



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:

<http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>

This is the authors' version of an article published in *Curriculum Perspectives*. The original publication is available through subscription at:

<http://www.acsa.edu.au/pages/page33.asp>

Please cite this article as:

Jovanovic, J., Krieg, S., Dolling, C., Curtis, R., Tam, E. and Norman, A., 2013. Investigating early childhood curriculum and pedagogy through a three-way collaboration. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 1-22.

Copyright (2013) The Authors

**Please note** that any alterations made during the publishing process may not appear in this version.

# Investigating Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy through a Three Way Collaboration

**Authors:** Jess Jovanovic, Susan Krieg

**Co-Authors:** Ms. Chloe Dolling, Ms. Rebecca Curtis, Ms. Emily Tam, Ms. Amily Norman.

*This paper examines one aspect of the university curriculum: the Professional Experience or practicum. Professional Experience has always been a pivotal and valued aspect of Teacher Education courses. However, in the contemporary Australian context many of the traditional ways of 'doing' the practicum are unsustainable. Two new Flinders University Early Childhood pre-service programs implement a different approach. Professional Experience in these new programs is underpinned by a partnership orientation focusing on the contributions that pre-service educators can make to young children's learning through the pursuit of joint research. This change in the university curriculum provides the opportunity for centre/school and university staff to work in new ways and offers opportunities for mutual investigations of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. This paper outlines examples of the contributions that pre-service educators have made within a partnership approach. Their stories demonstrate how the changed roles of the university staff, practicing early childhood educators and pre-service teachers have enabled the pursuit of significant questions about young children's learning.*

*Keywords: University curriculum, Early childhood curriculum, Professional Experience, Collaborative Research, Early Childhood Pre-Service Education.*

## Introduction

The concept of the university curriculum is complex and under-researched (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). The term 'curriculum' is used ambiguously among academic staff but often refers to a 'syllabus outlining the content of a specific discipline' (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p.8). Drawing from curriculum research in schools and in early childhood settings, this paper takes a more expansive view and sees the university curriculum as a 'composite of many different processes' (Marsh & Willis, 2003. p.xiii). The university curriculum is conceptualised here as 'all the experiences students have within an educational program' (Parkay, Anctil, & Has, 2006, p.2). One of the most significant experiences student teachers have as part of their university curriculum is their

Professional Experience. However, this has often led to a 'valorisation' of experience which Britzman (1991) argues has contributed to one of the most pervasive binaries in many teacher education discourses: a binary between the 'real world' of experience and what is taught at university (p.214). Britzman argues that the creation of this dualism between what is taught at university and the practical experience in schools, positions 'schools as the real and the university as the fiction' (p.214). This paper describes an approach to Professional Experience that bridges this divide.

Professional Experience (previously the practicum) has always been a significant component of Teacher Education courses with students consistently reporting that the practicum has the most profound impact on their teacher preparation (Aitken & Day, 1999; Beck & Kosnick, 2000; Shen, 2002). Nonetheless, the current system is unsustainable due to a range of factors to be explored later in this paper. This paper describes a re-framing of the Professional Experience in two Early Childhood teacher education degrees. The authors begin with a brief consideration of the factors influencing the need for change in the ways Professional Experience is enacted within teacher education. This is followed by an overview of the Flinders University of South Australia Early Childhood teacher education degrees along with some of the changed relationships between the university, centres and schools in a partnership approach to Professional Experience. The paper concludes with four pre-service teachers sharing their reflections on how a three-way partnership enabled them to contribute to young children's learning through their inquiries into curriculum and pedagogy.

## **The Context for Change**

Increasing competition for places, combined with dwindling resources and the considerable expense of Professional Experience programs, has stimulated the need for change in the ways the practicum component of teacher education is conceptualised.

The *Top of the Class* (2007) report outlines:

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

As student numbers have increased, so too has the need to find places. Many universities reported that they are having serious difficulties in finding a sufficient number of placements for their students. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007, p. 70)

The Report of the Review of Teacher Education in New South Wales (Ramsey, 2000) indicated the need for a shift from the idea of a practicum to the concept of Professional Experience: workplace learning which is integrated with academic preparation and educational studies. Following these recommendations many Australian universities have looked to restructure their Professional Experience programs. Indeed, the *Top of the Class* report (2007) concluded,

The key to achieving high quality practicum for all teacher education students is the establishment of strong authentic partnerships between all parties. (p. 75)

The new Flinders University Early Childhood degrees include Professional Experience programs that address many of the challenges outlined above. The first Flinders University Early Childhood four year degree was established in 2007. This undergraduate course was unique at the time for it is a double degree from which students graduate with both a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). Thus alongside their education topics (Curriculum, Education Studies and Professional Experience), early childhood students are concurrently pursuing majors and minors in topics such as Applied Linguistics, Drama, Criminal Studies, Gender Studies, History, Politics and French – areas that have not traditionally been associated with Early Childhood education. Consequently, their range of expertise offers many new opportunities for them as practitioners.

