



Practice makes perfect – does it? Adding value to practicum experience through field based teacher education

Project Team: Lin Howie and Bill Hagan

Manukau Institute of Technology



An Ako Aotearoa publication. Support for this work was provided by Ako Aotearoa through its Regional Hub Project Funding scheme



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Executive Summary

This report discusses the main findings from a pilot project on the value added by field based teacher education (FBTE) within the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) early childhood community of practice. The project was funded by the Ako Aotearoa Northern Region Hub in 2009.

Field-based teacher education at MIT provides student teachers with two types of practicum experience; sustained practicum, which is the field based component, and the more traditional teaching practice blocks. The sustained practicum (SP) requires student teachers to be based in an early childhood centre, the 'home' centre for the duration of the programme. The sustained practicum is embedded in particular courses. This enables authentic assessment which promotes the development of contextual knowledge, practice, and professional relationships over time. Student teachers are grounded in the reality of teaching while undergoing a thorough, rigorous academic programme that includes reflective practice writing and that meets the learning needs of the many diverse students that attend MIT.

The project aimed to identify good teacher education practice, critical success factors for student teachers, provide practical action oriented suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of early childhood teacher education, and enhancing the employability of graduates. The research findings confirm the value of FBTE to student teachers and employers, particularly the depth of and opportunities for authentic practice. Student teachers gained confidence to practice in the 'real' world that gives legitimacy to their practice. Challenges were experienced by some student teachers who were in voluntary placements, or in centres that they identified as of lower quality, or where centres did not include them as part of the team.

There are four key recommendations overall:

1. Support student teachers and centres to enhance the transformation of student teachers' participation (Rogoff, 1997) by increasing the range of experiences and responsibilities that they can engage in over the duration of the sustained practicum
2. Work to promote inclusion of student teachers in the full life of the sustained practicum centre and foster communities of practice which include student teachers, centre staff, and lecturers.
3. Enable students to recognise quality centres and make informed choices about where to carry out sustained practicum
4. Offer professional development to 'home' centre staff to promote student inclusion and participation.

Project description

The project relates to practicum in an early childhood teacher education programme. In the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) students complete two types of practicum experiences. First the more usual teaching practice (TP) in block weeks, and secondly regular, weekly, sustained practicum (SP) in a 'home' centre for the duration of the programme. This model is commonly termed field based teacher education (FBTE). MIT has

offered FBTE since 1997, and field based early childhood certificate and diploma programmes since 1992. Kane (2005) stated that field based model of teacher education was under-researched in the education community. Previous reports (e. g .Howie, Jackson, Ryan, Aitken, Gould, Burgess, McConnell, 2006 & Murphy, 2009) and others currently underway have endeavoured to address this. The project was funded by Ako Aotearoa Northern Regional Hub and was conducted at MIT.

The assumption behind the design of the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) (BEd(ECT)) as a field based programme was that the sustained practicum would add value to student teachers' learning by prioritising authentic experiences. The approval documentation states that the degree was "... underpinned by the strong belief that student teachers learn to teach through developing both their knowledge and practice holistically" (Department of Social Sciences, November 2006). Learning was seen by the developers as an active process, situated in particular physical and social contexts, social in nature, and where the situation in which a person learns becomes part of what is learned (Putman & Borko, 1999, cited in Department of Social Sciences, November 2006). In addition "The sustained practicum encourages relationships to develop between the student teacher, children, families, and teachers and provides a context for learning and ongoing critical reflection over time." Department of Social Sciences, November 2006). It was thought that the sustained nature of the practicum would provide increasing opportunities for student teachers to develop personal responsibility, autonomy, and teamwork within the SP centre. The researchers took a relatively open approach to discover what the MIT community of practice thought about FBTE and sustained practicum and how it added value to a teacher education programme. The title of the project "Practice makes perfect: does it?" reflects an underlying problem: just because FBTE student teachers spend more time in an early childhood centre than their contemporaries in a more traditional pre-service programme, it doesn't necessarily mean that they will be better teachers. We wanted to find out what value was added by FBTE at MIT over the three years of the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching), not conduct a comparative study between providers. The specific project aims are detailed in the next section.

Aims

The project aimed to identify, within the MIT community of practice; good teacher education practice, critical success factors for student teachers, provide practical action oriented suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of early childhood teacher education and enhancing the employability of graduates.

Method

The methods used to gather data in this project were predominately qualitative. The first data was collected using an on-line survey (survey monkey.com) followed by targeted focus groups. Some quantitative data was collected via the on-line survey. The survey questions were developed by first working collaboratively with two colleagues to come up with descriptors for key tasks for participation in centres. We then took the draft survey questions to a BEd (ECT) teaching team meeting to get feedback, as well as three external lecturers who acted as critical friends. The survey questions were finalised and placed on-line. An early childhood teacher trialled the survey and further edits were made.

