

# Examining the Impact of the Author's Pedagogy on Developing Relationality and Care in Pre-service Early Childhood Teachers

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Care and relationality are important foundations for dealing with young children and their families in early childhood education and care settings. Little is known, however, about effective ways to teach and assess care and relationality in teacher education. Care and relationality rarely appear in university outcomes, professional standards for teachers or assessment criteria. Teacher educators assume a significant level of responsibility for the personal professional developments of others in early childhood education. In 2011, the teacher educator in this study embedded seven characteristics of relational teacher education to help early years pre-service teachers experience the importance of care and relationality. This self-study explored the impact of pedagogy by examining the actions of the teacher educator and the resultant actions of pre-service teachers in the learning process. Zeichner (2005) conducted this self-study research was intended to make teacher educators and others more conscious about one's role in educating future teachers. Findings revealed three themes, providing evidence of the effectiveness of the teacher educator in implementing care and relationality.

*Keywords:* Care, relationality, early childhood teacher education

## Introduction

As a beginning teacher educator with a previous career as a classroom teacher, I (the author) have experienced the importance of care and relationality in the classroom. As a teacher, care and relationality are the key foundations for the learning process. When I started in tertiary education early childhood programs, I became aware that while we discuss theories of care and relationships, we do not model care and relationships with pre-service teachers to experience. As a beginning teacher educator, I wanted to “walk the talk” and make known my (the author's) support for professional learning. I wanted students to experience care and relationality as a learner.

A body of scholarship has emerged, which emphasizes the importance of caring and relationships in student learning. Noddings (1992, pp. 11-12) wrote:

Caring cannot be achieved by formula. It requires address and response; it requires different behaviors from situation to situation and person to person... Schools, I will argue, pay too little attention to the need for continuity of place, people, purpose and curriculum.

Care is important for working, living and being with others. It is a deep moral obligation that is not located

in individuals, but rather their relations with one another (caring becomes an action) (Nicol, Novakowski, Ghaleb, & Beirsto, 2010). Care can be delivered by embedding relational teacher education. Relational teacher education, with its grounding in the belief that education proceeds from the individual in their social context (Dewey, 1938), offers a framework for teacher educators "to study their experiences in order to better enable pre-service teachers to harness their personal professional knowledge" (Kitchen, 2005, p. 207). But, how does a teacher educator ensure namely the balance between a professional relationship and one that involves more emotional commitment?

This self-study explored the impact of my teaching as I try to implement care and relationality through relational teacher education. I position myself (the author) in partnership with the pre-service teachers. Using information from students and my own reflections to provide a triangulation of data, I am able to analyze and determine my influence on pre-service teachers learning. Findings revealed that by pre-service early childhood teachers understanding care and relationality, they have a deeper understanding of the nature of the teaching-learning process. Implementing care and relationality, however, requires much time and commitment from the teacher educator.

## **Literature Review**

### **What Is Relational Teacher Education?**

Relational teacher education is a reciprocal approach to enable teacher growth that builds from the realization that we know in relationships with others (Kitchen, 2005a, p. 17). It is sensitive to the role that each teacher plays as a teacher and learner in the relationship. Fundamental to this approach is respect for the pre-service teacher as a curriculum-maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) who draw upon personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) to inform their classroom practice and recognize that "knowing through relationship to self and others is central to teaching" (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Minarik, 1993, p. 8).

Relational teacher education is an approach that emerged from Kitchen's (2005a) research into classroom practice and professional development of the classroom teacher. In this study, Kitchen (2005a) entered into what Rogers (1961) referred to as a helping relationship. Such relationships involve experiences based on caring. According to Rogers (1961), such experiences are regarded as the highest authority. In the introductory essay on "Becoming a person", he wrote, "This book is about me, as I sit there with the client, facing him, participating in that struggle as deeply and sensitively as I am able" (p. 4). From this understanding, it comes the realization of the importance of relationships as experiences for teaching.

### **What Is Care?**

Noddings (1984; 2002) argued for the importance of developing caring relations in working, living and being with others. As teaching is based on relationships, care is an important aspect. Caring is positioned as not only important, but also an obligation towards something we feel that we must do—a deep moral obligation (Nicol et al., 2010).

