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PREFERRED MODELS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teacher education in Australia continues to be a topic of contention. The erosion of specialized early childhood courses during the early 1980's was indicated by Briggs (1984) in the face of then new shared structures with primary teacher education. Restructuring of courses at that time was brought about by amalgamations of many higher education institutions which provided courses for teachers. At that time, the tertiary education sector began what has become the most significant post-war re-arrangement of higher education Australia has witnessed. Course developments in 1984 were illustrative of the kinds of amalgamations which were taking place and attention was on "rationalization" of many courses within the college sector as it moved towards university designation.

To-day, early childhood teacher education courses are considerably different from those described by Briggs in 1984. On a national scale, connections with primary teaching courses have altered and much of the character of traditional early childhood preparation is again apparent.

However, the preparation of early childhood teachers in each State and Territory is now being challenged by new moves to restructure teacher education in this country and to develop a nationwide teaching profession (K-12) with national teacher registration, and national salary benchmarks and classifications. Early childhood teacher education in this exercise is subsumed in a teacher education model focused on the school as work-place.

The Australian Education Council Report on Teacher Education (1990) advocated directions for pre-service teaching courses which differ in notable ways from the style and composition of the present Australian Early Childhood programmes observed recently (Tayler, 1990). Now more than ever, is the time to document clearly the reasoning behind certain present early childhood course attributes and to consider critically what constitutes a sound preparation for early childhood specialists. National, system-

wide changes to teacher education generally need to be instituted in full knowledge of the scope and diversity of teaching in the early childhood field and with recognition of the specialized needs of teachers of young children employed in a wider work-place than the school. Early Childhood Education nationally, spans child care, kindergarten and the early primary years.

Catering effectively for any group in teacher education requires giving attention to the specific contexts in which the group will operate and linking the programme to the dominant philosophies in the profession - early childhood, primary, or secondary. In particular, beliefs about the ways children of different ages think and learn and beliefs about what constitutes appropriate educational provision for children in early childhood, primary and secondary years should impact on the design and implementation of teacher education programmes for teachers working in these sectors.

This paper outlines the features of early childhood teacher education considered important by early childhood teacher educators in Western Australia, where current courses differ in marked ways from those of other Australian States and Territories. Included are several issues for consideration, as these pertain to all Australian early childhood teacher education programmes and must be debated in the process of developing national responses about appropriate directions and provisions for Australian early childhood teacher education. The tensions between current reform plans (AEC, 1990) and present Australian early childhood programmes are also illustrated in some cases by reference to data collected by the writer (Tayler, 1990).

Early childhood teacher education in Western Australia (1990)

Because of known differences in early childhood programmes across the country, some attention is given first to highlighting factors about the Western Australian programmes which differ in substantial ways from early childhood

programmes in other places. One major difference relates to preparation for the care and education domains of the early childhood field. The integration and co-ordination of care and education is an issue across Australia, and teacher educators need to amplify the roles of early childhood practitioners across the birth to eight age range. The way in which these roles are construed will impact on the style of teacher education pursued. Present differing regulations governing care and early education in this country make arriving at consensus on any one teacher education model unlikely and, in the view of the writer, undesirable.

In Western Australia, care and education courses are separated. This partly accounts for the fact that current teaching courses at both Curtin University and Edith Cowan University continue to operate on a shared course structure with primary education although in each case, the structure is different and the links with primary vary in degree. Furthermore, the courses in both institutions are accredited to cover the three to eight year age range and the major employing authorities for early childhood teachers from both institutions are the Ministry of Education, the Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools sector.

There is also an historic component in the separation of care and education courses in Western Australia. Preparation for child care positions was set up through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) which offered a Child Care Certificate course to candidates who completed Year 10 of the secondary school. Although this course was upgraded to Associate Diploma and Diploma levels, training for child care remains largely with the TAFE sector. There are, however, a small number of graduates also coming from a separate Edith Cowan University course in child care.