A second Early Childhood degree, a two year post-graduate Master of Teaching, was established in 2008. Both of the new degrees are informed by the principle that, in order for pre-service teachers to reconsider their ideas about how children might be positioned in the learning process, their experience of teacher education needs to offer

the opportunity for them to learn in many different ways. In short, the pre-service teachers' preparation must enact the pedagogy that will frame their future work with young children. For young children to be positioned as co-constructors of knowledge in the learning process, pre-service teachers must also be positioned as inquirers and contributors to knowledge rather than as 'recipients' of knowledge. Within this frame, the Professional Experience component offers the opportunity for pre-service teachers to inquire into and co-construct knowledge with their mentors in unique ways. However, this re-positioning has required a new approach to Professional Experience.

## **Professional Experience as Partnership**

The Professional Experience in the new programs is conceptualised as a partnership model with the broad aim of contributing to children's learning by extending quality teacher-education opportunities for pre-service, in-service and teacher educators. This three-way partnership has the potential to change and improve the practice of all participants, and is an approach that requires a modified relationship between the university and the communities it serves. Boyer (cited in Sandmann, 2002) asserts, we must connect the rich resources of the university to our pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, our centres and schools, to our teachers and to our cities through a process he calls 'the scholarship of engagement'. According to Sandmann (2002), a growing number of universities are accepting Boyer's challenge.

The partnership model of Professional Experience is thus designed to develop a learning community between centres, schools and the university through more reciprocal relations built on a principle of *reflective inquiry*. The concept of reflective inquiry has a long history in educational contexts. Dewey's (1904) remedy for 'reactive, jumping uncritically from one new technique to the next' was for teachers to be 'reflecting on their practices and integrating their observations into their emerging theories of teaching and learning' (p.9). The work of Schon (1987) and more recent research such as elaborated by Groundwater-Smith, Cushworth and Dobbins (2004) has further developed this concept of reflective practice in action more explicitly. Reflective inquiry

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

blends practice and theory such that partnership-based teacher education is constructed as collaborative practitioner inquiry about practice and learning (Cherednichenko & Kruger 2001). Attention is given to enhanced outcomes for children, in-service educators and communities, with *enhanced learning* for children being the primary focus of the centre/school–university relationship. Thus each of the Professional Experiences in the Early Childhood programs at Flinders University, while unique in structure, share an underpinning principle of pre-service teachers making a contribution to children's learning through their inquiries into curriculum and pedagogy.

A 'Community Placement' occurs in the first year of the four year undergraduate degree and involves five full day visits to an early childhood setting (i.e., child care, preschool or junior primary school). In this placement, pre-service teachers work collaboratively with peers, teacher educators and centre/school staff on a project identified by the early childhood setting. In the second year of the undergraduate degree, or first year of the Master of Teaching, students undertake 20 single day visits to an early childhood setting over 20 weeks. These visits offer the opportunity for pre-service teachers to contribute to projects and inquiries spanning almost a year. In their third and fourth years (second year of the Master of Teaching), pre-service teachers are located in early childhood settings for three and six weeks. In every placement, recipient sites identify a curriculum project or inquiry and pre-service teachers submit their preferences for placement based on their professional interests.

Members of the Early Childhood Professional Experience partnership include academics working in the Flinders University Early Childhood programs (lecturers and part-time tutors), staff working in child care, preschool or junior primary schools and pre-service teachers. The initial establishment of this partnership required, as a first step, creation a Course Reference Group (CRG) that included representatives from the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), Catholic Education, child-care and preschool directors and school principals with responsibility for the early years of school. After an inaugural meeting with the CRG, the early childhood university staff began visiting sites

to discuss the possibility of establishing new and different Professional Experiences that were based on a partnership approach. A much wider group of centres and schools were then invited to attend an information session regarding the early childhood Professional Experience, which resulted in collaborators expressing interest and submitting offers of projects stating which type of Professional Experience would be of most benefit to them (i.e. the four or three week program, the 20 single day visits spread across the year or the community placement).

