation, drawing, metaphor and journal writing can access practical ways of knowing how to teach, and enable teachers to experience greater self-understanding, awareness and knowledge. The significance of combining a variety of reflective strategies for comprehending and illustrating what teachers working in child care centres need to know to teach is also discussed. Evaluations from some of the teachers who participated in the program are included to show how reflection which leads to renewed understanding of teaching images can be empowering and equip teachers to better deal with teaching complexity.

Reflecting on and representing ways of knowing: images

Beattie (1995) has claimed that accessing practical knowledge through narrative inquiry can result in critical, self-empowering understandings of the forces guiding teaching decisions. These forces often go unexamined due to their illusive nature and the absence of appropriate research tools (Briscoe, 1996; Freppon & MacGillivary, 1996; Johnson, 1989; McEwan, 1990; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).

The wealth of learning brought to the teaching act is, according to Clandinin (1983, 1992) and Elbaz (1991), caught up in 'images', coalescences of meaning that are automatically activated by certain types of situations. Becoming conscious of these 'images' activated by situations can provide a catalyst for professional growth.

Encouraging reflection and professional growth

Early childhood teachers working in child care centres became involved in a cycle of talking, thinking, drawing, reading and writing to access knowledge they used to inform everyday teaching actions. I acted as a facilitator for the teachers engaging Sandy, Brooke, Joy, Trish, Julie, and Linda, Kim, Kylie, Corinne, Lyn, Debbie, Annette, Kara, and Andrea (pseudonyms) in narrative inquiry into personal teaching experiences. These were teachers who accepted an invitation to collaborate with me in an inquiry into ways of communicating about working and teaching in child care centres. Teachers were engaged in a cycle of reflective inquiry for a period of twelve weeks. On six occasions they met for two hours to engage in reflective conversations.

A variety of forms of representation, or reflective tools/strategies, were used by teachers during their time together to gain a more holistic understanding of how their knowledge entered into teaching actions. Eisner (1997) argues that alternative forms of data representation have enormous potential for enhancing our understanding of complex educational phenomena. The professional development program built on Eisner's (1997) argument by 'integrating and combining a variety of representations' to provide a clearer picture of how images of teaching enter into teaching situations.

Reflecting on the conversations, drawings, metaphors and narratives generated during meetings enlarged personal understanding of how personal knowledge was implicated in the tensions, gaps and disharmonies occurring in their teaching situations.
These forms are as follows:

Conversations and Story telling

During the six group meetings the teachers talked about their teaching experiences in child care and discussed situations that were posing dilemmas for them. These accounts were then revisited in personal reflection and writing, which allowed the accounts to move beyond the anecdotal stories told in staffrooms or network meetings. These accounts became a deliberative social construction generated through sharing and reflecting on understandings of the complexities and intricacies of each other's worlds and roles in child care.

Teachers talked about their own situations, listened to what others had to say, retold, built upon and unpicked situations to embrace a collective orientation to experiences. The opportunity to talk with other teachers working in child care was a primary reason for their involvement in the program. Sharing commonalities and being able to relate to the experiences and dilemmas of others brought about a solidarity and strength between group members. The teachers shared openly and honestly, knowing that others understood, were experiencing similar situations, and could acknowledge the reality of the dilemmas presented.

Annette put it like this: *"It has been great to meet other teachers who have chosen to be in child care like me. I've really enjoyed talking to others in our group and knowing that they understand the pressures of being in child care - things like lack of respect for the industry, lack of resources, long hours etc. By having our discussions and providing support for each other has meant that I am feeling much more positive about my stressful job – because I don't feel so isolated any more. We are all in the same boat together and just the support – to know that with any topic – we can all relate to it – it is really nice to have that kind of support."*

In the professional development program, the conversations enriched understandings of teacher's own lives and the lives of others. Through carefully nurturing trust and mutual support, it became possible for teachers to risk expressing partly formed ideas, questions, emotional responses, lack of understanding and challenges to fellow learners in the group.

Conversations can also stimulate reflection about sensitive experiences, when it takes place among colleagues who trust one another and are mutually supportive, so that it is possible to risk expressing partly formed ideas, to ask naïve questions, bring emotion to the fore, and to challenge one another's ideas (Francis, 1995; Goodson & Fliesser, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1992; Yonemura, 1982).

As each teacher shared their particular experiences and concerns in the group the other teachers responded with nods and verbalisations of comprehension. Strategies, feelings, anxieties, and resources were identified by the group as a whole. Shared understandings about the multiplicity of roles, the constraints of the child care context

and the difficulties involved with meeting the needs of children and families attending their centres were created and developed. Each teacher noted that they work with children and families who have markedly different and complicated experiences from their own, and that the roles they undertook required far more knowledge than the body of knowledge acquired at university. The knowledge and skills required by these teachers certainly moved beyond knowing how to observe, plan and implement educational programs, which is often an exclusive focus of tertiary courses.

<u>Drawing and Metaphor</u>

Drawings were used at the first meeting and provided a starting point for teachers to articulate unexamined tensions around their identity and work by providing a recognisable form to their images of teaching and self-as-teacher. The teachers drew pictures of self-as-teacher, including key words and an explanation of what their drawing depicted. As the program progressed these drawings were used to re-examine teaching experiences to include dilemma situations in their work. The drawings helped teachers examine, reflectively, connections between feelings, aspirations, past experiences, relationships and events and how these shaped, and had shaped, teacher identities. The drawings also seemed to be an immediate clarifier of the myriad of responsibilities or work roles being undertaken, giving teachers a tangible glimpse of the complexity of their work.

