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Infant and toddler teachers' professional development

Reported changes in perceptions and practice

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January 2009

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A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

In Early Years

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New Zealand

January 2009

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore any changes in perceptions and/or practice of a group of infant and toddler teachers as a result of their participation in a facilitated professional development programme. This professional development programme and a teaching team which was committed to implementing an *A*ttachment *B*ased *L*earning programme (*ABL*) already imbedded in another section of their centre, held the potential for identifying changes in teachers' practices in response to their increased understandings of the theories, philosophies and beliefs underpinning the *ABL* programme.

The experiences of two focus teachers, two professional development facilitators and five infant and toddler teachers' involvement in a centre specific co-constructed professional development programme along with two parent users of the centre are documented in this report using a qualitative mixed-method approach. Data were generated with participants for the duration of the professional development programme spanning a seven month time frame. The teachers were interviewed twice; once at the beginning of the programme and then at the completion of the programme. The parents were interviewed once on the completion of the professional development programme. Data from the interviews as well as teachers' reflective journals, meeting minutes and centre policies were analysed qualitatively using Rogoff's (2003) three planes of analysis; the personal, the interpersonal and the institutional planes. From these planes three thematic categories were revealed in which teachers' understandings were concentrated. These themes were the teachers' view of the child as informant to their practice; how they perceived their role as a teacher; and the importance of team cohesion. Changes in teachers' practice within these three areas were examined, as were the professional development processes that influenced the teachers' perception and pedagogy. The study showed that there needs to be alignment of these concepts across and within the three planes to ensure optimal outcomes for all participants in the learning community.

This study has emphasized how professional development can shape teachers' views, understandings and pedagogy. The study contributes to an understanding of the importance of teachers having opportunities to theorise practice, and undertaking authentic and contextual professional development within safe and trusting environments.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their support and encouragement:
My supervisors: Dr Barbara Jordan & Dr Kim Powell whose professional support and encouragement kept me focused and motivated.
The Management of Christopher's Childcare Centre for their support and encouragement, including Faith Martin for her editing, proof reading and ongoing support.
The two child study families for their permission to include their children and their voices in this study.
The three case study teachers and the two facilitators whose professionalism, honesty and bravery constantly amazed me.
The wider community of Christopher's Childcare Centre, the teachers and families of both under two sections.
The Kanga section teachers, who always supported, provoked, questioned, argued and challenged me.
My family for their ongoing support and belief that I could do it, including Alivia for design and formatting.

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Glossary

Playcentre	The Playcentre movement is a uniquely New Zealand early childhood parent co-operative that teaches and practices empowerment for both adults and children.
Portfolio	A folder or file for each child containing sample records of learning. Might include observations, learning stories, assessments, teacher-child dialogues, and records of projects, art work, and photographs of experiences, parents' voices and child's voice. Maintained by the child's key teacher.
Primary Care/key teacher	A system of caring for infants and toddlers in group care settings where a teacher is allocated specific children with whom they develop and maintain close and intimate relationships.
Reflective Journal	A folder or file that each staff member compiles containing reflective journal entries on practice, action research plans, ongoing learning plans and goals; for the purpose of teacher development.
Whakatauki	Maori word meaning proverb
Whāriki	Māori word meaning a mat of woven threads. Because the New Zealand national early childhood curriculum document is called *Te Whāriki*, the word and the metaphor of a whāriki have become popular in early childhood terminology.
Self-sustaining teams	An organisational structure that is imbedded in the centres' philosophy and beliefs, (group size, limited numbers of children, key teacher systems, employment practices). A structure that empowers the teachers to implement relevant programmes without external roster or duty lists. Where teachers have the ability and power to sustain the centre and individual principles in practice.
Buddy teacher	A pair of teachers who work closely together sharing knowledge and understandings about the children and families/whanau from their groups. Thus allowing for continuity and consistency in teacher practice. Buddy teachers support each other in the development of children's' portfolios, they work together to create deeper understandings around pedagogy and support each other in their professional development journey.
Planes of Analysis	Barbara Rogoff (1998) suggests that the examination of individual, interpersonal, and community/institutional developmental processes involves differing planes of observation and analysis, with any one plane being the focus, but with the others necessarily observed in the background. As applied in the context of this thesis; • *The Personal plane*; shows how individuals experience change

through their participation in an experience by highlighting the role of the individual.

- *The Interpersonal plane*; shows how people communicate with each other and engage in shared endeavors.
- *The Institutional plane;* shows how people participate with others in culturally organised activities using cultural tools such as institutional polices and practices.