Regulations regarding children's services in Western Australia do include early childhood teachers as appropriate appointees to child care centres, but their roles relate to the provision of a three-to-five programme because they do not have the formal preparation or practice in working with the birth to three age group. Thus, in the area of care and education Western Australia differs markedly from many of the early childhood programmes observed in other States.

A second characteristic of early childhood in Western Australia is that all student teachers graduate with a Bachelor of Arts (Education), a

three year degree, and have the option of remaining for a fourth year and completing a Bachelor of Education. (They may also return later to complete the Bachelor of Education, a pattern commonly pursued.) Field experience is interspersed over the first three years with the largest concentration being in the third year Assistant Teacher Programme (ATP). This programme is a distinguishing feature of Western Australian teacher preparation. All Western Australian third year students complete a 10 week (one term) ATP. At Curtin University, this is set for either preschool or preprimary, and at Edith Cowan University, students may additionally select junior primary or a combination of preprimary and junior primary. The ATP is considered a major component of the pre-service programme and early childhood staff in both institutions view this as one of the strengths of present pre-service courses. The result gained by a student on ATP is taken by the respective employing authorities as a summative statement of a student's practical and professional skills at the completion of the pre-service period.

Funding of the ATP programme varies from teaching practice experiences in the first and second years of the pre-service course. Western Australian teachers supervise third year ATP students as part of their professional role. The Ludeke scheme of payment of teachers operates for all year levels in other parts of Australia whereas in Western Australia the Teachers' Tribunal sets requirements for the payment of teachers supervising any teaching practice other than the ATP. Despite this difference, overall costs of teaching practice are significant because of tertiary supervision charges and travel to the diverse country locations which are part of teaching practice.

In summary, the WA early childhood teacher education programmes are distinguished from many other programmes in five ways. Currently they do not include child care studies or practice, they are accredited three to eight years, they contain a 10 week ATP, and they graduate students after three years with a Bachelor of Arts (Education). Furthermore, graduates are employed predominantly by the Ministry of Education, the Catholic Education Commission and independent schools. These features underscore some of the discussion in this paper.

Western Australian early childhood teacher educators and the senior early childhood consultant in the Ministry of Education met in 1990 to consider the AEC Report

recommendations and to discuss a number of issues which emerged in regard to pre-service preparation of teachers. Some of the deliberations at this meeting are included in this paper and expanded by the writer to include a conceptualization of the basic requisites of a sound early childhood pre-service programme.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

(a) Birth to eight vs three to eight years.

The general principle of a birth to eight year focus is deemed most desirable, and Western Australia is following this principle, where possible, in present programmes. However, present courses are accredited to cover the three to eight year age span and the focus on preparing teachers for Ministry of Education and other similar positions impacts on how the birth to eight age span is covered. Any national consensus on a birth to eight year model or models would require a careful phasing in process in Western Australia.

At Edith Cowan University endorsement for planning a new birth to eight year programme has recently been given for the pre-service teaching course, but action on this will not take place until the programme is re-structured. In preparation, the advisory committee for the Edith Cowan programme has been broadened to include representation from care and community services areas and a working party to address the structure of such a course has been established.

(b) Care and education

Given the present provisions for preparation of child care workers and early childhood teachers in Western Australia this State is not presently geared to implement a model of early childhood teacher education which has child care studies and practice as a major component. This is not to suggest disaffection with such a plan, but traditional patterns of employment, conditions and regulations in Western Australia in the care and education areas call for a process of negotiation if this direction is to be pursued. This process is underway both in the university sector and in the State government departments. The reason for highlighting this as an issue is to stress the lack of commitment to any single model approach to early childhood teacher education in Australia being endorsed from Canberra.

Dilemmas in articulating programmes across the education and care arenas will be with early childhood educators for some time yet. In 1984,

Elliot and Irvine questioned the desirability and morality of retaining pre-service courses which created artificial barriers for staff working with under three's and which maintained the division between those working in "caring" and those in "teaching" roles. In 1991 in Edith Cowan University, there is an early childhood teaching course (B.A.(Ed.)) in the School of Education and a separate child care course (B.A.(Children Studies)) in the School of Community and Language Studies, a situation which reflects the separation of care and education in the Western Australian community. That such divisions are institutionalised at the tertiary level, despite concerns about the dichotomy being raised in the international and national literature, is an indication of the major steps yet to be taken in Western Australia in this regard.