"Much of what we have seen or known, thought or imagined, remembered or repressed, slips unbidden into our drawings, revealing unexplored ambiguities, contradictions and connections. That which we have forgotten, which we might censor from our speech and writing, often escapes into our drawings" (Weber & Mitchell, 1996:304).

Drawings provide an excellent forum for reflection, bringing to light nuances and ambiguity in teaching identities that might otherwise remain hidden, and illuminating how teachers make sense of their work by revealing the not always definable emotional dimensions of knowing (Effron & Joseph, 1994; Weber & Mitchell, 1996.)

Before the program many of the teachers were feeling overwhelmed and their work seemed to be a blur, full of challenges they hadn't had time to identify or reflect on.

Drawing enabled teachers to articulate and consider previously unexamined tensions and feelings.

Kim discussed the realisations she had after reflecting on her images of teaching:
"*Looking back at my images of myself as a teacher, I realise I feel a lot of negativity and dissatisfaction with my job and my role as a teacher. I have been at the crossroads for maybe 12 months now and have been thinking about a change, but I guess I never sat down and thought about just why my job has been getting me down. I feel a bit like the 'magic pudding' from children's literature: People take pieces from me over a daily or weekly period. I then go home at night or over the weekend and am supposed to revitalise, regenerate, so that I can go back the next week, ready for people to take more pieces out*".

The drawing was a very helpful tool for Annette. She found that reflecting on her perceptions of herself using drawings brought a clarity to her work and gave her a place from which to plan strategically rather than simply feel overwhelmed by her work "*With the drawing I have thought about it a lot. I really like the idea of drawing my role because it really clarified the different positions that I have to take over the week and I have lots of different other things I could have extended upon with it. I just found it a really clear way to try and define what my role is. It has been so helpful just to realise what a multi-faceted job I have. By drawing my perception of me as Director, it made me realise the many different roles I have to undertake each day. This reflection has helped me clarify my job into specific categories – whereas before the professional development program, my role was just a big blur. It has made me aware of the diverse role a Director has and given me the impetus to try and allow time for all of these different roles during my day i.e. teacher, social worker, administrator, ideas person etc.*"

Annette's first drawing: "my many different roles"
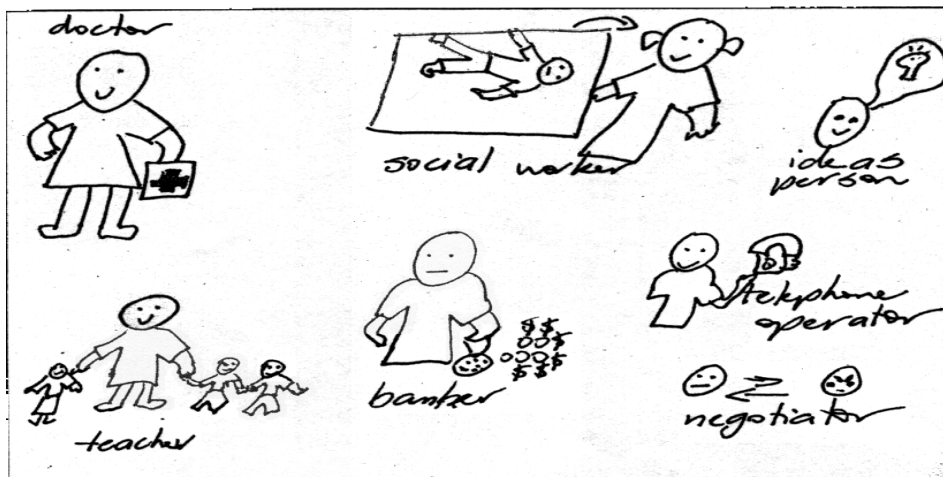
At the beginning of the professional development program, Sandy explored her image of herself as teacher and drew a smiling face, including these words to amplify: *"to keep happy and to keep the peace. (I believe) all interactions with people (staff, parents, children, community) need to be polite/positive so that the overall day can run smoothly and all people in the work environment feel positive and happy about the day."*

**Sandy's first drawing: "a happy teacher?"**
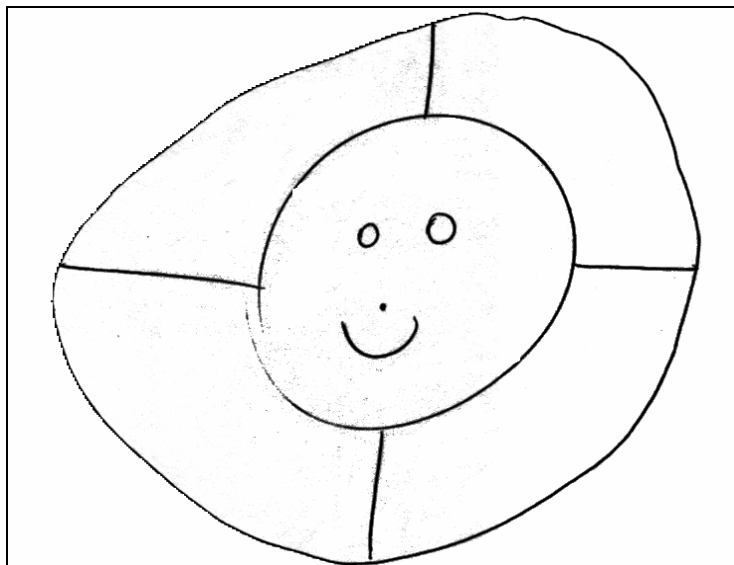
"Keeping the peace and keeping happy" - *S*eemingly simple images at first glance – however when Sandy reflected further many unexplored ambiguities were revealed. Sandy was also able to use her drawing to make sense of her particular work dilemma – a child with a complicated family background who was proving a challenge in terms of behaviour management.