The participant information sheet and hyperlink to the survey were emailed to members of the MIT early childhood teacher education community. This community was defined as all those who have direct connection with the delivery of the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) programme. Members of this community included current student teachers, graduates, lecturers, associate teachers, as well as employers and centre liaison people in the centres where student teachers were enrolled in sustained practicum. Responses were received from 107 participants (approximately 20%).

The use of an on-line survey involved an additional step for all participants as they had to click on a hyperlink to take them to the on-line survey. The 107 responses included 70 student teachers (25% of total), and eleven lecturers (70% of the total). There was a response from student teachers in all three years, although the response from year two students was low. After the initial email to student teachers the researchers visited each student cohort and reminded them to participate. However, the year two students were on teaching practice at the time of the survey and could only be reminded by a second email. If the survey had been handed physically to students there may well have been a higher response.

Twenty four associate teachers, as well as 10 employers /centre liaison people associated with the programme, responded. Together the response rate for these two groups was approximately 14%. The graduates who responded were also members of other groups: associate teachers, centre liaison people, or lecturers.

Each survey participant was invited to participate in a focus group and if interested to email an administrator with their contact details and availability. The following graph Figure 1 shows the distribution of survey responses. Respondents could select more than one group that applied to them.

What is your role in relationship to the BEd(Early Childhood Teaching) at Manukau Institute of Technology? Please tick all that apply

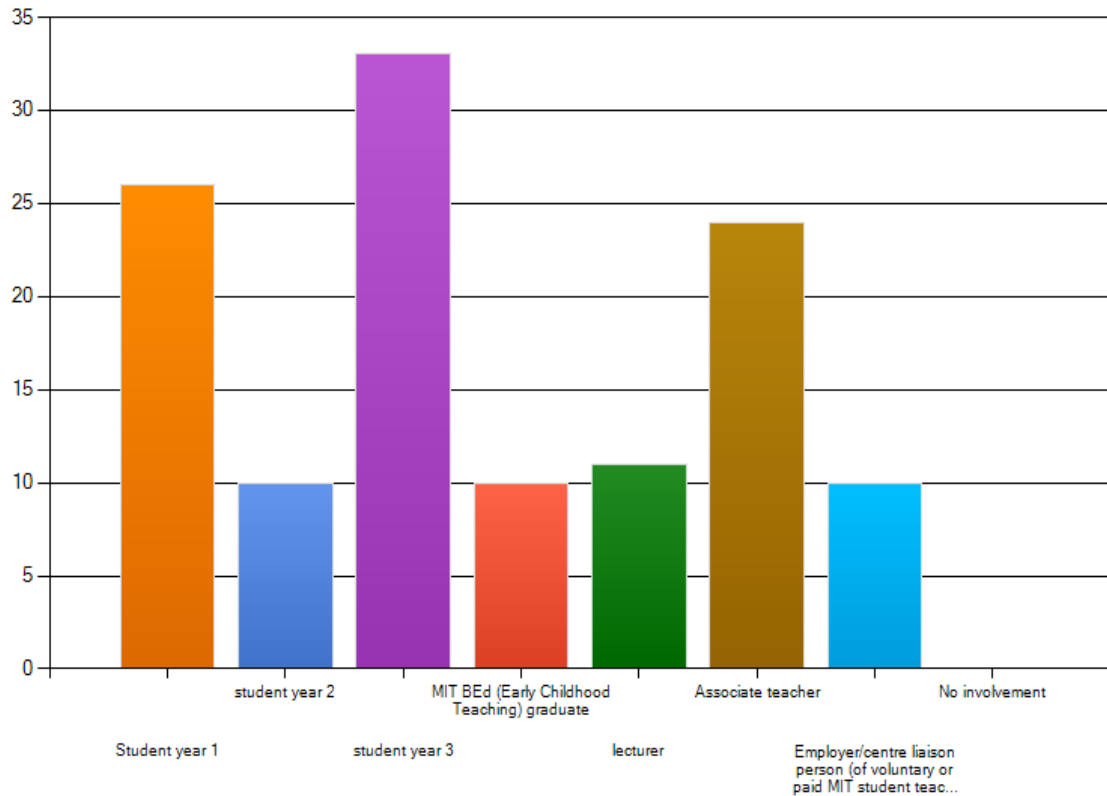


Figure 1: Survey respondents (N=107)

The survey data was predominately qualitative. Where quantitative data was collected it was used to prepare the charts included in this report. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, with 3 main themes being developed from the data. This initial analysis was used to generate three questions to ask the focus groups to tease out the identified key themes.

The participants in the five focus groups were self selected. Not all of those who volunteered to participate eventually did so. The five focus groups were year 1 students, year 2 students, year 3 students, employers (this group included associate teachers and centre liaison people), and lecturers. It was decided not to go ahead with a separate graduate group as they were represented in the employers or lecturer group. Figure 2: Focus groups, shows the number of focus group participants. Independent facilitators were used for the focus groups with consistent instructions and materials.