(c) "Early Childhood" designation on awards

Any documentation of desired models of early childhood teacher education should include a national call for "Early Childhood" designation on the teaching award(s) offered by early childhood schools, institutes, departments and sections. In Western Australia, no "early childhood" designation exists on parchments (B.A.(Ed.) & B.Ed.). This does not pose difficulties for graduates who remain in the State, but there is concern that Western Australian awards may not be taken as early childhood specialist preparation in places outside the State where parchments are expected to designate "Early Childhood" if such a specialist award has been studied. The Australian Early Childhood Association endorses the importance of recognising the specialization by the formal inclusion of "Early Childhood" on awards given. Furthermore, early childhood teacher educators are generally in agreement that Australian awards should be stated in this way.

(d) General vs professional studies balance

In the literature surveyed, the issue of the balance of general (liberal or discipline) and professional studies for students pursuing early childhood teaching awards has advocates taking diverse stances. This diversity of opinion is also noted among early childhood academics in Western Australia.

In Australian teacher education generally, the past decade has revealed a shift within the strong professionalist emphasis from the educational needs of teachers towards a specific focus on teaching outcomes, particularly as they relate to economic development. Considerable emphasis is

now placed on teacher appraisal and related changes in promotion criteria, and on the restructuring of teacher awards. Nevertheless, arguments about how preparation courses can best fit teachers for the diverse roles they take have not produced sound directions in regard to the balance of general course work and professional studies.

The trend towards more general studies has been noted in several places. AEC Report proposals to increase general studies components in early childhood, primary and secondary courses assumes that teachers at all these levels need the same kind of preparation. It is ironic that Ebbeck argued in 1984 for a re-orientation of early childhood courses to give students "a better understanding of and competence in interacting (with a variety of professional associates and family and community members)" and called for family studies to form "the core of studies around which other studies (the curriculum and so called liberal studies, etc.) revolve" (1984, 37).

In the United States, Haberman (1988) reported the thrust of laws and policies being towards limiting pre-service professional studies and including more in-depth liberal studies. However, these policies and laws were also noted as specifically exempting early childhood and special needs teachers.

These developments support my contention that even in the midst of the trend to limit (or scrap) professional education courses there seems to be universal agreement, among even the critics of professional education that teachers of young children are somehow really different. They apparently need more professional education and, ipso facto, less general education and less specialization in some university major. (Haberman, 1988, 34-35.)

How a programme should be composed with respect to general studies, education theory, and practical components depends on the kinds of roles for which a course is deemed to be preparing students. No clear, well documented methods of obtaining optimum balance between general study, education theory and practical components have, in the writer's view, been presented. Shulman (1986) calls for a more technical focus with a stress on subject matter and content knowledge. Doyle (1985) calls for a reflective approach with an intellectual framework for understanding class events. Early childhood teacher educators need to consider their priorities in preparing people for a diverse

set of appointments and have debate on the relative balance of general and professional studies.

(e) Specialization within accredited age range

In Western Australia, no firm direction has been agreed in regard to the treatment of periods within the age span of an accredited course. As stated earlier, Western Australian courses are more narrowly focused on three to eight years at present. Considerations of how best to prepare students for a wide variety of work across the birth to eight year range are now in progress. Of some assistance in this endeavour is the material and course details from programmes such as the one operating at Macquarie University (Waverley) where opportunities for specialization are well established.

Course structures which show regard to the continuing professional development of teachers of young children, through focusing the literature and the range of exposure of teachers to periods within the age span (for example, infant-toddler - birth to two years, kindergarten - three to five years, and early primary - five to eight years) have attraction in agendas charged with covering the birth to eight year span. These structures also fit well with the recommendations of the NAEYC (1982) for early childhood teacher education courses. Nevertheless, all graduates from programmes covering birth to eight years of age should have a background which ensures skills across the range as well as specialist competency within the age range.