Within the partnership, members have worked together to establish roles and responsibilities. Carpenter, Cherednichenko, Davies and Kruger (2000) state that partnership based teacher education requires substantial changes in how early childhood centres, schools and universities relate and will affect the entire organisation and curriculum of university courses and the practices of academics. Beck and Kosnick (2000) stress the importance of the involvement and commitment of university staff in the practicum for strengthening partnerships and enhancing the overall experience for pre-service educators. Mullen (2000) supports centre/school and university practitioners finding innovative and meaningful ways to develop professionally as colleagues in equal but different ways. Indeed, Marlow and Nass-fukai (2000) describe true collegiality as that which involves ongoing professional interaction from a position of trust, where each colleague is respected for his or her contribution to the whole. They describe two essential elements for the development of collegiality as the building of strong relationships and the validation of colleagues as equals. Opportunities are thus made available in this model for centres/schools and pre-service educators to pursue collaborative inquiry, curriculum development and teaching practice investigations.

## **Collaborative Inquiry: More than Supporting the Nexus between Theory & Practice**

A system is not the sum of its isolated parts but is dependent on the interactions among institutions, agencies, and people. (Lobman & Ryan, 2008, p. 531)

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

In taking a partnership approach to Professional Experience our collaborative inquiries have led us to ask; how do our changing Professional Experience principles reposition pre-service, in-service and teacher educators? Shortly in this paper, Emily, Chloe, Bec and Amily provide evidence of a re-positioning of pre-service teachers through the Professional Experience. By examining students' stories, we have found that the power dynamics present in apprenticeship or competency-based approaches to Professional Experience are diminished through collaborative inquiry in three key ways.

First, pre-service educators in our courses are recognised as individuals who bring their unique knowledge, feelings, experiences and current thinking to their professional placements (Sinclair, Trimmingham-Jack & Pollnitz, 2006), thus repositioning them as educators. In doing so, pre-service educators are able to construct their own understanding of teaching and learning practices (Russell & Chapman, 2001) and can explore their own styles of teaching for, as Goldstein (1997, p. 156) notes; 'we do not teach what we know, we teach who we are'.

Students are encouraged to reflect upon the documented evidence of their work with young children, colleagues, families and community members using the Teacher Registration Board (TRB) of South Australia's Professional Standards (TRB of South Australia, 2010). This approach has enabled our pre-service educators to describe the nuances of their approach and acknowledge the more subjective dimensions of their professional judgement that play an integral role in the work of caring for and educating young children. Additionally, the pre-service educator's reflections provide opportunities for all parties to engage in open dialogue and critical reflection on current pedagogies, paradigms, curriculum and professional issues in Early Childhood Education and Care (Geoghean, Geoghean, O'Neill & White, 2005; Goldstein, 1997; Ortlipp, 2009).

Second, according to Stonehouse (cited in Woodrow & Brennan, 1999, p. 88), contemporary understandings of the partnership model signify an equal sharing of power and decision making within mutually respectful collegial relations. In this model our students are not positioned as an additional responsibility for in-service educators –



## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

a concern echoed throughout the literature on teacher preparation (Goldstein, 2007; Simpson, Hastings & Hill, 2007; Walkington, 2005; Ward, 2010). Rather, working as part of a teaching team, our pre-service educators make genuine contributions.

Third, the Flinders' approach to Professional Experience in Early Childhood Education recognises that '... learning and teaching takes place within a web of relations, negotiations and collaborations in social [historical], cultural and physical environments' (Kennedy & Surman cited in Newman & Ashton, 2009, p. 95). Teacher educators cannot ignore the need to understand how contemporary practice is evolving and how it may inform our teaching and research as contributing members of the Early Childhood profession. Indeed, Woodrow and Newman (2007) suggest that opportunities for the sharing and discussion of differing perspectives can lead to the professional development and growth of all participating educators in a partnership model.

The Professional Experience constructed as a partnership therefore offers unique possibilities to co-construct understandings about teaching and learning. An inquiry approach is consistent with an epistemological perspective that views knowledge as constructed rather than as 'Truth'. From this standpoint, each person is working alongside another 'co-constructing knowledge'. Viewing learning as 'co-construction' is premised on the belief that people see a 'context, a situation, or a phenomenon, which is 'objectively' the same in qualitatively different ways ... and if we become aware of others' ways of seeing this, then we have a certain degree of collective consciousness' (Bowden & Marton, 1998, p. 189). By working with others, we are exposed to a much wider range of 'ways of seeing' than is available when working alone.