Focus group	Number of participants
Year 1	5
Year 2	2
Year 3	5
Employers	4
Lecturer	7
Total	23

Figure 2: Focus groups

As with the qualitative data from the questionnaire, the focus group data was analysed thematically.

Supporting Theories

The theoretical perspective that we felt underpinned our analysis and developing themes was from a social theory of learning that relates to situated learning in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) supports social theory as it highlights the importance of the social-environmental structures in charting a course of development. He defines development as a lasting change in the way a person perceives and deals with the environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory also provides a lens through which to view the interrelationships between mesosystems, in this case the mesosystems of the MIT learning environment and the sustained practicum 'home' centre, and the need to consider the linkages between the two environments.

Rogoff (1997) proposes that people change through 'transforming' their participation in sociocultural activities – in which both the individual and the rest of the world are active, and these reciprocal learning strategies are termed 'guided participation'. The boundary between individual and environment disappears if development is viewed as participatory, since it inherently means involvement. The central question from a transformation of participation view has to do with how people's participation changes as an activity develops. More recently, Rogoff, Moore, Njafi, Dexter, Correa-Chavez & Solls (2007) looked at how cultures differ in their goals of development. Mezirow (1998) relates transformative learning from an adult perspective. Within the framework of transformative learning, learners' assumptions, values and beliefs are challenged, and relate to the development of a reflective practice as student teachers. Leonardo (2004) looks at transformation from the point of view of critical social theory and asserts that 'quality education' provides a discourse framework that can change the pedagogical process from one of knowledge transmission to knowledge transformation.

The sustained teaching practice that student teachers commit to in field-based teacher education develops as a community of practice as relationships build over time. Wenger (1998) describes the learning that results in this community come from meaning making of the experience and the resulting developing teacher identity. "Our identities are rich and complex because they are produced within the rich and complex set of relations of practice" (p. 162). The three crucial characteristics of a community of practice are: the identity defined by a shared domain of interest along with the commitment that goes with it; the joint activities and discussions that take place; and also the helping each other and sharing information that makes up the community (Wenger, 2006). For student teachers their community of practice involves their 'home' centre, their relationships with fellow student teachers in their cohort as well as with lecturers. The student teachers' emerging practice takes time and sustained interaction in order to develop a shared repertoire of teaching. Nurturing and support is one of the key dimensions of a community of practice. Supportive early childhood educational environments enable emergent structures of practice to be responsive and always open to renegotiation. This means that alignment is negotiated constantly. In the findings section which follows it can be seen how these theoretical lenses shed light on the data.

Findings

The findings from both the survey and the focus groups were largely consistent between groups of participants. The research process involved analysing the survey data first. This led to the identification of three main themes: the value of ongoing reciprocal relationships with children and their parents/whānau, centre staff, lecturers and other student teachers; the opportunities for authentic practice; and thirdly the development of communities of practice. These three interrelated themes showed how the sustained practicum enhanced student teacher success over time, with some additional questions that were raised about participation that seemed to be different for students who were in paid work versus voluntary work.

Survey findings

Respondents were asked about their teacher education experience. Of the 107 respondents, 80 were enrolled in or had completed FBTE. Of this group, 40 said that they chose FBTE because they valued the regular hands on experience and opportunity to put theory into practice. For example a year one student said “I chose field based because of the interrelationship between theory and practice during study. I felt that this was the most appropriate way to learn and test my theories in practice. It was the continuity of practice while I studied that appealed to me.” Participants also valued what they learned from the ‘home’ centre, for example gaining “... a deeper understanding of the children’s needs and abilities.”(Year 2 student) and “learning from the child” (year 1 student).

Nineteen of the respondents valued the earning potential of participation in a FBTE course “I could study and work at the same time.” (Year 3 student). In addition, five commented that they had already been working in a centre when they began their study and were able to continue with employment. Seven participants gave pragmatic reasons for choosing FBTE for example “I never realised the course was field based at the time of enrolling and did so because it was close to home.” (Year 3 student) or that it fitted in with family commitments.

The survey data overall showed that the opportunity to develop ongoing, reciprocal relationships between student teachers and children and their parents/whānau, centre staff, lecturers and other student teachers were highly valued by respondents. This assertion was strongly supported in the themes that came out of the survey comments as far as participation in sustained practicum, and in relation to the later focus group data analysis. These relationships were enabling in a number of ways such as being included in the team, participating in children’s learning and development over time, and taking on responsibilities in the centre as the following quotations show: Students commented on the importance of “collaboration with colleagues.” (Year 1 student), and “being involved in team meetings’ (Year 1 student). Building relationships with children was also important, for example, “You truly get to know the children and know their personalities and who they are” (Year 3 student).