(f) Teaching practice vs field experience

One may be curious why this is deemed an issue, but visits made by the writer in 1990 to seventeen of the Australian early childhood programmes afforded an appreciation of different views on what constitutes practical experience. Presently, almost all formal field work in the Western Australian pre-service courses is completed in preschools, preprimary centres and junior primary classes. "Teaching practice" encapsulates the kind of fieldwork students undertake. If one adopts a model of pre-service teacher education with the school as focus then this term fits well, but if models of teacher education are to account for more diverse areas of employment for graduates than the Ministries or Departments of Education then the notion of "field experience" is much more appropriate. Western Australian early childhood educators now endorse "field experience" rather than "teaching practice" so that

field work in venues other than schools may be assumed as appropriate and necessary. Although limited provision exists, moves to provide field experience in venues other than school settings have yet to be developed. These moves also have implications for the funding of field experience programmes.

(g) Entry pre-requisites (including cultural diversity)

Debate on pre-requisite requirements for entry into teaching is underway in Western Australia. In response to the Beazley Inquiry in Education (1984), and the recent Discipline *Review of Teacher Education in Mathematics and Science* (1989), proposals have been put forward to set Mathematics pre-requisites for entry into all teaching courses. These proposals have prompted a wider debate on the qualities considered desirable in teaching candidates and exposed the need for a review of pre-requisites in all areas.

New directions on pre-requisites for entry to early childhood teaching are difficult to establish nationally because little attention to this area has been given in the recent literature. Early childhood professionals and academics involved with pre-service teacher education need to consider this area in conjunction with the need to introduce a diversity of individuals into the field.

A recurring issue in the literature is the quality of people generally attracted to teaching. Although there is not supporting research evidence, at the early childhood level, the writer suggests that candidates tend to choose this area of teaching out of interest in, and commitment to young children and not, for example, primarily because they failed to win places in other tertiary courses. Indeed, a number of candidates who enter early childhood teaching programmes have attracted high grades in their previous studies.

Advocacy in a number of reports on teacher education for "better people" to be recruited to teaching generally, tends to be targeted towards attracting sound Arts and Science graduates to the profession. For example, in the United States, the Carnegie Report (1986) was seeking people of "substantial, intellectual accomplishment" for teaching and in Australia, the AEC Report highlighted the quality of student intake as a problem and noted that "teaching does not attract anything like the appropriate proportion of school leavers with high levels of achievement." (1990, 15).

One of the unchallenged assumptions in views of this kind is how the connection is made between high levels of achievement of school leavers usually denoted by TEE, HSC, ASAT, or other scores derived from testing at the end of secondary schooling, and subsequent quality of teaching performance. Furthermore, scores derived from performance at the end of secondary schooling may be produced using a narrow range of subjects as the base. The notion of a sound general education being necessary for future teachers may not be well served by end-of-secondary-school scoring systems which allow for attention to very few subjects rather than assessing a broader, more balanced preparation.

Raths (1989) noted that one attribute of effective early childhood teachers was an ability to "read" their pupils. How this ability, for example, would correlate with teachers' previous academic achievement, particularly if this was derived from sampling few subjects, is unclear. The need to recruit into teaching those with a capacity for caring has been highlighted in a variety of places, and early childhood teaching in particular, may not benefit markedly from drives to recruit Arts or Science disciplinary specialists who attain high academic scores at the expense of recruiting students who have a deep interest in young children at the beginnings of learning.

In short, high academic achievers or "brighter people" being recruited into teaching may have merit, but this kind of focus in the literature on teacher education and the improvement of teaching must be balanced with strong arguments that academic talent alone is not a sound predictor of quality teachers. Qualities of character, commitment to education, to teaching as a profession, and motivation to work with young children are also important variables. Raths' (1989) suggestion that teacher educators devote more attention to learning how to work effectively with the students in front of them rather than wishing for different students with different academic records is worth consideration.

