

STEPPING OUT OF THE “IVORY TOWER”: AN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATOR’S EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING TO THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: *In this article I want to discuss my attempts to make sense of my role and practice as a teacher educator who helps student teachers implement the curriculum in schools and my experiences of engaging in a process of personal professional development. I will demonstrate how a six week experience as a teacher in a primary school challenged my understandings and practices of the what it means to be a teacher in this context, and what the learning experience meant for me as a teacher educator. It is work that explores what it takes to be a teacher of teaching for students who are working towards teaching in primary schools. I report that linking teacher education curriculum with the realities of primary schools has particular challenges.*

KEYWORDS

Initial teacher education, teacher educators, professional development, curriculum implementation

INTRODUCTION

Over the years most teacher educators in curriculum courses originally came from the secondary school sector with specialist knowledge of a subject. It seemed to be assumed that they would know about practice in primary schools and therefore could demonstrate and support Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students to make sense of teaching that subject in primary school settings. As Loughran (2008) suggests “what they [the teacher educator] know, how they know it, why it matters, and what it looks like in practice is central to that which might be described as quality in teaching about teaching” (p. 1181). However, when a secondary school subject specialist has never taught in a primary school, providing quality teaching about teaching in the primary school is likely to be challenging.

Like many of my colleagues in ITE, I am a specialist secondary health and physical education (HPE) teacher who has assumed responsibility for leading and teaching future primary school teachers how to teach HPE. With few primary school teachers having qualifications that would allow them to apply for lecturers’ positions as curriculum specialists in universities, the responsibility for teaching HPE (and other curriculum areas) to future primary school teachers continues to rest mainly with secondary specialists, like myself. Little in my training exposed me

to the primary school context and the unique role that the generalist teacher has in the education of young people. Acutely aware that I had limited experience in the primary school context, and feeling that I did not know enough, I sought out every professional development opportunity to enhance my understanding and practice. Conferences, discussions with colleagues (ex primary school teachers), school visits, coaching primary school aged children, and contract and doctoral research opportunities supported me to development some understandings of teaching and learning in the primary schools.

However, I still felt that that the design and delivery of our ITE programme occurred with secondary specialist hats firmly in place. Our course was idealistic, we drew heavily from our own experiences and attempted to translate secondary school-based understandings of HPE and water them down to fit with what would best serve future primary school teachers. This sense of unease was further amplified during 2008, when two events became trigger points for reconsidering what PD might support me to enhance the learning experiences for my ITE students.

Realising that I did not know enough

Two short vignettes are used to detail my growing realisations of *inadequacy*

I was in a school supporting my first year primary teacher education students with their first experience of teaching HPE. As my class began teaching, I wandered around and observed different pairs, offering encouragement and making some notes for areas to discuss when we were back in class later that day. As I approached the tennis courts, I became aware that Roberta¹ (one of my students) was very flustered. Roberta had really struggled to grasp the requirements of planning, especially because she was assigned a new entrant/year one class (five year olds). She had been a frequent visitor to my office as she endeavoured make sense how to plan for these three lessons. As I got closer, Roberta looked at me with desperation. So excited to see me, she walked away from her students, leaving them to their own devices. “I have no idea what I am doing, they won’t do anything I say and I am stuck. What do I do? Can you help?” gushed Roberta. Given the state that Roberta was in, I suggested she just sit to the side for a few minutes, catch her breath and I would take the group of 10 students. With relief stamped across her face, Roberta introduced me to the students and slipped into the background.

As the confident teacher, with over 15 years experience teaching PE I figured this would be easy. I knew from reading Roberta’s plan that she was exploring throwing and catching using large soft balls. She was at the point in her plan where she wanted students in pairs throwing to each other. This was fine until I realised that five year olds did not respond to my requests to “get into pairs” or “stand with a partner”. After gently manhandling them into pairs, and again failing to use the appropriate language to help them understand where

to position themselves, I finally got them throwing, catching or dropping the ball in pairs. The five minutes this took gave Roberta the time to recover herself and she stepped back in, much to my relief.

The next week Roberta was fine, but as I watched her teach I realised that every time she taught there were new students (first day of school children) who did not know the routines, or had no opportunity to learn simple cues for organisation, like what was meant by spread out or how to stand opposite each other. This meant that Roberta’s planning for teaching PE had to have the dual focus on teaching the language and skills for working in groups/pairs and for just being a first-timer at school. This recognition of the planning requirements for working with new entrants triggered me to consideration of what I really understood about planning for teaching HPE in primary schools, especially younger children.