You are in the centre consistently and the children are familiar with you! They are confident in your presence, and you are able to fit in and learn about the routine of the centre as well as the day to day running of the centre’s planning, management teamwork and philosophy (Lecturer)

Where sustained practicum worked well student teachers were able to gain "... knowledge and feedback from experienced teachers already at [the home] centre." (Year 3 student). As a year one student reported the advantages of sustained practicum are:

Continuity of theory and practise in practicum. The support of a team that provides valuable feedback about your practise as well as feedback to the team about new ideas from learning. Sustained practicum gives you a platform to improve your practise over time where in a block course situation that time is limited. The opportunity to build sustained relationships with children and team. The time to learn about the centre culture and environment and be able to reflect on your practise and areas of improvement." (Year 1 student)

However some student teachers for example, this year three student, reported that volunteers are disadvantaged as compared to those who are in paid employment in the 'home' centre: "I feel that students who are volunteers have limited opportunities to be fully involved in centre life. I volunteered for my first 18 months and it is vastly different to being employed as a member of staff as I have been for the last 18 months"(Year 3 student). There was a strong thread in the survey comments about differences in participation between students who volunteered hours in the home centre versus those that were paid. A year one student commented that being a volunteer was a relatively powerless position to be in, however a different perspective on voluntary work was given by this year three student who said "You are there to be 'employed' (even voluntary work) so will be expected to do the same as everyone else." The data is inconclusive as to the challenges students face when they do voluntary hours in a centre. Whether it is the nature of voluntary hours or attitudes of student teachers and centre staff is something that needs further research.

Volunteering hours can place some additional demands on students as this year 2 student said "I am in a [...] kindergarten and can only volunteer which means as a student and parent, I have to fit paid work into my week as well....Studying is done late at night when [the] brain [is] not at its best."

Opportunities for authentic practice were also highly valued as these real tasks provided rich opportunities to experience the complex nature of teaching and learning. This largely seemed to relate to two main aspects. The first reported aspect was the value of ongoing, weekly reciprocity between theory and practice. For example one student said "You get to put what you learn at uni (sic) into practice all the time further developing your own personal knowledge of what works and what doesn't, and improve on these things ...". Another said "... I like to be able to action immediately the things I am learning."(Year 1 student). A year two student also reflected on the value of ongoing practicum "You are taught something during the lectures and then you think about it in the centre and everything starts to make sense. If you were taught and taught you would forget everything before you got to put it into practice.

The second aspect related to the authenticity and wider range of tasks, activities, and experiences the student teachers were able to participate in as the following comments show. All groups valued the authenticity of experience in the sustained practicum. A year two student stated "... we have experience of what it's like going to work everyday." A year three student said "It can give an opportunity to get actively involved in everything happening in the centre and feel a sense of belonging ..." A graduate said "... it gives you all round experience." From a lecturer's perspective "students are able to see the complete running of the programme, be involved in it completely and feel/become part of the team." And finally one of the associate teacher respondents commented that sustained practicum "Gives a better insight in to what the job fully entails."

The importance of tasks, activities, and experiences for student teachers and the difference in participation between teaching practice (TP) and sustained practicum (SP) is summarised in figure 3 below. The chart percentages for importance relate to respondents from all groups who rated each activity that in discussion with colleagues and a centre owner were rated as either very important or important. The chart percentages for participation in both SP and TP relate to those respondents who reported participation taking place always or frequently.