Furthermore, the AEC report condoned the concept of a degree followed by a teaching preparation course so that "well qualified graduates in a variety of disciplines (can) opt for teaching as a career." Present Diploma of Education courses have not been considered in this paper because this kind of course is not presently available in Western Australia at the early childhood level.

Another facet of the debate on the most appropriate forms of selection and recruitment to teaching involves appropriate representation of minority groups. The Carnegie Report (1986) highlighted the lack of recruitment of people from minority groups as a matter for concern. Although recent reports on teacher education in Australia have not focused specifically on the need to recruit candidates representative of the cultural diversity of the population, this area deserves serious attention. In some places for example, attention has been given to the recruitment and continued support of aboriginal students entering teaching. The establishment of enclaves of some institutions at diverse locations outside metropolitan areas has assisted in providing teacher education courses sensitive to the social and cultural dynamics of the areas concerned and has assisted the movement into teaching of aboriginal candidates in particular. However, these developments in Western Australia for example, are directed towards primary teaching at this stage.

In early childhood teacher education little specific attention has been devoted to special recruitment of candidates from minority groups, despite the close liaison expected between early childhood teachers, parents and the diverse communities in which they work. This is not to suggest that current students in early childhood courses come from one cultural group or one area of the population but the writer is not aware of specific monitoring systems in place to ensure that a wide diversity of candidates forms the early childhood student-teacher population.

Given that Australia is a culturally plural society, some attention to determining the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students in present courses in order to articulate any needs for recruitment of particular groups may be productive. Arguments for ensuring access of minority groups to teacher education courses should be based on moral imperatives and a sense of justice rather than on any expression of need for an ethnic or cultural minority group to be taught by people from the same group.

(h) The "feed-forward" problem

The timing and sequencing of particular content and experiences in programmes of teacher education is considered by some as problematic. Guidelines on time allocation and sequencing of content which can be applied readily to teacher education courses have not to date been forthcoming. Katz, Raths, Mohanty, Kurachi, and

Irving (1981) conceptualized much of this discussion in their notion of the "feed-forward" problem which suggests that many of the questions likely to be asked by novice teachers facing dilemmas on their first appointments are perceived by those teachers as unimportant during the pre-service course. In essence, students in pre-service courses may be provided with answers to many questions they have yet to ask because the units of study are placed at points where students are yet to realize the need for, or importance of the content. This poses a considerable dilemma for teacher educators.

The "feed-forward" problem can also be linked closely with issues of attaining optimum, concurrent field experiences designed to integrate the theoretical components of a pre-service teaching course with practice. Debate about appropriate field experience ranges from argument for frequent, early, quality exposure of students to teachers and teaching (thus attempting to minimize the "feed-forward" problem), through to a complete avoidance of field experience because of many poor teaching models and the difficulty for students in effecting new educational ideas.

Early childhood teacher educators in Western Australia endorse the notion of frequent, early, quality field experience across the birth to eight age range. Such experience should be interspersed throughout the pre-service programme which, given a birth to eight focus would best become four year undergraduate model.

(i) Links to primary teacher education models

The literature distinguishes early childhood courses from primary courses by indicating the different theoretical frameworks operating in the two sectors, the larger focus on socio-emotional domains in early childhood courses, and the significantly increased attention to observation skills and the study of infant and toddler development within early childhood. Courses which operate on a shared structure for primary and early childhood therefore need to consider these and other differences, and look at ways of ensuring that the distinguishing characteristics of one sector do not swamp the distinguishing characteristics of the other.

Models of education which may suit pupils beyond the age of eight, and be suited to teaching beyond early childhood, should be challenged if they are unilaterally applied to all areas of a

system, early childhood to tertiary. This is particularly so if the scope of early education provision and early childhood teacher education is narrowed by any model to the kindergarten and school as sole venue for the early childhood teacher's work.

Because directions in the debate about teacher education in Australia have been focused around the school as work-place there is a danger that early childhood teacher education may become further dichotomized in regard to care and education of young children instead of moving further towards integrated programmes which ensure that these areas are brought together. Although this is perhaps not a major concern for present Western Australian early childhood programmes, it is apparent from recent observations of course structures around the country that some programmes in other States would be severely compromised if a model of pre-service teacher education with the school as work-place were set for the country.