Reflecting on the drawing helped Sandy identify feelings of disharmony - disharmony because the reality of her work was not corresponding with this happy image of self-as-teacher nor with the ideals she held for teaching generally. She felt that this child's behaviour disrupted '*the peace*' and she experienced conflict because all interactions were NOT positive and happy - she wasn't happy, her interactions with this particular child were not entirely positive, and the days weren't running smoothly. She also came to understand that teacher as 'keeper of the peace' was far more complicated than her first drawing depicted.

Positive relationships were part of Sandy's aspirations and goals for the children, families and staff in her centre. Her drawing helped her to see that much of her energy and current actions were aimed at establishing and maintaining positive relationships with the people in her world. She was trying very hard to 'be all things to all people' and keep everyone happy. This was having personal consequences - she was feeling disillusioned, burned out, frustrated. In subsequent discussions and in written reflections, Sandy described how the conflict between her images of teaching and her working reality had affected her deeply - to such an extent that people around her *have been commenting on the change they see* in her. Instead of being *vibrant and enthusiastic* about her job, she has been *quiet, preoccupied, stressed out*. She can *feel her body carrying the weight of her stress and wonders what she can do to make her work less stressful*. Sandy's reflections made her aware that she was feeling symptoms of burnout and she concluded that she would need to make an extra effort to keep physically and mentally strong in order to deal with these feelings.

Sandy revisited her first drawing and although the happy face and emphasis on positive interactions and relationships remained, she added another dimension - Teacher as torn down the middle - happy on one side, and sad on the other.

Sandy's second drawing: "the complexities tied up in my image of happy teacher"
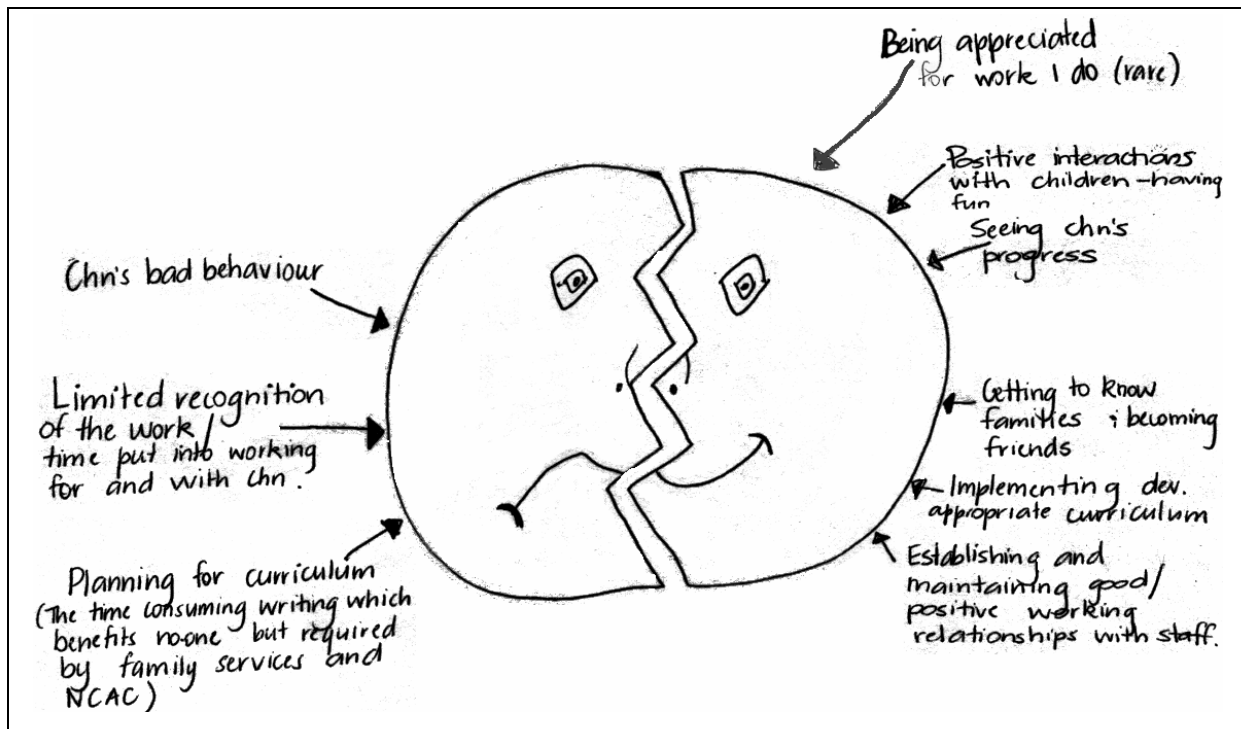
Combining metaphor with drawing added to the reflective processes by assisting teachers to conceptualise various dimensions of their images of teaching (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1991; Francis, 1995). Metaphor as a form of representation was selected to encourage self exploration about links between practical knowledge and practice. Metaphors offer a way to identify deep seated beliefs and images driving action (Bullough, 1991).