The partnership and collaborative inquiry principles of Professional Experience at Flinders University thus allow all participating educators to experience '... what it means to learn as a function of being part of a community ...' (Newman & Ashton, 2009, p. 96). The program immerses pre-services educators in their sites over time; hence our students are able to explore aspects of teaching and professional practice that are jointly developed (Sinclair et al., 2006). This has enabled our students to engage in

problems and practices that are authentic and have offered their colleagues new and often exciting perspectives and solutions to site specific concerns. In the following section, Emily has written about her experience. Particularly pertinent in her writing is the way that Emily's reflections weave together experience, research, practical and theoretical knowledge.

### **Emily's Story: Using Information and Communication Technologies with Young Children in a Child Care Centre**

For my second semester professional teaching practice in 2010, I undertook ten single day visits to an Early Childhood site, part of which involved student teachers trying and testing out different teaching techniques. I was placed at a Child Care Centre with children aged three and four and chose the technique of reading. As part of this experience I decided to investigate the use of electronic storybooks on an Apple iPad. Of course, the children loved playing with the iPad, so the use of electronic storybooks turned into playing games and creating art as well. This experience cemented my belief that ICT can be part of an effective learning program in Early Childhood Education when used in moderation and in an appropriate way, without infringing on a philosophy of play-based learning.

In the following reflection, Emily situates her practice in a contested arena regarding the place and value of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Early Childhood pedagogy. She then articulates her position, which she substantiates with reading and observations:

Some Early Childhood educators criticise the use of ICT in the Early Years on the basis it encourages passive behaviour and social isolation, and does not suit the way young children learn (Connor, 2010). Technology, especially television and computer games, is often seen as unnecessary in the early years as children should be focused on real relationships with people and

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

nature, participate in hands-on activities and engage in child-initiated play (Alliance for Childhood, n.d.). This is true. But in an increasingly technological society, exposure to technology is wide-spread, despite good intentions. Every day, children watch parents use mobile phones, computers and microwaves, and unless children live in a completely technologically-free environment, children will witness technology frequently. As children get older, they will *use* technology on a daily basis. Thus, the key is balance. There are endless opportunities to involve children in the use of technology, but these opportunities must be managed appropriately. The aim, then, is to incorporate technology with the ways we believe young children learn. By allowing children to play and explore technology freely, it allows them to *learn about* and *learn through* technology (Price, 2009).

Emily then goes into detail about using the iPad in a Child Care setting:

The key to ICT in Early Childhood Education is interactivity. This concept is what separates computers and Apple iDevices, such as iPads and iPod Touches, from television as a way to enhance learning. iPads and other iDevices involve *active engagement* with the device, rather than *passive listening and viewing* as with a television (Hemmings, Clarke, Francis, Marr, & Randall, 2001).

Thus there are real benefits of using iDevices in moderation within classrooms and early childhood centres. Not only do iDevices teach children about technology as they use its different functions, they also allow children to learn through technology as they interact with different applications. I think the iPad is more appropriate for early education, especially in pre-school settings, than a television or even a computer because it has more opportunities for interaction, both technologically and socially.

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

There are many benefits of using an iPad as a teaching tool. An iPad is small, light and portable. The iPad is perfect for small group work and much easier for young children to handle than a computer. As a teacher, you can easily curl up in a reading corner with a child and share a digital book, hence supporting literacy skills. Children have to use their fingers to manipulate the screen, to play games, to draw and this strengthens fine motor skills as children need to be precise with their movements. Children need to draw on past experiences and actions to remember how the iPad works, aiding memory and recall skills. Creativity is encouraged and nurtured through the use of drawing applications, and there are plenty of applications and games available to aid numeracy learning. Finally, the iPad encourages cooperation between children because iPads are exciting. They are not yet widely used in schools and centres, and I found that all the children 'wanted a go' with the iPad. Since there was only one iPad, the children had to share, wait their turn and limit their time. But if the children weren't actively using the iPad, they were talking to the child who was, giving suggestions, pointing out new features and simply interacting with one another.

In her reflections, Emily is contesting traditions and knowledge about young children and their learning. In this process, she is adding to the body of knowledge about the skills and learning that are on offer for young children using an iPad rather than being positioned as an unquestioning 'recipient' of someone else's knowledge. In Chloe's written description of her work she also takes a position of inquirer and, rather than replicating ideas, she 'creates' a pedagogical tool based on this particular group of children that she thinks will be effective.