(j) Advanced skills teachers (AST's), national goals and curriculum priorities

Early childhood teaching across Australia takes place in a wide variety of venues which impact on the kind of approach taken by teachers. Any designation of AST's at the early childhood level which was based on performance indicators of "advanced teaching skills" would need to be made by using indicators appropriate in the early childhood context. In this way early childhood teachers may obtain a fair assessment in relation to teachers in other areas. Furthermore, the idea of employing AST's to supervise "interns" moving into teaching poses many logistics problems for the early childhood field where teachers are not generally clustered on one school site. In short, an AST at the early childhood level would have to travel to a variety of centres to observe and advise interns at this level.

Early childhood education services (including pre-service teacher education) may not have traditionally been pre-occupied with establishing links to economic productivity or with making links to many Government policy directions, but these are present preoccupations of the Federal Government and some address to these links would be prudent. Characteristics of current early childhood pre-service courses, including a strong focus on child and family studies, human development and learning, administration and management of children's services, and extensive and varied field experience may be maintained

and maximized by attempts to highlight the links between these course characteristics and present government policies and directions. In this way, early childhood professionals may retain control of their own field. Early childhood professionals must advocate that the early childhood field currently provides teaching and research directions in matters close to many social policies and demonstrate this clearly by also linking the present research endeavours to current social policies.

Viewing the selection of curriculum content for early childhood teacher education courses through the lens of economic rationalism may require the field to argue in new ways for particular directions deemed important to young children. In an environment where national goals for education are linked to economic needs and to the subsequent prioritizing of particular areas of curriculum, the early childhood teaching profession is now faced with advocating clear, well grounded policy directions for effective early childhood education within this environment or with losing control of the direction which early childhood education takes.

For example *The Discipline Review of Teacher Education in Mathematics and Science* (1989) called for certain minimum levels of contact in teacher education courses for Mathematics and Science. Although there may be valid reasons for concern about the level of knowledge in these fields, failing to make reference to a teacher education programme as a whole and to the balance of all needs expressed by the various areas invalidates any single statement about the amount of time one should allocate to Mathematics and Science. In setting models for early childhood teacher education courses, there is a need to advocate for all fields of learning rather than reacting only to areas which happen to be presently topical in politics and general education.

Indeed, the expressive arts areas (music, movement, drama, art, dance) for example, have been minimized in several early childhood programmes. At Edith Cowan University, for example, staff are now attempting to deal with this imbalance in a programme very well represented by mathematics and science (20% of course time), in an environment where any reduction in mathematics and science in favour of an area less politically in favour is challenged.

FEATURES TO BE REPRESENTED IN MODEL(S) OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

The issues canvassed in the above section highlight the complexity of producing workable models of early childhood teacher education. The notion of multiple models designed to suit a set of early childhood courses which have varied focuses according to regional needs has appeal in Western Australia.

Nevertheless, there is recognition that some attributes of teaching relate to all levels of education and require attention in all pre-service teacher education courses. For example, all Australian teachers work in a multi-cultural society, have professional needs regarding their provision of pastoral care in the work-place, the administration of centres and schools, and the development of productive relationships with the communities they serve. All teachers also have practical needs for appropriate educational spaces, materials and equipment, for reasonable group sizes and for recognition of their work and reward for effective participation. All teachers need opportunities for on-going professional development through appropriate in-service courses and variety in practical experience. How these common needs are translated into a teacher education programme becomes important because within this "common ground" there should be scope for different developments for early childhood, primary or secondary.

The structure and content of present courses in any one State or at one level (early childhood, primary or secondary) cannot be seen as appropriate for other States or other levels without due consideration of the particular legislation governing local services and without defining the work practices of the different groups of teachers. Furthermore, community need for specific types of services varies according to population locations, geography, cultural factors and the expectations of major employing authorities. These factors highlight the importance of diversity in pre-service teacher preparation courses offered in this country and, to some degree, they support the view that a system of teacher education built *not* on one dominant model but on many models according to locality and need is necessary for optimum provision.