Expressing images metaphorically had the capacity to communicate meaning that was difficult to access using literal language alone (Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Carter, 1990). Tobin (1990) has emphasised that reflection, in and on action, can lead to change, especially when teaching roles and metaphors used to make sense of those roles are the targets for reflection.

Sandy's metaphor communicates with impact her emotions and the contradictions she sees in her work: *"Sometimes I feel like an island. Years come and children come to visit a while, have the fun they can, and learn what the can then they leave again - like tourists. The island (me) is providing as much for them as possible while they are there. Part of the island is being eroded by wind, ocean etc. - like how I feel when I cannot do much for a particular child - I'm being worn out. Of course the other side of the island has a resort where people are having a great time and are completely unaware of how the other side of the island is being worn away. Even though the island has solid*

foundations and is not going anywhere despite cyclones and bad weather something must be done about the eroding section or in time it will all wear away.""

Sandy's metaphor was useful in terms of gaining access to her feelings about her work and its complexity. It evokes an awareness of the demands and pressures of her work in child care, and her need for some 'erosion protection' measures. Used alongside her drawings, it helped Sandy get in touch with why she was feeling distressed, and in touch with teaching decisions and goals for particular children with complicated family backgrounds. It helped her identify her own needs, her knowledge needs: What to do to help these children? How to cope with the pressures of her work? Writing the erosion metaphor also assisted the process of examining the enduring images which guided her work, her emotions, and current and ongoing actions.

Kylie explored a metaphor which examined her roles as director and her responses to these. Something of her desires and goals are also caught up in this metaphor: *"Director as a mender of an old patchwork blanket." –"Each patch is unique in fabric and texture (has it's own personality and background) and symbolises something within the centre - children, staff, the environment, the program. BUT this blanket is old and needs a lot of work. There are many holes (gaps in policies, procedures, programs) that need to be filled or patched, there are frayed edges (problems caused by interactions between each patch, communication) that need to be mended constantly; there are stains (caused by working conditions, the Child Care Award and other things that we would like to change) that we need to work hard to get out and they only come out with a lot of perseverance; there are creases (the hurdles and the barriers we face daily) that need to be ironed out. The director's job is to work with the blanket (the centre) to mend, patch, fill, and then iron it to leave a path of smooth fabric (a smooth running centre) that is warm and inviting for those who come inside."*

Journals and Story writing

The teachers used a journal to record reflections about group conversations, drawings and metaphors. The teachers used journals to write about specific situations of concern in their teaching. By examining specific dilemma situations, implicit knowledge was brought to the awareness of the teachers. Lampert (1985), Berlak and Berlak (1981)

and Halliwell (1995) characterise teachers' work in terms of managing dilemmas: in relation to knowledge, students, the teacher's role, the relations to the local community, and the relations to society at large. Examining dilemma situations and discussing these is a way of staying close to teaching practice and to how teachers use their knowledge to make sense of competing goals and actions (Carter, 1990; Olson, 1995).

The journal was also used to record reflections on past experiences so that teachers could think about how knowledge had been acquired, and teaching images informed. Many researchers are recognising the influence teachers' past experiences and life histories have on teacher decision making (Taylor, 1996; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1991; Clandinin, 1992; Maitland-Gholson & Ettinger, 1994; Pinnegar, 1995). Such research is suggesting that past experiences might, more powerfully than anything learned from teaching courses, form the basis of teacher images.

Writing about and reflecting on their education-related life histories encouraged the teachers to think about the connections of past experiences to current teaching actions. Reflecting on past experiences and their connections to current actions worked hand in hand with the notion of accessing practical knowledge through examining images. In their journals the teachers wrote about their childhoods, significant past experiences and thought about the influence of their life histories.

Often, the influences of past, present and future were caught up in the teachers' images and responses to dilemmas, so representing images in a variety of ways helped them to tease out the connections with tacit knowledge. Listening to others assisted individual teachers to tap into their existing images of teaching and examine how these had been influenced by past experiences. Writing about this in journals added another layer of understanding about experiential knowledge.

Sandy traced her image of 'keeping the peace' back to her family upbringing: "*My mum has devoted her life to the family peace keeping process and as a result I value calm, happy environments where people can reach full potential in a stress free environment - staff and children.*" This image is also related to her own experiences as a child: "*I was a very sensitive child and I guess this is why it was so important for me to please people and do what was expected - keeping everyone happy - in retrospect this is what I was*

doing and still today I am the same - can't let my employer down, the parents, children, family, friends."

