Creating Effective Invited Spaces: Putting the lens on early childhood teacher education practica

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

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2016
Abstract

The teaching practicum offers many opportunities for growth of knowledge, practice and development of new understandings and competencies for student teachers. However, student teachers who are placed within low socioeconomic early childhood settings, if they have little or no knowledge of this habitus, may find this a challenging aspect of their initial teacher education. This study aimed to identify factors that support, facilitate and nurture the positive relationships between associate teachers and student teachers during teaching practicum within low socioeconomic early childhood settings.

A qualitative case study approach was used to gather data, including in-depth interviews with two pre-service teacher education coordinators as well as six associate teachers in a range of low socioeconomic early childhood educational settings. The findings provide insights into associate teachers’ pivotal role in allowing student teachers access to the very intimate and specific dispositions and approaches that they implement every day in their practice. In addition, the findings highlight the reciprocal responsibility of student teachers to take advantage of the opportunities to share with their associate teachers during the short passage of time that the teaching practicum allows.

The findings from this study led to the development of a conceptual model which reveals the characteristics of an effective ‘invited space’. This invited space is most likely to emerge when both the associate teacher and the student teacher negotiate a respectful and trusting relationship that allows them to share their identity, beliefs, values and practices, and to be prepared to move flexibly between the roles of teacher and learner.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I want to thank my amazing, colourful and hearty children, Drew and Blake. You have been so patient and understanding throughout this venture. Every day you give me the strength and determination to push through and move forward. Never forget to grab this world with both hands. This thesis is dedicated to you both. Arohatinonui.

To my supervisors, Associate Professors Penelope Haworth and Sally Hansen, I give my utmost thanks and humble gratitude to you both for sharing your experience, understandings and professional insights with me. Both of you have challenged and guided me, had constant faith in my ability as a beginning researcher, and patiently encouraged my efforts at every stage of this journey. He waka eke noa, ngā mihi mahana kia kōrua.

Getting the rare opportunity to talk on an intimate basis with two pre-service teacher education coordinators and each of the participating associate teachers about their specific pedagogies and philosophies was a privilege. I appreciated the honesty and integrity with which each participant shared their own personal and contextualised practices with me. Kia ora koutou katoa.

Special thanks to Nicki ‘spindle fingers’ Watterson who meticulously transcribed a huge amount of data in a very efficient time frame, and to a professional standard.

Thanks to both my former and current work colleagues with whom many collegial and professional discussions and conversations have added to my motivation and determination to get the ‘story’ of this study told.

Acknowledgement and thanks to the Institute of Education at Massey University, Manawatū, for their support of scholarship so this study could be possible.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. i

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. iii

Te Wero – The Challenge ................................................................................................. xiii

Chapter One Introduction ................................................................................................. 1

1.1. The Aim of the Study..................................................................................................... 2
1.2. The Rationale for the Study ......................................................................................... 3
1.3. Organisation of the Thesis ......................................................................................... 4

Chapter Two Literature Review ......................................................................................... 7

2.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 7
2.2. Traditional Roles in Associate-Student Teacher Relationships ................................ 7
2.3. Invited Spaces .......................................................................................................... 10
2.4. The Art of Active and Cultural Engagement ......................................................... 12
   Active Engagement ........................................................................................................ 13
   Cultural Engagement ..................................................................................................... 14
2.5. Effective Teaching Practices and Dispositions in Diverse Learning Settings .......... 16
   Ako ................................................................................................................................ 17
   Funds of Knowledge ...................................................................................................... 18
   Co-Construction ........................................................................................................... 19
2.6. Learning Through a Shared, Mutual Process ......................................................... 21
2.7. Summary .................................................................................................................. 22
2.8. Research Questions ................................................................................................. 24
2.9. Theoretical Framework: Social constructivism ......................................................... 24

Chapter Three Methodology and Research Design ......................................................... 27

3.1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 27
3.2. The Qualitative Research Approach
3.3. Method/Approach: Case Study
3.4. Participants
3.5. The Setting of the Study
3.6. Ethical Considerations
3.7. Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews
3.8. Data Analysis
3.9. Summary

Chapter Four Findings

4.1. Background: Pre-service Teacher Education Coordinators
4.2. The Setting, Experience and Philosophy of each Associate Teacher
4.3. Emerging Themes from the Associate Teachers

Knowing your Identity
Chapter Five Discussion ................................................................. 57

5.1. Introduction ..................................................................................... 57

5.2. How are Invited Spaces between Associate Teachers and Student Teachers Created and Negotiated? ................................................................. 58

Trust and Respect ................................................................................ 58

Time ........................................................................................................ 60

Working Through Expectations and Tensions ......................................... 61

Taking Responsibility and Using Initiative ............................................. 62

Creating a Climate of Dual Challenge ..................................................... 64

5.3. What are the Effective Associate Teacher Practices and Dispositions That Allow for Invited Spaces to Emerge? ................................................................. 65

The Ability to be Both the Teacher and the Learner (Ako) ....................... 66

Being Open and Listening .................................................................... 67

Flexibility ............................................................................................... 69

5.4. How do Invited Spaces Promote Shared Understandings to Enhance Cultural Awareness and Contribute to Student Teacher Success during Practicum in Low Socioeconomic Early Childhood Educational Settings? ................................................................. 70
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Associate-Student Teacher Relationship. ........................................................ 26
Figure 2: The Invited Space. ................................................................................................... 79
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Approval ........................................................................................................... 105
Appendix B: Consent Form – Individual ............................................................................................ 106
Appendix C: Consent Form – Institutional ...................................................................................... 107
Appendix D: Information Sheet - Practicum coordinators .............................................................. 108
Appendix E: Information Sheet - Associate Teachers ................................................................. 110
Appendix F: Interview Schedule - Practicum coordinators ......................................................... 112
Appendix G: Interview Schedule - Associate Teachers ............................................................... 114
Appendix H: Authority for the Release of Transcripts ................................................................. 117
Appendix I: Transcriber’s Confidentiality Agreement ................................................................. 118
The challenge is for associate teachers to pick up this knowledge, take it, and use these insights to nurture beginning teachers.

Associate teachers hold the power position and the key to creating transformative teaching practices. Utilising the mentor role with a willingness to share, and a view to creating a new genesis of teachers through a collaborative lens, is vital for the success of future teaching. Understanding and guiding our learners today will empower them to use this rich knowledge for navigating tomorrow’s world.

Kia kaha, kia toa, kia maia, kia manawanui!