In Western Australia, early childhood teacher educators confirmed the following features as fundamental to their "ideal" model of teacher education. The issues raised above and the

refinement of these fundamentals were taken into account by the writer when developing the conceptualization of the model which is presented in Figure 1. Clearly, directions taken on any one of these issues would impact on the way such a model was refined and implemented. The objective of the writer was to produce a conceptualization of early childhood teacher education fundamentals which allowed flexibility for educators wishing to implement such a model.

The central areas of child development, teacher development, and the early childhood field come together in a focus on the world of the child and the provision of appropriate experiences. Set out below are the particular attributes of a teacher education programme which Western Australian early childhood educators deemed as significant.

- (a) A sound background in child development
- (b) An integrated and inter-disciplinary understanding of learning theory and practice
- (c) Philosophical and historical foundations of early childhood
- (d) Developmentally appropriate curriculum studies
- (e) A grounding in principles and methods of teaching young children
- (f) A developmental focus, birth to eight years
- (g) A focus on the child within family within society
- (h) Research and theory connected to on-going, relevant field experiences across the programme
- (i) Interpersonal communication skills (including ethics) for effective, professional relationships with co-workers, parents, and children
- (j) Academic studies in liberal arts, humanities, social and physical and behavioural sciences

In summary, all courses need to provide graduates with the foundation for a philosophy of teaching young children, a knowledge base of child development (birth to eight years), and basic competence in working daily with young children and their families. This provision may be established through academic coursework in both professional and general studies and through a variety of field experiences.

CORE COMPONENTS SUPPORTED BY WESTERN AUSTRALIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATORS

The components considered by Western Australian early childhood teacher educators as relevant structural components for a model of early childhood teacher education which could be applied in Western Australia were as follows:

- (a) Studies of development and learning
- (b) Education studies
- (c) Curriculum studies
- (d) Field experience
- (e) Interpersonal relations, professionalism and administration
- (f) General Studies in the humanities and/or sciences

It should be noted that these core components are different from the components presently in place in the Curtin and the Edith Cowan University courses in Western Australia. Further, it is assumed that the instructional methods used in courses would ensure variety of experience as well as give support to the integration of theory with practice. The content of all courses should reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian communities which they serve and the staff and associates involved with the courses would model the high standards of ethical and professional behaviour expected in working with young children and their families.

A preferred pattern for early childhood teacher education, given the features and components described above, is a four year pre-service preparation with practical experiences interspersed throughout. The outcome of this preparation would be the award of Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood).

Conclusion

Although Western Australian early childhood teacher educators preferred certain features to be represented in any model of teacher education suitable for the preparation of teachers of young children, there is serious doubt that a single model of teacher education for all teachers, as presented by the Australian Education Council Report (1990), is realistic or appropriate. Programmes preparing teachers for early childhood positions across Australia are presently broad ranging and reflect the diversity of early childhood services in the field. Any model of teacher education must reflect the needs of the community to which it is focused. Across