## **Chloe's story: Empowering Children to Reflect on their Literacy Learning**

My second year Professional Experience was completed in a reception class at a primary school. The project that the teacher identified was to work with a group of children who needed a bit more help with their literacy and numeracy skills, by using a kinaesthetic approach. For the first couple of days, I mainly observed the six children. From my observations I discovered that while the rest of the class were reading and writing at an early writing level, these six children were still at an emergent level (Hill, 2006, pp. 284-5).

The first two activities I created were aimed to diagnose the children's current literacy and numeracy skills. By doing this I was able to see where they were and continue from what they already knew. In literacy I created an 'I know my sounds' sheet with two columns. On one side there was a tick and the other side had an arrow, which meant 'working towards'. Each student was given this sheet as well as a set of coloured letters, which were spread out in front of them. The children were then asked to identify different sounds and put them in the correct columns dependent upon if they knew if them or not. From this activity I was able to clearly see the letters that these children needed to work on.

This activity allowed the children to see what they already knew and what they needed to learn. This was very helpful for them, particularly as some of the children seemed to get very frustrated when they did not know how to write a letter or word when all of the other children around them did. By being able to see how much they *did* know compared to how much they were working on helped them to feel better about themselves.

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

As educators we know that children develop quite differently due to the different previous experiences they have had (Hill, 2006, p. ix). I wanted to show these children that they were moving forward with their literacy skills.

What Chloe does not write here, but her mentor reported to the university liaison, is that as a result of Chloe's work, this group of children not only 'felt a lot better' about themselves but also improved their literacy skills. These two students, Emily and Chloe, have reflected on their second year Professional Experience. The next two examples of three-way collaboration are drawn from third and fourth year students.

### **Bec & Amily's Stories: Boy's Education**

Bec begins her section by outlining her school's inquiry focus, before vividly describing how she felt when she met her class and group of five boys.

During my practicum I was asked to focus on issues relating to boys' education. This was a broad enquiry, but focused more specifically on a small group of boys, who were particularly unruly. The inquiry involved observation-based planning to form and try out strategies to help the boys become more focused and engaged in a classroom setting.

As I was introduced to the class my eyes fixed on a pair of bright blue eyes, a cheeky smile, and a look that said 'I didn't do it.' I would continue to hear that phrase, and many similar, throughout my practicum. The eyes belonged to a young boy, who was to be part of a group of five boys who were identified as 'hard to engage'. Their high energy levels, spontaneity, and zeal for talking had made them 'difficult' to deal with in the classroom, and they were often identified as trouble. Instead, I identified boys who were eager to learn, but perhaps struggled with the content and delivery they were being presented with. The Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) digest (2005, p. 1) describes engagement as

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

'energy in action, the connection between person and activity.' I think understanding that some children often need to expend this energy in more physical ways in order to learn is important when assessing engagement levels.

I gradually got to know the boys over the first week or so. I chatted with them, worked with them in small bursts one-on-one, and got to know their interests and passions. While my teaching load was low at this time I was able to spend time observing them in different settings. I discovered that marbles were hugely popular for the boys. They played at recess and lunch, they discussed the value of different marbles and made trades, and they learnt different tricks to help them win games. This was fascinating for me, and the deep thinking that was clearly taking place was far beyond any learning I was seeing from these boys in the classroom. *Pokemon* books also seemed to support this deeper thinking. The boys would initiate reading, something that rarely happened in the classroom, and would share their thoughts with others displaying a high level of comprehension that I had not otherwise seen in their reading. *Pokemon* also enhanced their writing skills, and boys who would usually only write a couple of short sentences, were writing a whole page if allowed to write on this topic. I found these observations intriguing.

I quickly discovered that the boys were very much visual learners and that verbal instructions relating to behaviour were not necessarily being retained. I formulated several ways to display the boy's behaviour in a visual format to show them. To accommodate the visual learning I created 'Focus charts'. I would record the boys' behaviours every two minutes using a colour system; green = focused, orange = perhaps fidgeting but still participating, red = unfocused/distracting others. I did this across a variety of situations including desk work, board work, out of class Italian and Music.

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

When I shared this with the boys they responded very well. The boys saw how unfocused they could be, and whilst we had a giggle at some of my descriptions of their behaviour, they became serious about wanting to be 'all green.' We discussed ways this could be achieved and the boys seemed more aware of their behaviour, and would often check to see if I was watching their 'green' behaviour.