According to Noddings (1992; 2002), students need and want teachers to care for them as persons and convey this care through listening and responding to their expressions of concern. Noddings (1992) suggested that sometimes teacher educators acted "being tough" with teachers in order to demand the best from them. In this sense, the act of care is for future school students, not future teachers. Noddings (2002) distinguished between two types of care: natural and ethical. Natural caring occurs when we feel that we must respond. The

caring occurs and in return the cared for respond. In contrast, ethical caring involves some conflicts or internal resistance. Ethical caring involves a belief that we should respond with care. Noddings (2002, p. 14) suggested that, in this case, we turned to an ethical ideal, our memories of being cared for and caring to help us in “establishing, restoring or enhancing the kind of relation in which we respond freely because we want to do so”. For example, if we are unprepared to respond to a pre-service teacher’s questions, we may experience a resistance to responding with care. Ethical caring involves a belief that we should respond with care. In this paper, I have tried to embed ethical care into my teaching.

Both natural and ethical caring involves an interaction among people. The carer moves to a level of receptivity in a way that puts aside the carer’s own motivations to, even if for a moment in a particular situation, place the needs and interests of the cared for first (Noddings, 1984). Noddings (2002) referred to this as motivational displacement where “caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference and into the other’s” (p. 24). In this self-study, I have tried to move to this level of receptivity to understand the influence of my actions.

An ethic of care provides a way for framing educational encounters. Hackenberg (2005) drew on Noddings’ (2002) work to develop a model of mathematics learning and caring relations. According to Hackenberg (2005, p. 45), “Caring is conceived of as work towards balancing the ongoing depletion and stimulation involved in student-teacher interactions”. Interaction occurs between stimulation (being excited, awakened and motivated) and depletion (less interested, less energised or having diminished well-being).

### **Why Are Relationships and Care Important in the Early Years?**

In Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2009) provided principles and learning and development outcomes for all early childhood educators who worked with children from birth to five years. The framework’s vision is for all children to experience play-based learning that is engaging and builds success for life. The framework is used in partnership with families to develop learning programs responsive to children’s ideas, interests, strengths and abilities, and recognize that children learn through their play.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia describes childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming. Belonging is the basis for living a fulfilling life. Children feel that they belong because of the relationships they have with their family, community, culture and place. Being is about living here and now. Childhood is a special time in life and children need time to just “be”—time to play, try new things and have fun. Becoming is about the learning and development that young children experience. Children start to form their sense of identity from an early age, which shapes the type of adult they will become.

In this framework, the importance of relationships and care is considered foundational for early childhood education and care. It is built on the understanding that in early childhood settings, when children feel emotionally secure, they learn through play to develop the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with others and gradually learn to take responsibility.

Little is known, however, about ways that the importance of care and relationships can be effectively taught in early childhood teacher education. While many pre-service teachers are able to engage with theoretical understanding from tertiary education, limited opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience care and relationality are available. Today, pre-service teachers are often asked to bridge theory and practice and make connections between personal experiences and the contemporary classroom (Kitchen, 2005a, p. 20).

While tremendous progress has been made in understanding the theory-practice divide, little has changed in response to the crises identified by Goodlad (1991), Fullan (1993) and others. This self-study helps to reduce the divide between theory and practice for care and relationality in early childhood teacher education.

### **Setting the Context**

In my first year of teaching, I inherited a subject about social and emotional well-being in the early years. According to the course outline, the subject enabled pre-service teachers to build an applied knowledge of SEL (social and emotional learning), child diversity and responsive teaching in the early years. Course assessment was casework-based and involved the generation of assessment summaries and initial planning materials for a student requiring additional support in SEL (known as a child case study).

I began to notice many ironies in this subject. Firstly, the subject was delivered online, with only three face-to-face workshops. How could a subject that taught productive home-school relationships be online? Secondly, I noticed that even though the students were learning about the theory of relationships and care, they could not relate this to practical experience. I further realized that care and relationality were not assessed in my teaching evaluations, were not a part of the university outcomes and did not feature in the state's professional standards for teacher registration. Finally, when I was marking assessment items, I realized that the students could only demonstrate a theoretical competence of relationships with families and care.

