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Bodies of knowledge:
Early childhood teachers’ experiences of their initial teacher education programme and sense of preparedness for teaching

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Katherine Ann Ord
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of ‘preparedness’ as it is employed in relation to the preparation of early childhood teachers through initial teacher education. It is a descriptive account of how newly qualified teachers made sense of their learning to teach process through the lens of preparedness; a construct that was brought to the research process. Individual and group interviews with field-based and pre-service newly qualified early childhood teachers participating in the study were conducted over eighteen months. The programme leaders of participating teacher education institutions were also interviewed, and a range of teacher education programme and official documentation was examined. An interpretivist approach was employed in the design of the research, including data generation, data analysis and presentation of findings.

This thesis argues that newly qualified teachers equate ‘being prepared’ with ‘being knowledgeable’. Rather than holding this knowledge as a store of ‘in-the-head’ knowledge, the research texts strongly suggested that as students approaching newly qualified teacher status, they desired to hold this knowledge in a practice, or an embodied sense. Through investigating participants’ stories of becoming knowledgeable this thesis argues that the process of accessing and acquiring the formal knowledge of teaching was aligned to the structural form of each institution, and to the way in which each positioned students in relation to that knowledge. From participants’ perspectives each institutional setting represents discursively different ways of coming to know teaching and being teachers.

This thesis clarifies the conditions for teacher education students to understand knowledge for teaching and thus become “self authoring members” (Edwards et al., 2002) of early childhood communities of practice. It argues that the key to teacher education students’ sense of preparedness lies within the design of teacher education programmes. The stories of newly qualified teachers and the author’s interpretations of them make a contribution to on-going dialogue about what constitutes knowledge and knowing for teachers. It adds a voice to those who argue that learning to teach is not principally a cognitive process that privileges thought over action and theory over practice. Rather, this thesis contends that the nature of knowledge for teaching must be reconceptualised to take account of practice theories of knowledge.
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This thesis is dedicated to my two fathers—William Kingsley Ord and Dudley William Thomson Sheppard—and to my dear friend and brilliant teacher educator and mentor—Judith Mary Carver.
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