Bec goes on to describe how she engaged the boys in discussing and monitoring their own behaviour. As Bec's inquiry progressed, she shared her findings with her mentor and discussed the learning outcomes for this small group of boys. She concludes her story with the following:

To reflect on these observations I would like to briefly explore the big idea of 'behaviour management'. For me, this implies that children's behaviour in the classroom must be managed in order for the children to learn, and in order for the teacher to teach. It implies that all children learn in the same way and that children need to be moulded to fit a one-size-fits-all pedagogical model.

I would like to challenge this idea and suggest that perhaps it is 'us' as educators that need to consider how classroom behaviour reflects on the way we teach. MacNaughton and Williams suggest, 'the forms of expression children can use to represent and discuss their meanings will vary from child to child and within each child as they grow and develop' (2009, p. 232). Are we using children's interests and passions to guide their learning? Are we answering children's questions on life and the world around them? And are we employing strategies that scaffold ALL children as learners, not just those who easily conform to the school setting?

Bec's questions resonate with those of many experienced early childhood educators. Bec takes a position as an early childhood educator re-thinking the issue of Behaviour



## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

Management, 'creating' tools to use with dis-engaged children, reflecting with the boys about their behaviour and in the process developing deep learning about the relationship between curriculum and children's involvement. In her fourth year placement Amily was also asked to focus on boys' behaviour. She writes

Once I entered the site we started building an inquiry project. After confirming that I was there to support the site and develop insight into something they saw as important or perhaps neglected, I received this:

*"We have some issues with the boys"*

From this I could start working on some ideas and building my own inquiry, setting my own instructions and planning my practicum experience rather than receiving a set of guidelines and boxes to tick from the university. It was at this point I began to feel useful and really considered what was going to be making an impact in the site and for the children, rather than being a hindrance to the staff or on the children's learning. Specifically, I worked to build some goals and strategies for working with a group of boys. My overall goal was to *work toward a higher level of engagement* with the boys. To reach this goal I had two aims, which linked to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

*Aim one: for the boys to be effective communicators by expressing their feelings.*

*Aim two: for the boys to develop a sense of belonging by cooperating with others and forming friendships.*

Initially I undertook some observations in order to help build my inquiry. I used videos, photos and different written documentation. I documented the type of play the boys were engaging in and from there I decided that I needed to work with them to develop positive strategies for playing with others, such as inviting others into their play and cooperating to make their play more enjoyable. From

this data, I also hoped to get the boys involved in more imaginative play, because most of their day was spent either playing with toy cars or kicking balls.

Another example of something I did to meet my aims was to introduce the concept of *recognising, discussing, expressing and changing* feelings or thoughts. We needed to get the boys in touch with their feelings, because this was important if they were going to cooperate, play together and form friendships. To do this, we introduced the children to some new language: *red thoughts and green thoughts*. Red thoughts being sad or angry and green thoughts being happy; all the staff and children began to use this language. This was explained with a thermometer which the children built together. On the thermometer the children drew pictures of things that gave them red and green thoughts, and we scribed stories and situations which the children discussed with us: the way they felt, why they felt this way, if they thought this was a positive way to feel, if they changed how they felt and how they changed their red feelings. The children also had their photos displayed on the thermometer so they could recognise red and green faces on themselves and in other children.

This experience allowed the children to communicate their feelings rather than have an instant reaction, such as hit out in rage or begin to cry. This was a great way to slow the children down, get them to think and then make a decision about how they were going to react, as well as to recognise feelings in others.

Over the six weeks I documented all the learning and development I witnessed through 'learning stories'. I created a learning story for the children and parents and I also created one for the staff, which outlined the learning that had occurred as well as some strategies and ideas for future use. This is where you can start seeing my emergent pedagogical approach, and the type of scaffolding and support I was offering. I was helping the children work through things that had been identified by the site as critical. By the end of my placement I had left strategies, knowledge, skills and ideas, as well as implemented some approaches

to the identified issues at the site for the boys and staff. Most importantly, I felt I was performing the job of an early childhood educator and making a difference to children's learning.

Amily's reflections are an example of a pre-service teacher using her theoretical knowledge regarding observation as the basis for planning. She then 'creates' a way to talk with the boys about their feelings and reactions using the 'red and green thoughts' language. In effect, by Amily being re-positioned as inquirer and contributor, she has re-positioned the boys in the learning process by involving them in the development of the thermometer and contributing to the group's understanding of 'triggers' for red feelings.