I began to think about other ways I could model relationality and care. I returned to the academic literature and immersed myself in reading to find guidance and the concept of relational teacher education. I realized that "thinking like a teacher must be taught explicitly and developed over time" (Russell, McPherson, & Martin, 2001, p. 45). In 2011, I embedded seven characteristics of relational teacher education to help pre-service teachers experience the importance of care and relationality (Kitchen, 2005b):

- (1) Understanding one's own personal practical knowledge;
- (2) Improving one's practices in teacher education;
- (3) Understanding the landscape of teacher education;
- (4) Respecting and empathizing with pre-service teachers;
- (5) Conveying respect and empathy;
- (6) Helping pre-service teachers face problems;
- (7) Receptivity to growing in relationship.

I also encouraged pre-service teachers to model their understanding of care and relationality by articulating complex ideas aloud and engaging in peer teaching (Garbett & Ovens, 2010). For pre-service teachers, I wanted the experiences with care and relationality to precede understanding (Russell, 2007). Examples of how I have tried to embed the seven characteristics are outlined in Appendix.

### **Method**

#### **Self-study**

Researching one's teacher education practices provides opportunities to uncover understanding about the complex relations between learning and teaching and putting that knowledge into the practice of teaching teachers (Loughran, 2007). It is an important tool for teacher educators. Pinar (1980) suggested that if one always taught by themselves, it was crucial that teacher educators engage in rigorous self-study in order to develop self-understanding and an understanding of education for others. I decided to conduct a self-study to

examine the impact of my pedagogy for developing relationality and care. Self-study researchers recognize that “there is an important relationship between personal growth and understanding and public discourse about that understanding” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Writing about oneself provides opportunities to analyze experiences, which enables one to construct understanding that can enhance the possibility for relocation through personal change (Kamler, 2001).

Through a narrative approach, I explored understanding acquired over time from the data from students and myself. Data sources from students included assessment performance, interactions on discussion boards/emails and teaching evaluations. Data sources from me included personal journal entries and observations I had made of student learning.

Data were analyzed using coding and categorization (Creswell, 2002) with the resultant common units of meaning presented in an autobiographical narrative chronicling the impact of my pedagogy. Three broad categories were identified in the pedagogical process of the semester: (1) relationships encourage support; (2) mirror on mirror; and (3) building philosophies of care and relationality.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Relationships Encourage Support**

The first theme consisted of the pre-service teachers recognizing the importance of providing support for their own learning needs. In my teaching philosophy, I tried to embed productive relationships in which we would share professional and personal experiences about one another. Modeling care and discussing care also entered out conversations.

While pre-service early childhood teachers were not explicitly asked to become more supportive, by modeling relationships and care in front of the pre-service teachers, I inadvertently embedded pedagogy of support that became the heart of the learning process. I begin with a letter, I sent to students to help support them with their child case-study tasks. The letter was designed to praise the students on the level of care I was reading in their assignments and their commitment to relationships with others.

Hi Everyone,

Many thanks for posting your blogs. I have enjoyed reading them and they provide insight into your classroom contexts (I actually had tears in my eyes). The level and ethics of care that you are showing to your children in the case study is exemplary. I feel honored to know that you are all passionate about working with the child, family and teacher to help the social-emotional wellbeing of the child. Your philosophy and commitment to the wellbeing of children in the early years is commendable and a trait of wonderful teachers. I have enormous respect for each of you and the unique qualities that you are able to bring to help support your child in the case study.

Your involvement with the child will provide powerful influences over your teaching now and in the future. By telling and re-telling your experiences in the blogs and online, you will better understand yourself and others in the group as a teacher and learner. More importantly, this will help you better appreciate the diverse needs of your students and school community. Combining reflective practice with acquiring a range of teaching and assessment strategies, you can develop a coherent educational philosophy and the tools to negotiate meaning in the educational contexts that you enter.