Many of the teachers talked about the challenges of working with families different from their own. Sandy and Annette both made links with their own family experiences, concluding that it was hard for them to relate to the family complexity observed at their workplace. They had no personal knowledge on which to draw having both experienced stable, 'uneventful' family lives as children. Annette reflected: *"As a result of being involved in this program I am now a lot more aware of what a definition for 'family' is and I have been challenged to think more deeply about why a child has negative behaviour. I have been challenged to think more about why a child is having behavioural problems instead of just labelling them as 'difficult'. I think something I have picked up from looking back at my life story and also from Sandy's story was the fact that I have come from such a stable nuclear family and I think it was a shock for me when I came to my centre. It has caused me to think 'well what is a family now?' After reflecting on Sandy's story it made me really think that maybe I shouldn't be so judgemental – thinking 'gee this child is being so difficult' but instead I really need to think 'why, what is their home background like?' – maybe they haven't been brought up in the same conditions that I have."*

Annette then reflected on a particular family: *"We have one child who was being really difficult in our preschool room last week and it was topped off on Friday when he wee-ed in our playhouses outside and then decided to mix sand in with it. I was just so disgusted with him! But then, after considering Sandy's story I thought further – this child is actually in foster care and his mum is schizophrenic and I realised there was a lot more for me to think about rather than me just feeling angry. I should really think about what he has had to go through and be a little bit more understanding. So this is something I could relate to with Sandy – there isn't just nuclear families any more and it is hard when you have come from such a normal family to suddenly be confronted with these children who have such different backgrounds from what we might have had as children*

Tracing current images of teaching and visions, or goals, to past experiences allowed teachers to identify why particular values were so important to them. It also helped

them to understand their feelings and frustrations within work dilemmas which made these goals more difficult to achieve. This reflection also led the teachers to think about how their teaching goals might be achieved despite the constraints. For Annette, treating and responding to children as individuals was something she felt challenged to encourage through monitoring of staff planning and programming, and through more thoughtful consideration of the family backgrounds of children. Making links with her own childhood experiences provided some insight into why these ideals and images were so important:

Annette: "*I really didn't like school, I never felt that the teachers treated me as an individual or made the time to get to know me. I can't remember getting much in the way of positive feedback for the things that I might have been good at. As a teacher now it is important to me to treat children as individuals and not be judgemental of them. It doesn't matter what clothes they wear or where they live. Working in such a lower class suburb is good because you realise that just because a child might live in a housing commission house doesn't mean that they are not good or valued as a person. This is something I am very devoted to – treating children as individuals. For instance, if they are not developmentally ready then don't force them to go to school. I can relate so much to me* (Annette was always the youngest in her class at school)*, I don't think anyone realises the impact unless you have experienced it yourself – it can do a lot of damage to your self confidence….*"

During group discussions journal reflections were explored further. As the program progressed teachers built on and made connections with each other's stories and reflections. As teachers shared, similar experiences and the taken-for-granted hidden norms of working in child care were recognised. Recognising a commonality of experience existed among the group was encouraging. As a result, teachers felt less isolated and better able to understand their individual workplaces within the wider context of centre-based care. The teachers were also able to identify useful ways to think about dilemmas they faced in their work.

Sandy was able to use her reflections and the experiences of others to consider the specific knowledge she and the other teachers needed to deal with the complexities of their work: "*To know that other teaching/non-teaching directors experience the same*

problems as me certainly eliminates the feeling of isolation. Many dilemmas which have been spoken about can generally be considered "people problems" - whether they stem from problems with staff, parents/family members, children, or employers. At first, one would not think that a teacher's dilemmas would result from these relationships/interactions - but (think) instead (that dilemmas) would result from planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum. Wrong! This is the easy part. Learning and teaching can only occur in an environment which is conducive to this, and for an environment to be harmonious, interactions and relationships need to be positive. Establishing and maintaining these relationships requires much knowledge and many skills and I feel university courses need to address subjects which aim to develop these in future child care teachers."

Narrative Accounts: Storying images and reflections

The professional development program was committed to using stories constructed by teachers working in child care to generate insight into their personal and professional worlds and to anchor understanding to the practical everyday situations teachers face in their work. Each of the stories assembled during the program communicate complexity - the complexity of roles, responsibilities and relationships (Kelly & Berthelsen, 1997; Kelly et al, 1997). Within the program, the accessing and examining of practical knowledge - images as they related to specific situations - lead to improved understanding of the complex and interrelated processes of personal experiences, beliefs and practices (Fang, 1996).

The value of these accounts is their capacity to generate both personal and professional understanding about the complexities of teacher decision making. Stories lay open for reflection teachers' experiences, feelings, dilemmas and needs. Reflection on these has value, not only for the teachers in the program but also for teacher educators and others who may read it (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Using a variety of reflective tools and representations enable teachers to communicate much about their work in child care. They can provide insight into the challenges of working in child care and into how teachers manage competing imperatives and responsibilites, and enable the tensions between ideals and real teaching situations to be identified.

Reflecting on their stories illuminated for the teachers the types of knowledge and skills they needed in order to manage ongoing dilemmas - patience, how to communicate effectively, how to be assertive, how to negotiate, how to support staff, how to cope with complexity, how to deal with stress, how to manage difficult relationships and interactions.

The construction of narrative accounts helped individual teachers identify enduring images guiding their practice, resulting in better understandings of themselves as teachers. These narrative accounts can make contributions beyond the personal as well. Stories from the workplace offer teacher educators opportunities to achieve new insights into the complexities of teacher decision making and the professional knowledge needs of teachers working with groups of learners in different educational contexts.