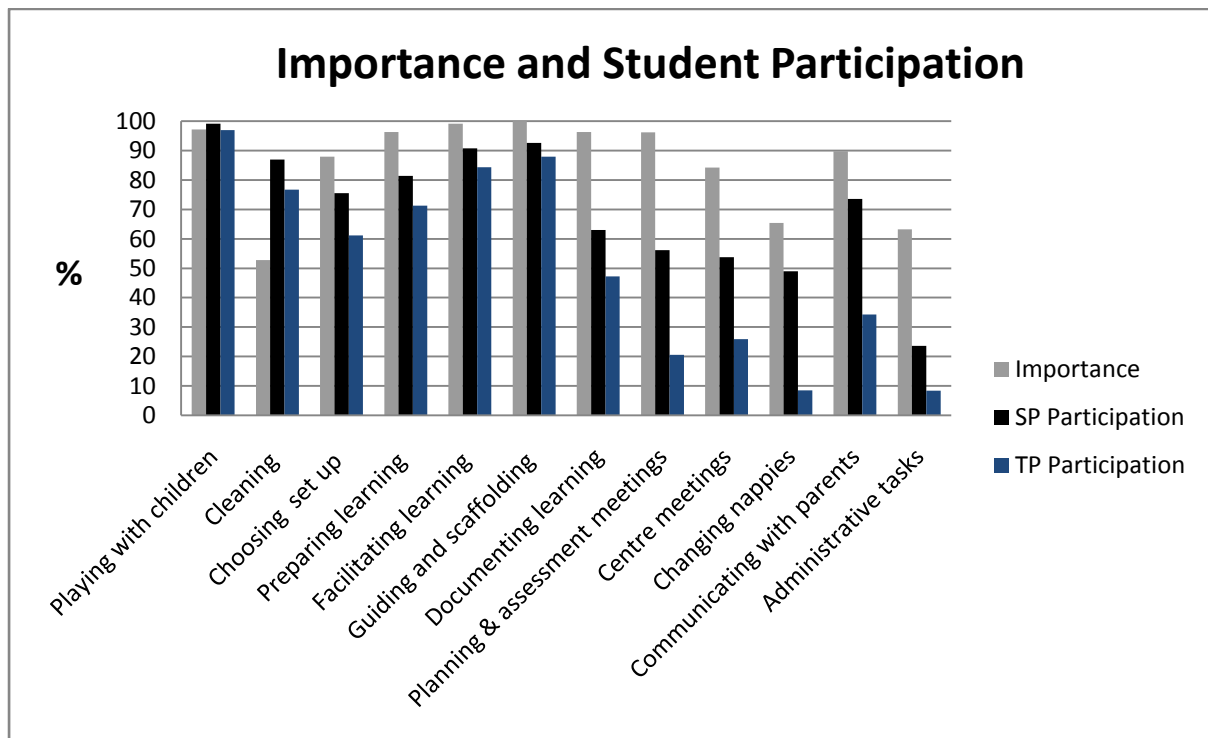


Figure 3: Importance and Student Participation in Authentic Tasks

Playing with children was valued highly and student participation was also high and at a similar percentage in both the SP and TP settings. There were four aspects that were of high importance but where reported participation was lower in TP. These were: choosing what to set up for children's play; preparing learning experiences for children; and facilitating, guiding and scaffolding children's learning. Changing nappies was seen as a relatively important care routine for students to engage in. Participation by SP students was much higher than those on TP.

Documenting learning, participation in planning and assessment and centre meetings were seen as having high importance, yet student participation was relatively low. In each case however, participation rates in SP were higher than in TP. Communicating with parents was given a 90% importance rating and participation was relatively high (74%) for SP and yet only 34% for TP.

The opportunities for building relationships and participation in a wider range of tasks, activities, and experiences during SP, is exemplified by the following written comments from student teachers: said

You get to know the children and their families well and so the opportunities for teaching and learning are richer and deeper, Also enables strong relationships to develop with other

teachers, the opportunity to be 'mentored' by some or all, and to experience working in a team over a period of time. Generally speaking provides ongoing opportunities to practice what you learn in an environment you are used to. (Year 3 student)

Sustained practicum gives you a platform to improve your practice over time whereas in a block course situation that time is limited... (there is) time to learn about the centre culture and environment and be able to reflect on your practice and areas of improvement (Year 3 student).

The comments from the survey respondents did show a fuller level of participation over their 3 years, but an initial look at the quantitative data from the question answers from each year did not fully support this assertion. There could be many reasons for this, and one response is that some of the year one students did not fully understand the difference between sustained practicum and teaching practice or the differences in the nature of the tasks. This was backed up by the comments from the survey For example "I'm really not sure how to answer this question." (Year one student). Another year on student said she was not sure which type of practicum she was in. Most of the year one students were participated in the questionnaire before they had been on their first teaching practice so lack of experience may also have been a factor.

Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are complex entities as noted above. The community of practice within the SP centre can be very supportive as this student shared. "I have found my colleagues to be fantastic moral support as well as source of resources & knowledge. The examples they set for me inspire me to keep working towards my qualification." Lecturers valued opportunities for ongoing discussion as this lecturer stated: "They [students] are able to share dilemmas in classroom enabling them to reflect on difficult situations." Student's individual characteristics also contribute to how well these communities of practice work. It is this willingness to be involved that seems to make a difference as this employer indicated:

From our perspective the students who have an open mind and are wanting to learn - they might not agree with all that we do, but they need to be open minded to new experiences. The students who jump in and are willing to give things a go, whether this be sweeping with a broom for the first time or taking a mat time."

One of the questions on the survey asked which type of graduates, pre-service or FBTE, were considered more employable. This was not intended as a question to show that one form of teacher education was preferable to another, but to provide a snapshot of the value placed on FBTE within the MIT community of practice. The results are shown in Figure 5 and 5 below.