The development and support within the online community for this subject is also commendable. Your respect and advice to one another provides opportunities for collaborative learning. You are all true role models for early childhood education.

Kind regards,

Susie

Unknowingly, I sent the email after the pre-service teachers had felt depleted after engaging in conflict with another teacher educator over a numeracy assignment. The students felt what Hackenberg (2005) called depletion. This email acted as a form of stimulation, helping support the pre-service teachers in building confidence. The email responses recognized this attention to the support they needed as an outstanding quality of a teacher educator. In emails and teaching evaluations, the pre-service teachers wrote highly about how I cared about their wellbeing:

Thank you for your words of encouragement. I have to say that your e-mail brought me to tears! You have been a true teacher this year-inspiring and motivating. People and teachers like you are rare and should be reminded every now and then how wonderful they are. You care about our wellbeing and try and support us. This is what a teacher is. This is what I want to become. Have a beautiful day (Email correspondence, August, 2011)

I just wanted to thank you so much for your encouragement and support. I know that we all really needed it (the letter), and you sent this email at exactly the right time. I am really looking forward to catching up with you and really appreciate the support you have provided us all. See you tomorrow (Email correspondence, August, 2011).

The pre-service teachers noticed, with appreciation, my attention to their depletion and stimulation throughout the course. They commented in their feedbacks on my awareness and attentiveness to their fears and concerns, yet, at the same time, I would design activities that were stimulating and motivating. Students responded to this care through their enthusiasm and engagement, their risk-taking to share ideas and a positive attitude towards helping children in the early years.

A part of feeling supported, the early years pre-service teachers in teaching evaluations and observations appeared to value the level of comfort and tone that I had established in the classroom. They mentioned my approachability and warmth. One student commented (Observation 1a, 2011), "Our lecturer's door is always open". Approachability also featured in my reflective journal. I wrote of trying to make myself available to all students (especially over email for the online community), as I realized from my years of early childhood teaching that the majority of learning occurs outside of the classroom. I also acknowledged that the learning that the pre-service teachers made was not during my workshops or online sessions. Hence my availability to help students understand these learning experiences was necessary for developing personal-practical teacher knowledge.

Pre-service teachers reported that participation online and in small groups' activities during workshop provided opportunities for them to build relations with each other and with the teacher educator. The students made frequent comments (in teaching evaluations and through teacher observations) that in the classroom they felt that they knew the teacher educator cared about their wellbeing, because they felt the learning space was safe to share ideas with the whole class.

While it appeared that the pre-service teachers felt more supported, I began to reflect on the increased workload for addressing care and relationality. In my reflective journal, I began to notice that my time spent on teaching continuously increased until I thought my position was only about teaching. Many of the activities that I had employed required more time from my part in my already busy load. I also noticed that the number of email increased from students who wanted more individual care and attention. While I was able to provide this with the small cohort of students, I wonder if it would be possible for one lecturer to be able to provide care and relationality to larger cohorts of students.

### **Mirror on Mirror**

The next category revolved around the concept of mirroring my modeling of care and relationship. With

their selected child in the case study, they began to share their experiences and model care and relationality. I began to reflect on what I was observing in my journal:

I am starting to see myself in what they are doing. I was a mirror to modeling care and relationality. Now, I can see that they are mirroring what I was trying to do. In our course, we have all become mirrors, looking into one another and sharing experiences. I understand Rogers' (1961) thinking when he said that the book was about me. The students' actions are about me—their teacher.

Students' online blogs began to model the care and relationality for children and families that I had desired. Their blogs formed a part of their first assessment item. An example is provided as follows.