Being involved in the professional development program was encouraging and empowering. The program enabled teachers to be self-directing in their professional development and to consider, in a supportive environment, current actions, dilemmas, thoughts, feelings and decisions. The reflective tools helped teachers to represent their experiences and then move beyond the representation to investigate origins of images, teaching visions and goals, areas of growth, and new interpretations and understandings of themselves as teachers and the complexities of their work.

As the program progressed the teachers understood themselves better, they could see why they did what they did, and why they felt unsettled or discouraged by particular experiences.

Sandy wrote about the benefits for her and also identified why she had been feeling undervalued as a teacher: "*Involvement in the program helps me feel like a professional, which brings up the subject of teacher recognition in child care. To know that others feel the same as me is also a comfort. Child care teachers could be seen by those working in the public sector as having a "bee under their bonnet" - why one might wonder? I think what it boils down to is the vast differences in conditions of employment and the old community view that state preschools "teach" and child care centres "look after". Therefore preschools, and by association their teachers, are*

regarded more highly and are seen to do a better job. We child care teachers studied the same subjects, went to the same universities and work as hard - if not harder due to contact hours - as our public sector colleagues so it seems extremely unfair to be regarded as "baby-sitters" by the wider community. The program has also made me reflect on the information I use which guides many of my decisions and actions/reactions. It was interesting within the group that the base from which we worked developed from our own childhood experiences and that the university study was used or discarded on the basis of beliefs and feelings which had been preconceived before enrolling at uni. "

The professional development program was helpful to the teachers because it provided an opportunity for them to talk about teaching experiences in a non-competitive professional relationship, listen to others, receive emotional support, and identify what they needed to know more about in order to deal with the challenges of their work. The reflective activities helped them identify past experiences implicated in images informing teaching actions, including the skills they strived to acquire or the goals they were endeavouring to achieve.

Before the professional development program, many of the teachers had not had an opportunity to talk freely about their work with other teachers. All had felt isolated in their work and for the majority confidence and enthusiasm was low.

The outcomes of the program were that teachers felt like valued professionals and knowledgeable early childhood teachers - not just child minders. Hearing what other teachers working in child care had to say gave each individual confidence in her own ideas and decisions and that sense of professional remoteness and aloneness was replaced by a feeling or sense of community. Knowing that other teachers were experiencing similar dilemmas alleviated anxiety.

The focus of the program, and the opportunity to talk with other teachers, helped each teacher understand their teaching context and self-as-teacher better. Examining images of teaching and teaching dilemmas lead to other self- understandings. For Sandy, these related to the importance of positive interactions. connections with her past experiences as a child and her current dilemmas with particular children, her need

for recognition and acknowledgment, the influence of her ideals on current images and teaching practices, the physical and emotional demands of her work, and particular knowledge needs related to working with families. For Annette these related to the multifaceted role she had as director, and co-worker: *"At the start of the program I was feeling confused, guilty and angry about my role at the centre but over the course of the program, my thoughts and dilemmas were clarified"*

Annette continued to think about the roles she has assumed as director and reflected on the strategies she employs with staff. *"I think also with me it is defining my role as director, how far I should go to help my girls - because I like to treat my staff as individuals and respect them and not compare them to what I would do all the time, as a teacher, because they are not me."*

Better equipped to deal with complexity

Many of the work situations discussed by the teachers involved difficult relationships with children, parents, staff, directors and owners. Often, complex and dramatic situations were described: custody battles and family crises, circumstances where children had been abused, and negligent and unethical behaviour observed. When faced with these particular situations the teachers often felt ill prepared to deal effectively with them. Feelings of inadequacy, of not knowing enough about the types of situations faced or appropriate strategies to use were reported. Yet these situations still had to be managed.

Encouraging the use of drawing, metaphor and anecdote enabled the teachers to generate accounts that were anchored in everyday teaching realities. For the teachers, these alternatives to the impersonal, propositional forms of representation that dominate in scholarly discourses liberated their efforts to understand their teaching situations and themselves as teachers.

Using multiple forms of representation in narrative inquiry is a way of helping teachers understand decision making within the complexities of teaching situations - the processes of learning and knowing they engage in, their personal practical knowledge,

the particular educational settings in which they work, their every day teaching situations, and the relationships and systems which influence their work.

These reflective strategies can be used to show how teaching understandings develop, the activity of knowing, and characteristics of practical knowledge in use: images which guide action, and the influence of past experiences.

Conversations with other teachers can provide an avenue for understanding and articulating practice and for reducing feelings of isolation. Lyn said she benefited greatly from speaking with other teachers who were in similar situations to her and experiencing similar constraints.   Debbie, also communicated the value of conversation: "*The networking and sharing of experiences show I am not alone in my work dilemmas. They are common and shared – there is a comfort in this. I am not alone. We can draw from each other's experiences, good and bad.*"

Drawing can focus attention on experience and stimulate the teasing out of connections within tacit knowledge. Drawing assisted Sandy to secure elusive threads caught up in the images informing her teaching decisions. She was able to recognise how images of 'keeping the peace' were driving forces in her teaching decisions and interactions.   Upon reflection, Sandy was able to see how these images had been shaped by past experiences as well as identify their influence in current teaching practices. Reflection revealed the contradictions and connections of these images with her dilemmas with particular children. Her second drawing showed more clearly how ideals and real teaching situations were in tension and how difficult it was to maintain this image in all aspects of her work.