## **Conclusion: The Development of Self-Efficacy for Professional Change**

Perhaps the greatest outcome of the partnership and collaborative inquiry principles that underpin the early childhood Professional Experience at Flinders University is the re-shaping of educator identities, beliefs, theorisation and practices, and the sustaining of commitment and persistence. With the high attrition rate of beginning teachers both in Australia and internationally, there has been an increasingly urgent call in the Early Childhood profession to de-romanticise and reconceptualise our identities as educators in a move away from our privatised, gendered and highly altruistic personas (Dalli, 2002; Geoghean, et al., 2005; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Manning-Morton, 2006; Murray, 2000; Sumsion, 2004; Woodrow & Brennan, 1999). The four examples provided by the students in this paper illustrate how participating educators' self-efficacy has evolved as a result of our focus on pre-service educators contributing to young children's learning through a centre or school-identified collaborative inquiry. A partnership approach offers the pre-service, in-service and teacher educators transformative learning opportunities that go beyond the bounds of the traditional practicum to create learning environments which are more conducive to assisting us all to search for meaning, make

connections and extend ourselves as educators in a mutually beneficial partnership (Newman & Ashton, 2009; Sumsion, 2006; Woodrow & Newman, 2007).

Professional Experience in the Early Childhood programs at Flinders University thus blurs traditional boundaries between theoretical knowledge that is constructed within universities and the practical knowledge which emerges from day-to-day experience (Newman & Ashton, 2009; Russell & Chapman, 2001; Sumsion, 2006; Walkington, 2005). Collaborative inquiry between pre-service, in-service and teacher educators becomes the catalyst for a more collegial, three-way learning process to evolve. The redistribution of power present within this partnership approach contributes to a 'triadic relationship' (Woodrow & Newman, 2007). This relationship offers new opportunities for curriculum innovation by teacher educators and student teachers which in turn offer new opportunities for young children.

## References

- Aitken, I.P. & Day, B.D. (1999) Early Field Experiences in Preservice Teacher Education: Research and Student perspectives. *Action in Teacher Education*, 21(3), 7-12.
- Alliance for Childhood. (n.d.). *Media and children*. Retrieved 16 November 2010, <http://allianceforchildhood.org/media>.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), *Schooling Issues Digest*, 2005, (1).
- Beck, C., & Kosnic, C. (2000). Professors and the Practicum: Involvement of university faculty in preservice practicum supervision. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 6-9.
- Bowden, J., & Marton, F. (1998). *The University of Learning: Beyond quality and competence*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Britzman, D. (1991). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Carpenter, I., Cherednichenko, B., Davies, A., & Kruger, T. (2000). *Liaising dangerously? A decade of practice-based teacher education*. Paper presented at the Practitioner Action Research Conference, Ballarat, Sept 2000.
- Cherednichenko, B., & Kruger, T. (2001). *Partnerships for Collaborative Research and Improvement of Practice: Dissolving the dichotomy of propositional and process*

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

- professional knowledge*. Paper presented at the Australian Teacher Education Conference, Melbourne.
- Connor, J. (2010). ICTs and Young Children. *Every Child*, 16(3), 26-27.
- Dalli, C. (2002). Being an Early Childhood Teacher: Images of professional practice and professional identity during the experience of starting childcare. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 37(1), 73-85.
- Dewey, J., (1904). The relation of theory to practice in education. In C.A. McMurray (Ed) *The third NSSE yearbook*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fraser, S., & Bosanquet, A. (2006). The curriculum? That's just a Unit Outline, isn't it? *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(3), 269-284.
- Geoghean, N., Geoghean, D., O'Neill, S., & White, R. (2005). *Preservice Early Childhood Teachers' Self-Efficacy, Teacher Preparedness and Facilitating Children's Learning of Concepts in Multiple Contexts*. Paper presented at the Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). Cairns, Qld. 4-5 July, 2005. Retrieved 6 June 2009, <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/geo041041.pdf>.
- Goldstein, L. S. (1997). *Teaching with Love: A feminist approach to Early Childhood Education*. New York.
- Goldstein, L. S. (2007). Beyond the DAP versus Standards Dilemma: Examining the unforgiving complexity of kindergarten teaching in the United States. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(1), 39-54.
- Grieshaber, S., & Cannella, G. (2001). From Identity to Identities: Increasing possibilities in Early Childhood Education *Embracing identities in Early Childhood Education: Diversity and possibilities* (pp. 3-22). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Groundwater-Smith, S., Cusworth, R., & Dobbins, R. (2004). *Teaching Challenges and Dilemmas*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace.
- Hemmings, T., Clarke, K., Francis, D., Marr, L., & Randall, D. (2001). *Children, Technology and Culture: The impacts of technologies in children's everyday lives*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hill, S., (2006). *Developing Early Literacy, Assessment and Teaching*. Victoria, Australia: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training (Feb. 2007). *Top of the Class: Report on the inquiry into teacher education*. Commonwealth of Australia.
- Lobman, C., & Ryan, S. (2008). Creating an Effective System of Teacher Preparation and Professional Development: Conversations with stakeholders. *Educational Policy*, 22(4), 515-540.