I was heartened by the enthusiasm of "C's" Mum when talking about the study. I have learned from past experience that positive, reciprocal relationships between the observer and the families are extremely critical to the successful outcome of a study of this nature. It is important to be sensitive to parent's emotions, as Bentzen highlighted that "they may feel distressed at the possibility of an outside observer discovering deficiencies in their child" (2009, p. 68). I want them to see I care. (Pre-service teacher B)

"Mirroring" my pedagogy was also observed in the online discussion among the students when writing the blogs. Responding to blogs was not a part of the summative assessment item, but pre-service teachers began to provide supportive responses to one another. This organic approach grew out of my modeling of supportive feedback during workshops and emails. My constructive criticism of student work mirrored back my understanding, serving as a purpose for dialogue and professional growth for both. I was surprised to see that the students had moved into a "community of learners" in which they wanted to help and support one another. I observed that the students deepened their understanding by hearing not only what I had to say, but also their fellow colleagues. For example, student F responded to student B (who had lived in another country) with the following:

It definitely sounds like that you have chosen a child that will benefit from your case study. Even as an adult, I find it hard to deal with frustrations, so I can imagine that it must be a difficult strategy to develop as a child. I am very interested to hear how you will help him cope with these everyday interactions. I also found it interesting that you mentioned that he appears to be a fairly intelligent boy. Have you seen any assessment results compared to other children in the class? I am excited to see what you will find! I think that care and understanding will be a strong foundation. Finally, I would find it beneficial to my learning if you could link the above observations of your child with your previous experience in different cultures with social and emotional learning. You have so much experience—you must use it as we learn so much from you. Perhaps you were already considering this method of relating and reconstructing for future reflective logs.

There online blogs, my observations and reflection journal all documented the impact of my pedagogical intent for relationality and care. I could see myself in the teaching actions of the pre-service teachers. I was a mirror to them and they were a mirror to me, as we continually provided information about our care and relationships.

I also began to realize that my mood and level of tiredness also influenced the mirror that I was seeing. If I was tired and slightly short tempered, I observed in my reflection journal that the pre-service teachers would soon embrace a similar mood. From looking at the actions and mood, I could see my own tiredness. I realized that in implementing care and relationality, the teacher educator requires much energy, time and continual positivity to support students.

### **Building Philosophies of Care and Relationality**

The last category moved beyond their "mirroring" of my pedagogical intent for relationality and care into

a pillar of philosophy. The pre-service teachers began to build their own philosophies of teaching and learning as their personal professional knowledge developed. One pre-service teacher wrote:

Over the past semester, I have realized the importance of family involvement in children's education, thus reconstructing my teaching philosophy. During this professional experience regarding R's family and in my future teaching practice, I aim to take a family-centered approach that is caring and collaborated with families to ensure that shared goals are achieved. (Pre-service teacher C)

By the end of the semester, the pre-service teacher had come to understand the importance of my pedagogical intent and realized the importance of embedding likeminded beliefs in their philosophies for early years' classrooms. I was observed that the pre-service teachers were engaged in a new type of dialogue that discussed ways they could care and encourage relationality in their teaching. Some students were interested in studying care and emotional wellbeing in master degrees. Others were interested in finding professional development sessions and networks where they could continue to build and discuss their experiences related to care. Many questioned why care and relationality were not at the forefront of educational policy.

Caring for everyone became a foundation in the class. Towards the end of the semester, the early years pre-service teachers also began to realize when I needed elements of "stimulation" as another adult. The pre-service teachers modeled care for me by surprising me with an anonymous bunch of native flowers after I had encountered a "bad day". I tried to capture my feelings by writing in my diary "While I cared for the pre-service teachers, they will care for the next generation of children. I feel honored to have met and learnt alongside these future educators. Care had taken a full circle and now they were caring for me". While care and relationality are not formally assessed in tertiary education or acknowledged in professional teacher registration standards, students have been able to learn, model and embed these elements in their experiences to draw upon as future early years' professionals. While it had taken considerable time, effort and energy as a teacher educator, it was beneficial to see the impact of my pedagogical intention with this small cohort of students.

### **Conclusions**

Collectively, my experiences have made me realize the importance of learning about teaching future teachers through self-study (Loughran, 2007). The findings of this study indicated that it is possible to witness the intent of pedagogy for care and relationality for a teacher educator. As a teacher educator, I could witness how my teaching would influence these future early childhood teachers. I have been able to recognize myself in what the students are doing. Relational teacher education offered a framework for me to study my experiences in order to better enable the pre-service teachers to develop personal-professional knowledge.