Debbie also found that drawing brought clarity to her work and associated decisions. She drew a picture of herself as a juggler. Each juggling ball represented aspects of her roles and needs as teacher and director. When she reflected on this image and representation of competing imperatives and the emotions caught up in trying to deal with these effectively she wrote*: "These pictorial representations have consolidated my feelings at particular times over the past months. They helped me to clarify what I was feeling, so then I could effectively address these feelings. After seeing myself as a "juggler" with the ball representing my needs being significantly smaller than the rest, I*

addressed this at work by changing my focus during decision making. When making decisions I carefully reflected on my needs and feelings as part of the process. An important step for me."

Metaphors offer a way to identify those deep-down-hard-to-get-at feelings and emotions. Sandy's metaphor of an island eroding was a powerful communicator of her inner conflict and need for recognition. Corinne found similar benefits: "*I think for me looking at the metaphors has been very beneficial. I saw being a teacher like gardening. Being able to relate my feelings to something like this helps to point out the areas that need nourishment and assistance and those that are flourishing on their own.*"

Annette linked metaphor and drawing together during reflection and found many benefits: "*It has made me realise that the dilemmas I have faced are important – (for instance), despite my owner not putting money back in into my centre, I can still do all I can to make it a quality place for children – the garden metaphor – I want to become more involved with the programming of all rooms so that my children will be blooming flowers rather than wilted ones. I feel more confident and realise I have a lot to offer…."*

Annette's reflection on her drawings and metaphors revealed her driving image of teaching as providing environments for children where they can grow and develop in optimum ways: "*If out of the watering-can (building on a metaphor of teaching as gardening) we are giving them things like inflexibility, or we are angry with our children all the time, or planning is repetitive, or we show no respect for them being individuals, then they won't flourish and they will just end up being these wilted individuals. This is why I want the group leaders to also be aware of what they are offering children or not offering children. It gets back to how important each room's programming and interactions are for the children.*"

Many of her dilemmas related to the constraints she felt were being imposed on her by economic pressures and managerial decisions, muddying up her valued image, making it difficult to provide ideal learning environments for children. The process of reflection helped her to see possibilities for achieving desired goals, despite constraints.

Annette's second drawing: "teaching as gardening"
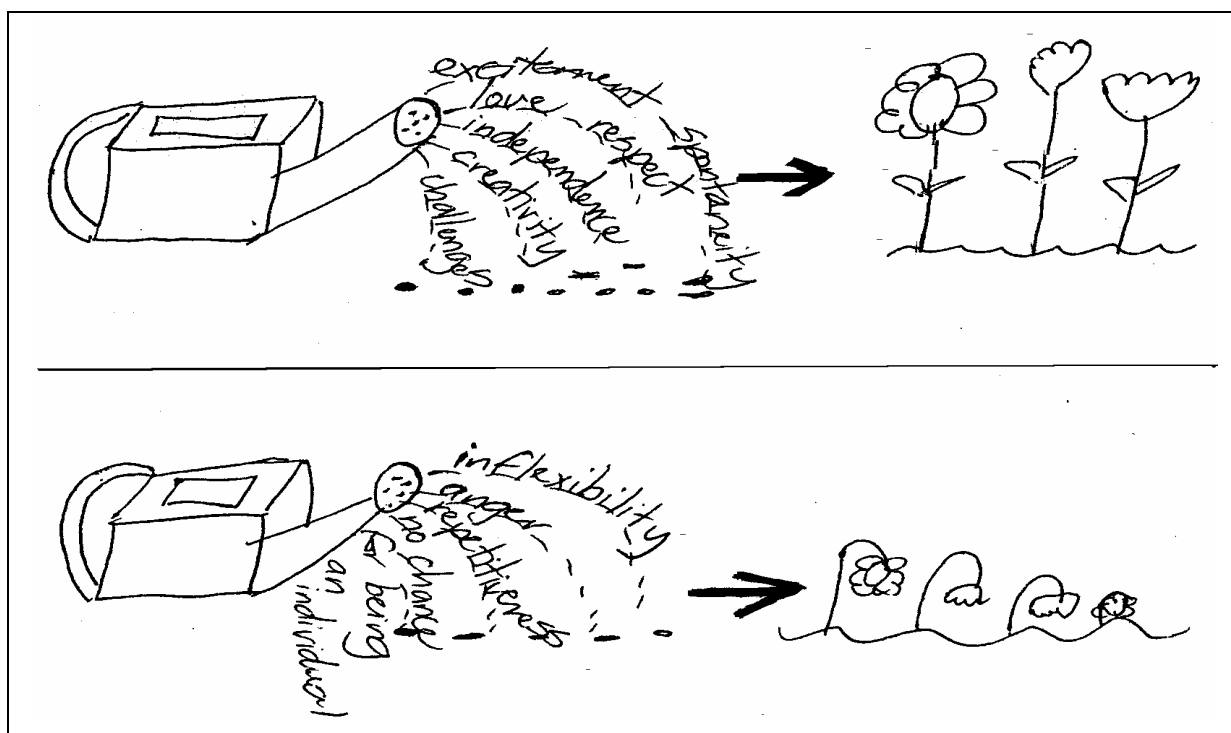
The **dilemma situations described in journals** highlighted the complexity and diversity of teachers' work. As each teacher's experience and roles were different, so too were the specific knowledge needs and strategies for coping with work demands. The teachers found it helpful to use image as a tool for reflecting on dilemmas situations and the knowledge they used to deal with them.