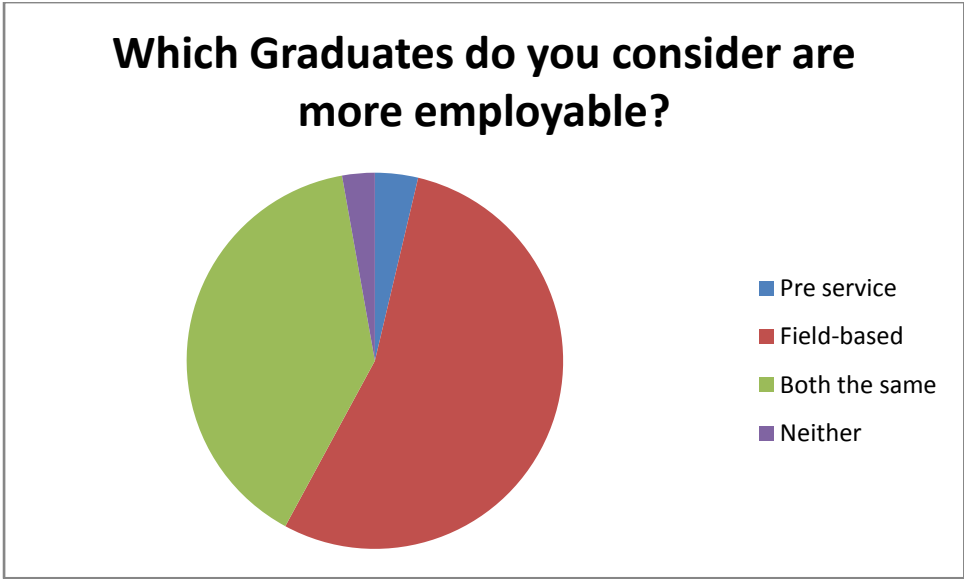


Figure 4: Employability of graduates (All survey respondents) N=107

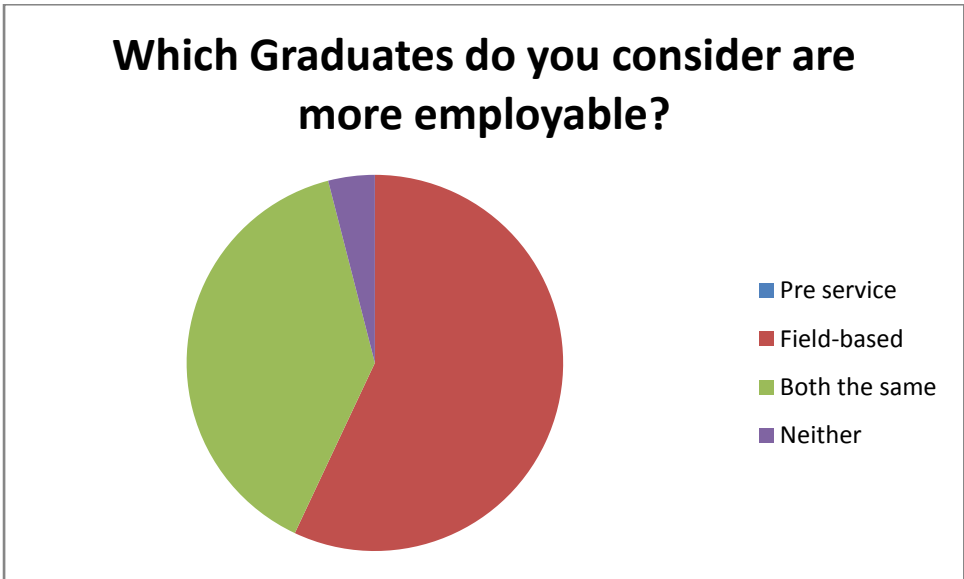


Figure 5: Employability of graduates (Employers and Associate Teachers) N= 28

The graphs shows that in the MIT community of practice as a whole FBTE is valued and that employers and associate teachers similarly place value on FBTE. Student teachers commented that they felt prepared for work and that the SP helped them get a job – being in the right place at the right time. For example a year three student teacher said “I started as a volunteer (totally new in this area and the course). After my first semester, the centre offered me a job and now I am on their payroll working for 2 days (15 hours) a week”. The aspect of preparation for employment was linked to the authenticity of the tasks student teachers participate in on SP. While FBTE is valuable in terms of improving employability it is not enough. As one employer said “Although I believe that what is learned in the classroom should be embedded in consistent practice and therefore favour a field based model of study, it is really the attitude of individual students to their study, work and colleagues that makes some students 'shine' in the employment market.”

Focus group findings

The focus groups provided the opportunity to explore the themes from the survey in more detail. The first theme related to ongoing relationships. The following quotation from a year 3 student suggests that these long term relationships can facilitate a depth of learning for the student based on the opportunity to see how children develop over time, and reflection on their own role in supporting children's learning.

Children, I learn a lot from children. They teach me a lot. In my practice I...in my centre I got a boy. He came in my centre when he was three. I worked with him more than two years...he's very confident now. At (the) beginning, he does not speak English and he just followed others, followed instruction. Normally, he needs his food cooked...er...warmed at lunch, and he's very scared, he couldn't see that. And then I just...um...communicate with him and encourage him to fill up, and now he can just go in front of the whole class in the mat time and sing the song and tell story. I think that's a transition...a process... it's related to this course and I understand why...what I'm doing. That's very important for me. Relating the theory to the practice. Good practice. (Year 3 student)

Student teachers also felt that regular interaction develops a passion for learning and that student teachers create their own community of practice, which lecturers also encouraged through their emphasis on group work in class and in assignments.