Findings revealed three categories that emerged from the collection of data to show the development of pre-service teacher learning. Findings also suggested that while the outcome was successful, it increased the workload of the teacher educator and took time to embed care and rationality. In my reflection journal, I began to notice that the process had made me tired now. It is for this reason that I suggest that care and relationality should be adapted across all areas of an early childhood teacher educator program, not just in a single subject. By doing so, would reduce the workloads of teacher educators, but still allow the importance of care and relationality to become the foundations of the learning process.

More research into the importance of embedding care and relationality in teacher education programs is needed. Since there are two people in a higher education relationship (lecturer and pre-service teacher), the reciprocity of research into care should also extend to teacher educators. Questions are raised: who did teacher

educators care for? In this study, the pre-service teachers began to care for their teacher educator at the end of the subject. Who else in the university cares for the wellbeing of a teacher educator who is responsible for teaching future teachers? Where does a teacher educator go to receive stimulation and support after depletion? These and other questions are important for the wellbeing of all people involved in early childhood teacher education.

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### Appendix

#### 1. Understanding One's Own Personal Practical Knowledge

In understanding my own personal practical knowledge, it is important that "I tell, retell and reexamine" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) my experiences as a pre-service teacher, mentor teacher and teacher educator to identify the importance of care and relationality in my pedagogy. In my teaching, I drew upon my experiences with the pre-service teachers. Together, we critiqued my actions of care and relationships. As I was teaching, I allowed pre-service teachers access to my thoughts, ideas and concerns that shape my teaching through the process of thinking aloud (Berry, 2004; 2007; Loughran, 1995; Loughran & Berry, 2005). Articulating the dilemmas I face when teaching around care and relationality exposes the complexities of teaching to the pre-service teacher.

#### 2. Improving One's Practices in Teacher Education

Beattie (2001, p. 3) wrote, "Good teachers are centrally concerned with the creation of authentic relationships and a classroom environment in which students can make connections between the curriculum of the classroom and the central concerns of their own lives". I realized that improving one's practice in teacher education is a continual process, based on care for the teaching profession.

My pedagogy of relational teaching to encourage care and relationality was influenced by my experiences in the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education. By studying this course, I discovered more about the power of personal experience methods and learned the importance of community and care in supporting individual learning. The teachers in this course provided educative experiences that nurtured reflection. The teachers created safe spaces in which to negotiate our meaning of higher education individually and collaboratively. From this experience, I wanted to create similar safe spaces for my students.

A part of my approach also involved providing extensive formative feedback throughout the semester with the child case study. Feedback was intended to help make the transition into working with the child and communicating with the family of the child.

I also spent a significant amount of time responding to emails and online reflections, helping pre-service teachers make important connections and allowing me to be responsive and caring as a teacher educator. When responding to each pre-service teacher, I would suggest alternative approaches that were unique to the situation.

I also encouraged pre-service teachers to model their understanding of care and relationality by articulating complex ideas aloud and engaging in peer teaching (Garbett & Ovens, 2010). For pre-service teachers, I wanted the experiences with care and relationality to precede understanding (Russell, 2007).

#### 3. Understanding the Landscape of Teacher Education

As a teacher educator, it was important to understand the landscape beyond the university context, to frame early childhood education within a societal challenge. For each of these pre-service teachers, it was important that I understood about their school where they were undertaking the case study. I contacted each of the schools to facilitate a relationship that enhanced opportunities for meaningful reflection and collaboration in regard to the child case study. As a teacher educator, I wanted to demonstrate to the school and pre-service teachers my empathy, care, respect and a commitment to the community. This approach allowed me to gain deep insight into the contexts of the pre-service teachers and developed a positive relationship with classroom teachers.

#### 4. Respecting and Empathizing with Pre-service Teachers

Relational teacher education is based on respect for adult learners and on a belief that each pre-service teacher must construct their own meaning as a curriculum maker (Kitchen, 2005a). As Domince (2000, p. 83) wrote "each adult learner has his/her own relationship to knowledge, and this relationship is influenced by the social and cultural characteristics of the individual's life history". From this perspective, every adult learner must examine his/her individual frame of reference to become successful. In the initial workshop, we undertook an activity based on "care in the classroom". Pre-service teachers were encouraged to discuss their decisions based on each of the situations. From this experience, pre-service teachers realized that teaching was more than a set of core competencies. It was a complex experience that required professional decision-making based on personal and

professional experiences.