Writing education-related life histories proved to be an important step in uncovering images at work in dilemma situations. Within the group, reflecting on past experiences assisted articulation of how these were linked to images of teaching and teacher action. The teachers were able to see how their past experiences were influencing and colouring current teaching actions, and found that examining their prior experiences enriched the sense they made of their work. After reflecting on past experiences they seemed more able to embark on the task of probing unreflected meanings about particular situations and to describe images or metaphors about themselves as teachers.

Understanding self

Self understanding and knowledge can promote growth and change and it is also empowering. Debbie wrote: "*As busy professionals you don't have time during the day*

to reflect upon your deep philosophical under-pinnings and how your experiences have shaped your practice. I've learnt a lot about myself as a result of this program and this has actually given me confidence during times of stress."

Joy summed up the value for her*: "The benefit for me has been to clarify my actions. I feel it has even made me feel more confident as I know the teacher I am and why I react the way I do to certain situations."*

Kim valued taking the time to reflect on the connections between her work and her past experiences: "*It is good to stand back and look at your work. When you are working, you are so busy, you rarely have time to stand back and scrutinise how you feel about what you do. I have found it really interesting looking at why we do things, our teaching actions, the way we do. Unless you think about it, you rarely make the connections about where these actions originate."*

Andrea recorded that before reflecting on it, she didn't realise how much knowledge she had, used and called on each day to make her job successful. She realised just how multi-faceted her teaching role was. She recorded that this renewed awareness made her feel: *"more certain, confident, assured about being a teacher and I feel calmer, more relaxed and in control."*

Once teachers have arrived at a destination of renewed awareness they then have a place from which to seek new possibilities and improved teaching approaches (Pinnegar, 1995). In Sandy's case, she had to adjust some of the conceptions she had of herself. She realised that she needed to seek assistance from knowledgeable others. Sandy realised she needed to develop positive ways of managing her feelings of stress. At a personal level, involvement in the professional development program highlighted her need for 'time out' from the pressures and demands of her work. By the end of the program she had made a decision to take the following year off and travel overseas.

Annette, who at the start of the program was "*feeling confused, guilty and angry about (her) role at the centre but over the course of the program found (her) thoughts and dilemmas were clarified"* became excited about the role she could play to ensure her

children became 'healthy flowers'. She began to make goals for herself like '*reading the preschool curriculum guidelines*' and '*then really evaluating what our programs are offering*'. She reflected on ways to provide the 'nourishing ingredients' which didn't collide with budget constraints - accessing resource centres, the museum, Noah's ark toy library – "*so that the children CAN experience new equipment and resources and have new opportunities to learn and be challenged*."

Annette has also become determined that she will keep telling her owner how she feels; she will keep him informed about families who leave the centre and why they leave; and reinforce to him that if he wants to keep the centre full he will need to offer a quality service to families. She is clearer about the role she will take on in terms of staff development – "*I'm going to really focus on making sure that my group leaders are offering a great program so that children are still getting pleasure out of their day.*"

To further illustrate the importance of awareness and its link to improved practice Kim wrote: "*Until being involved in the program I didn't realise how negative I was about my work. I have tried to be more positive as a result. I have also taken some of the pressure off myself at work. I have focused a little more on my needs and worried a little less about others needs and have felt I am getting my things done first. I feel better about this. Personally, I have decided that I need a change. I love the children and being with them, but I feel I am not giving them all they need due to outside influences. I have now applied for a couple of jobs and am looking for the next challenge – either directing or something out of child care. I have also decided to do some more study. I feel more positive about what I am doing as I have really examined how I feel about what I am doing. This has been helpful in clarifying my goals and aims as a teacher and for my future.*"

Engaging in conversation, examining images using drawings and metaphors, and reflecting on life history and specific dilemmas, were powerful ways of assisting the teachers in this group to identify knowledge needs and make sense of their work and teaching identities. The stories provided by the teachers in the program highlight the potential of using and integrating multiple forms of representation/reflection to understand educational worlds.

Conclusion

Teacher decision making is seldom the impersonal technique implied in many of the grand generalisations peddled in the media about what makes a good teacher. The participating teachers experienced an awakening, an empowering, as they told and retold their stories of complex situations, re-viewed and re-constructed experiential knowledge, from the distance of time, place and ongoing meanings.

Using different forms of representation/reflection together provides an important strategy for understanding teachers' conceptions of their experiences and for portraying these in holistic ways. Accessing practical knowledge, by exploring images using methods of conversation, drawing, metaphor and journal writing, helps teachers develop the capacity to engage in critical reflection. It also provides an insight into the processes involved in conceptualising learning and self as teacher, by revealing not only what is being learned, but how it is being learned. Teachers can learn from the understandings uncovered by these methods, widen their conceptions about what it means to be a teacher, and become better equipped to be self-directed professionals.

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