We are skilled and we learn, you know? We've got the lecture, we've got the course and after learning you go back to the centre to practice. Here we have all our classmates, we come together. I think, well, I think what I enjoy most at MIT, they are my classmates. I treasure, it's like we are so open with each other, we talk about the child abuse and how we share openly. We cover our childhood days, you know, doing the 'holistic (development)', the problem that we had, who influenced us...and we just talk and after we just get on...like we know that this person has a problem, and then the other one is of support, you know? (Year 2 student)

The year two focus group student teachers estimated that 95% of the informal classroom discussion, when the lecturer is not present, relates to what has been happening for them in sustained practicum.

The student teachers overall reported that they gained confidence to practice authentically in the 'real world'. This legitimates their theoretical learning and practice and also prepares them for employment as this year one student describes.

I personally feel that it's extremely important to get that hands-on experience. You know where your weaknesses are and your strengths and everything and you can work on them and build on them...by the time you've achieved your qualification you've effectively got three years of work experience behind you... (Year 1 student)

The research data confirms the value of FBTE to student teachers and employers. In particular, the trend of evidence highlights the importance of ongoing reciprocal relationships between the student teacher, children, the centre staff, and lecturers. In addition lecturers saw these relationships as having a direct impact on quality practicum assessment.

Lecturers see student teacher success, in relation to authentic practice, as being seen as a successful person in the centre community of practice. Student teacher inclusion, acceptance, and belonging within the centre contribute to learning which can rarely be planned for but is seen by student teachers, lecturers, and employers as important.

Staff and student teachers also value how the sustained practicum experiences can shape the classroom discussion on an ongoing basis because student teachers bring personal, practical, experience and knowledge to support co-construction of the curriculum. The opportunities in this 'apprenticeship process' came through teacher mentoring, role modelling and developing reciprocal relationships. The level of responsibility student teachers are given grows over time.

So I guess if we look at ourselves as a first year student in a new centre, we are kind of a person who just does a lot of the cleaning and the sorting and we don't really get involved much. We play with the children and then that begins to develop over that year. We move from being that person to being someone that's really facilitating with children...we're beginning to offer ideas and exchanging ideas with colleagues ...because we've got confidence (and) because we 're learning things..and the more we're doing that the more confident and capable we become in our own eyes but also in the eyes of our colleagues. They begin to think that some of the things we are doing and saying are really valid and that they support the children. And we are really beginning to notice the strengths and interests of the children so they're quite happy to accept our ideas when it comes to, in terms of programme planning...so that does tend to change us a lot and the only reason we know we are changing is because we can see ourselves developing and our colleagues notice it the most. (Year 3 student)

The depth of this reflective response describes in detail the transformative teaching practices that are occurring in this community of learners. Consistently the focus groups commented on the issue of the quality of the centres in which students undertake practicum because of the impact poor role modelling and socialisation practices might have on students.

Employability

It was interesting to note that the employers in the focus group stated that they appraise applicants holistically rather than base an employment decision just on the type of qualification an applicant holds. Employer respondents in the survey felt that on the whole FBTE graduates were more employable than pre-service graduates; however it is reasonable to expect that employers would need to look at a wider range of factors than type of qualification when actually employing a new staff member. Student teachers and lecturers commented that student teachers on sustained practicum are involved in the whole life of the centre; therefore they have opportunities to develop a wider range of skills and knowledge as shown in Figure 3 above. The qualitative data shows that

student teachers are also given greater responsibility over time and increasingly become part of the team. Student teachers and employers reported that FBTE graduates have realistic expectations of what the job entails, and are prepared to tackle all aspects of the role. The concept of 'employability' seemed to mean different things at different times and to different people and therefore would need to be teased out in further research.

Discussion

The overarching theme from the findings is the importance of communities of practice that the student teachers belong to and participate in. The two main communities of practice are firstly the teaching and learning environment at MIT and secondly the 'home' centre. These two environments or microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) have connections and interrelationships (the mesosystem) through the student teacher's enrolment in the Bed (ECT). Through the SP student teachers have more opportunities to develop authentic practice, make strong connection between theory and practice, and to develop ongoing reciprocal relationships.

Communities of practice

Ongoing participation in interrelated communities of practice ('home' centre and classroom) promotes the transformation of student teacher participation. Student teachers, lecturers, and employers support each other in regards to practicum, and employers reported that changing beliefs and practice takes time. Sustained practicum validates the cultural capital that student teachers bring with them, and invites them to challenge their beliefs and assumptions in the wider community of practice. Understanding of each child's prior knowledge and interests and the child's home background, is a concept that Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) recognise as teachers and children extending children's 'funds of knowledge' in a meaningful way. Student teachers, lecturers, and employers valued the ongoing opportunities for student teachers to transfer skills and knowledge from the classroom into practice and vice versa. Employers also mentioned that they valued how student teacher input kept the centre practices up to date.