By modeling respect and empathy, I allowed pre-service teachers to become aware of the social context of learning. I tried to model ways of working that were sensitive to diversity and complexity. Drawing on these experiences allowed pre-service teachers to reconcile personal experience with theory.

#### 5. Conveying Respect and Empathy

Letter writing proved to be an effective way of conveying both respect and empathy throughout the subject to pre-service teachers. A total of four letters were sent to students (beginning, before the first day of professional experience, after the first assessment blog post and at the end of the teaching semester). The letters identified the challenges that the pre-service teachers may face, acknowledged their insecurities with the assessment task and expressed my commitment to building a community of early years professionals characterized by collaboration and support. During the semester, I also modeled my commitment to respect and empathy by listening attentively, following up concerns and providing extensive personal commentaries about their reflections and associated assessment items.

By embedding this characteristic, I wanted early year pre-service teachers to develop a strong group identity. Goodlad (1991) suggested in many teacher education programs, students do not develop strong group identities. Developing group identity requires a common goal and efforts to build a community (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). Moving from "cohort to community" requires a skilled and committed faculty team (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). As the only early childhood person on campus, this was my responsibility.

#### 6. Helping Pre-service Teachers Face Problems

Helping pre-service teachers face challenges means providing space for the reconciliation between individual personal-practical knowledge and classroom practice. When students emailed me or visited my office to talk about teaching problems, I would provide opportunities to discuss teaching strategies and personal practical knowledge to help develop reflective practice. Pre-service teachers were respected as curriculum-makers, helping develop their agency to find solutions to problems.

My attention to care was also recognized in what Hackenberg (2005) called stimulation and depletion. For a teacher educator, there is attention given to students' feelings of depletion (Nicol et al., 2010). Knowing that the pre-service teachers had concern over providing suitable learning experiences for their children in the case study, I structured activities online and during the workshops that were designed to help students feel more confident and comfortable. I wanted to make sure pre-service teachers feel cared for.

#### 7. Receptivity to Growing in Relationship

I have tried to model the importance of receptivity in teacher education. In particular, I have recognized that new understanding about professional experience is enhanced by the "student" defining the problems faced, as opposed to me defining what I anticipate as problems. In online blogs, I have asked pre-service teachers to share their encountered problems with the child case study. Together as a group, we helped each other search for a deeper understanding. This process recognized that each pre-service teacher was unique and that each context and situation was different.

One page reflection: What have I learnt about the scholarship of teaching?

I have been able to pursue my own area of interest with a research study into my scholarship of teaching. I chose to investigate the impact of my pedagogical intent for care and relationality in early childhood teacher education. By engaging in this self-study, I have gained insight into my own practices and also the future teacher educator that I would like to become.

In my teaching, I realized that self-study is important as an investigative tool for teacher educators, especially as much of our work is conducted in isolation. By engaging in self-study, we investigate what has and has not worked in our teaching. In this self-study, I investigated if my intentions for embedding care and relationality could be enacted by the pre-service teachers. I realized that as a teacher educator, it is important to engage in continual reflection on one's own thinking and practice.

I have also learnt the importance to engage with the academic literature. In this study, I have learnt about relational teacher education and been able to embed the seven characteristics suggested. I have discovered the *Journal of Studying Teacher Education* that acts as a source of professional learning, especially as a beginning teacher educator.

This study has also provided me with research ideas to pursue in the future about care and relationality in higher education. I am interested in also understanding my current situation of who cares for the wellbeing of teacher educators. In this study, I spent much time and energy trying to embed care and relationality. In reality, such a strategy is not sustainable and may not be possible with large cohorts. It is for this reason that I am interested in teacher educator wellbeing, as it is an important part of the reciprocal relationship with pre-service teachers.

In 2012, I will continue on my journey of understanding higher education (in particular early childhood teacher education) when I embark on a master of higher education. I am hoping to explore two different contexts, Australia and Norway.