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

- MacNaughton, G. & Williams, G. (2009). *Techniques for Teaching Young Children: Choices for theory and practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edn. NSW, Australia: Pearson Education.
- Manning-Morton, J. (2006). The Personal is Professional: Professionalism and the birth to threes practitioner. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(1), 42-52.
- Marlow, M., & Nass-Fukai, J. (2000). Collegiality, Collaboration and Kuleana: Three crucial components for sustaining effective school-university partnerships. *Education*, 121(1), 188-194.
- Marsh, C., & Willis, G. (2003). *Curriculum: Alternative approaches, ongoing issues* (4th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Murray, S. B. (2000). Getting Paid in Smiles: The gendering of child care work. *Symbolic Interaction*, 23(2), 135-160.
- Mullen, C (2000). Constructing Co-mentoring Partnerships: Walkways we must travel. *Theory into Practice* 39 (1), 4-11.
- Newman, L., & Ashton, J. (2009). Sociocultural Learning Approaches: Exploring early childhood communities of practice. *Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 16(1), 87-101.
- Ortlipp, M. (2009). Shaping Conduct and Bridling Passions: Governing practicum supervisors' practice of assessment. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(2), 156-167.
- Parkay, F., Anctil, E., & Has, G. (2006). *Curriculum planning: A contemporary approach* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Price, H. (2009). *The Really Useful Book of ICT in the Early Years*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Ramsey, G. (2000). *Quality Matters: Revitalising Teaching: Critical times, critical choices. Report of the Review of Teacher Education, New South Wales*. New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Sydney.
- Russell, B., & Chapman, J. (2001). Working as Partners: School teachers' experiences as university-based teacher educators. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 29(3), 235-248.
- Sandman, L. (2002). Serving society: The scholarship of engagement. *Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia*, 24(2), 4-7.
- Schon, D. (1987). *Developing the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Josse-Bass.
- Shen, J. (2002). Student Teaching in the Context of a School-University Partnership: A case study of a student teacher. *Education*, 122(3), 564-580.
- Simpson, T., Hastings, W., & Hill, B. (2007). 'I knew that she was watching me': The professional benefits of mentoring. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 13(5), 481-498.

## Contributing to Young Children's Learning – Three-way collaboration

- Sinclair, C., Trimmingham-Jack, C., & Pollnitz, L. (2006). Taken for Granted: What does 'professional experience' mean? *International Journal of Practical Experience in Professional Education*, 9(1), 1-13.
- Stark, J., & Lattuca, L. (1997). *Shaping the college curriculum*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sumsion, J. (2004). Early Childhood Teachers' Constructions of Their Resilience and Thriving: A continuing investigation. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 12(3), 275.
- Sumsion, J. (2006). *Early Childhood Student Teachers' Reflection on their Professional Development and Practice: A longitudinal study*. Sydney, Australia: University of Sydney.
- Teacher Registration Board (TRB) of South Australia (2010). Professional Teaching Standards for Registration in South Australia for Entry to the Registrar: For graduate teachers from South Australian pre-service teach education institutions. Retrieved 29 January 2011, [http://www.trb.sa.edu.au/pdf/Standards\\_Entry-to-Register.pdf](http://www.trb.sa.edu.au/pdf/Standards_Entry-to-Register.pdf).
- Walkington, J. (2005). Mentoring Preservice Teachers in the Preschool Setting: Perceptions of the role. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 30(1), 28-35.
- Ward, C. (2010). Trialling Learning Circles in a Professional experience Placement. *Every Child*, 16(3), 7.
- Woodrow, C., & Brennan, M. (1999). Marketised Positioning of Early Childhood: New contexts for curriculum and professional development in Queensland, Australia. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1(1), 78-94.
- Woodrow, C., & Newman, L. (2007). Building Collaborative Communities. *Every Child*, 13(4), 14-15.

Word Count: 6,871.