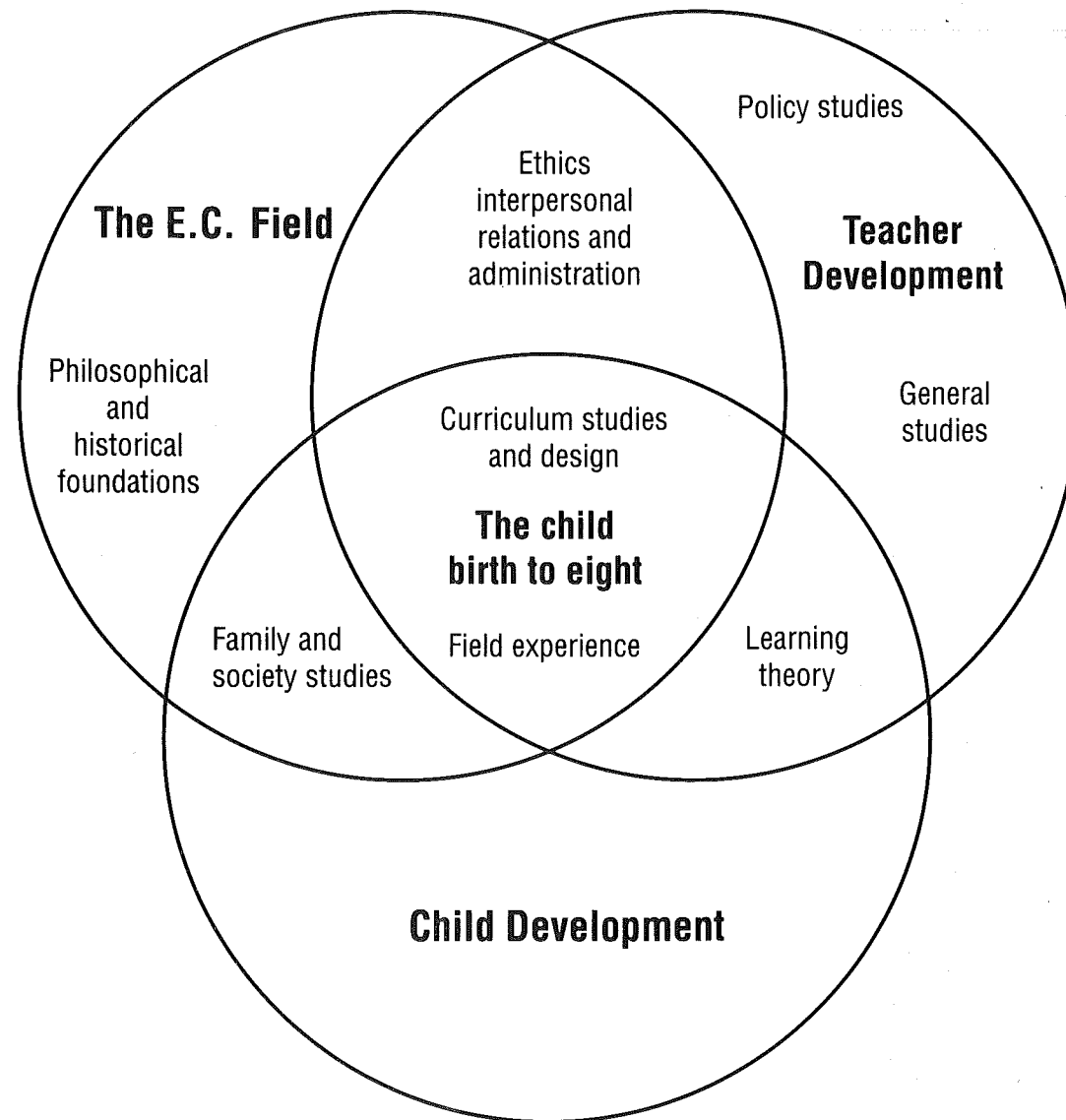
Australia, there is a wide diversity of needs which supports the notion of diversity in the models of teacher education adopted.

Consideration of the issues presented in this paper and subsequent resolutions at the regional level would result in different focuses being taken in preparing teachers for work at the early childhood level. The writer considers the present diversity in early childhood teacher education as a positive feature which reflects care by teacher educators to take into account regional needs and issues when preparing teachers for professional roles. That early childhood teacher educators can learn from each other and maintain vibrant teacher education programmes by being aware of developments across Australia is apparent. However some degree of flexibility for programmes to be tailored to suit local needs is an important feature to maintain.

There is room to develop a national perspective on teacher education but this should occur while also preserving some scope and facility for diversity. For excellence to be pursued, be it in teacher education programmes or in other endeavours, the writer argues for freedom of academics to respond to needs in a country which is rich in diversity. Any attempt to present a single model of teacher education, as outlined by the Australian Education Council Report (1990), should be challenged for the sake of preserving variety and fostering excellence rather than mediocrity.

Figure 1

Early Childhood Teacher Education : A Western Australian Perspective



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