Ongoing opportunities to participate – authentic practice

Employers and the majority of student teachers report that SP student teachers are treated as part of the centre teaching team. Survey data shows sustained periods of time provide wider opportunities for developing new skills and exposure to participate and contribute in the wider life of the centre. Over the 3 years, student teachers are given increasing levels of responsibility, for example planning and documenting children's learning. The student teachers value ongoing opportunities for reflective writing about practice. Spending more time in 'quality' centres supports good practice. One student called this 'proper experience'. This demonstrates they are developing a discourse framework with opportunities for critical reflection that relates theory to practice that Leonardo (2004) calls 'quality education'.

Student teachers particularly gave examples of how deeper learning occurred by developing sustained relationships with children. One of the year 3 student teachers recalled a 3 year old who did not speak English and was a follower. Over the 2 years the student worked with him, his

communication skills developed to the point he became a confident, capable child. These observations were supported through encouraging reflective practice in written work throughout the year in their student learning and teaching log. Carrington and Selva (2010) in their study of a group of pre-service teachers who were engaged in service-learning as a pedagogical process with a focus on reflection, reported that the structured reflection log they used supported quality learning and helped them experience diversity from a more informed and authentic perspective. Student teachers who are regarded as being competent and capable, and part of the centre team have opportunities to take on additional responsibilities within the centre which contributes to more authentic learning. Student teachers are trusted to take on greater responsibilities over the three years. The SP provides ongoing opportunities to develop professional attitudes and practices through reflective practice.

Both the survey and the focus group data suggested that whether a student teacher was volunteering hours in a centre or in paid employment might impact on the nature of their experiences in sustained practicum. The data was inconclusive however, as to whether or not the issue was voluntary work per se, or rather individual centre expectations and requirements or the attitude of student teachers on voluntary placement. This needs further study.

Each of the focus groups commented on the issue of centre quality in relation to the practicum experience. Where student teachers experience poor practices and poor role modelling within the 'home' centre community of practice, they may align themselves with poor practice. This is an issue for student teachers in any teacher education programme, however the challenge for FBTE programmes is that poor role modelling may take place over a considerable length of time. Student teachers need skilful support from lecturers to recognise quality practices. Some student teachers, when they recognise the centre is providing them with a poor learning experience, have chosen to find a new SP centre, others try to improve the centre.

The value added by FBTE to student teachers relates to their belonging and participation in the two communities of practice; MIT and the 'home' centre. This enables transformation of participation in authentic tasks, greater autonomy, personal responsibility and teamwork within the SP centre.

Key recommendations

In order to come up with some key recommendations in regards to enhancing the effectiveness of teacher education practice, we looked at how student teacher communities of practice could be supported and enriched. Three recommendations stood out in relation to transforming participation and creating more opportunities for authentic practice that arose from our findings:

Inclusion

- Work with centres and student teachers to promote inclusion and participation in the full life of the SP centre
- Foster a supportive community of practice (student teachers, centre staff, lecturers).

Transformation of participation

- Develop student teacher capability to build and maintain relationships and participate in communities of practice.
- Facilitate student teacher's long term and integrated reflection on the SP over the length of the programme e.g. use of 3 year e-Portfolios in order to develop critical self reflection and deepen understanding of their own transformation of participation through the duration of the programme
- Work with students who are volunteers to find out what additional support they may need to participate fully in the 'home' centre

Quality of centres

- Enable student teachers to recognise quality centres and make informed choices about where to carry out sustained practicum
- Offer professional development to centres who have SP student teachers to enable them to support student teachers more effectively

Conclusion

Does practice make perfect? Simply increasing the number of hours of practicum in a teacher education programme does not necessarily lead to better student outcomes. The value added by FBTE depends on the extent to which student teachers are included as members of the teaching team in the 'home' centre which impacts on the range of centre activities they can engage with and the responsibilities they can take on. It was noticed that being a student teacher 'volunteer' sometimes meant that they were not fully included by the teaching team, for example. The time it takes to develop relationships, and the amount of time student teachers can devote to the centre, especially if they are in paid work outside of early childhood education, is a factor in a successful placement. The findings presented here lead to more questions in regard to contexts for learning in field based teacher education placements.

Further research is required to build on this initial study to investigate in more depth some of the critical success factors raised in the report, for example:

- What are the essential characteristics of welcoming and inclusive centres which promote the desired student teacher outcomes?
- To what extent are these critical success factors consistent across other teacher education programmes and contexts?
- How could critically reflective e-portfolios sustained over the full length of a teacher education programme be used to promote and develop transformation of participation?
- How does inclusion and transformation of participation differ between students who are in paid or voluntary employment?

We plan to engage some of the other field based teacher education providers in the North Island of Aotearoa to look at ongoing collaborative research projects relating to FBTE. The next step for us is to look at the positives and any barriers for volunteers in sustained practicum as far as belonging and building relationships in the community of practice in their centre.

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