The four members of the HPE teaching team were meeting to moderate the student’s unit and lesson planning assignment. Having all marked the same five assignments, we were meeting to ensure we were all viewing and marking the assignment in a consistent manner. It just happened that Roberta’s assignment was in the pile. The first comment was “there is not enough in here. She has not planned enough for six lessons”. At which point it was added, “I agree, what I see in here could have been taught in two lessons, the planning is light on content”. At this point I explained what I had observed about the context of Roberta’s teaching, the difficulties I had had when I tried to teach the class, and suggested that maybe we needed to rethink what was achievable in one lesson with a group of learners that included some children who had only started school that day.

If I had not stepped into Roberta’s lesson, watched her teaching more closely, and taken more interest in the context of her teaching in the weeks that followed then I doubt that I would have understood why Roberta’s plan had been so “light on content”. As I reflected on my practice, the conversation with colleagues and the literature, several gaps in my understandings and practice became evident. These included

- understandings of the context of the primary school, beyond my own experiences as a school student;
- a lack of appreciation of the role of being a classroom teacher working with the same group of children for the entire school day; and
- limited appropriate craft or practice knowledge or experience to draw on. I had all the discipline knowledge and did not have the knowledge of learners or age appropriate pedagogies to make the complex simple, and therefore, an understanding of what planning and teaching in the junior primary really should be about.

My knowledge and understandings of PE as a secondary specialist teacher did not necessarily position me well for providing the best programme of learning for

future primary teachers. Nor did my lack of contextual awareness assist me as I considered the possibility of focusing my research in the primary school context.

Being out there again

It was evident that I needed to undertake some professional development to improve my understandings and practices as an initial teacher educator, working specifically in a BTchg (Primary) course. One approach to my own professional development was to engage in the abundant literature about effective teaching in classroom settings (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Richardson, 2001; Tinning, McCuaig, & Hunter, 2006) and teacher education (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Demers, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Lanier & Little, 1986; Loughran, 2004; Murray, 1996). While I read as much as I could, I believed that I needed to be out in the primary school to understand the practice of the theory. In line with the work of (Loughran & Northfield, 1996) I decided to immerse myself in a primary school, a choice that appeared to amaze and amuse many of my teacher education colleagues. With a condition that I publish something based on the experience, the study leave committee approved six weeks leave for me to work in a Year 2 class at a Central Otago primary school.

During this time, I immersed myself in Room 16 working with the classroom teacher, Miss B, to support learning for 28 five and six year olds. This meant being at school at 8.15am ready to greet students, and often their parents, as they ran through the door at 8.30am, and struggling to find 30 minutes during the rest of the school day away from the students. While in the first week I was simply an extra pair of eyes and a reading buddy, as the weeks progressed I took more responsibility for planning and teaching, a bit like a third year teacher education student on their final practicum. I started with the areas I felt most comfortable with, physical education, fitness time and taking the class across the fields to the local swimming pool for a community-run swimming programme. The opportunity to plan and lead the teaching of a unit of work focused on working well with others and resolving our own problems occurred as the weeks progressed, as I got to know the students better. This meant that I also planned for shared reading, writing, drama, and topic time.

As much as possible I endeavoured to share the full load of the teacher and took full responsibility at different times throughout a teaching week and when there was a relief teacher in the class for the day. My responsibilities did not extend to report writing, although I did help with the framing up of the report comments. To make the load as authentic as possible I also took a Year 4/5 T-ball team in the interschool competition on a Tuesday after school.

A journal of the frustrations and successes, enduring questions and planning allowed me to record the learning from the experience. This paper has been developed from my journal entries.

IMPACTS ON UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICE

As part of the experience of being “Miss Peachtree” came many joys and challenges and a great deal of reflection on my role as a teacher, teacher educator

and researcher. Being in the classroom with the time and space to reflect critically on my own practices and the practice that exists in the school environment allowed me to explore and understand teaching and learning from a new perspective. The insights from the experience are described in relation to three key areas; first, insights into the context and operations of a primary school, second, what it meant for me to be a classroom teacher again, and last, the impact on my practices as an initial teacher educator.

The World of the Primary School

Being the classroom teacher in a primary school means dealing with the competing and constantly changing desires and demands of policy makers, parents/caregivers, principals, senior teachers and the students in your own class. The primary school teacher's role is a constant battle to provide effective and relevant programmes of learning for a diverse range of students, while also negotiating the demands of the other players. Many things about being in the primary school were, for me, the same as being in a secondary school context, things such as constant pressure to get all the administration tasks completed, reports in on time, the roll completed and sent to the office. However, three areas of difference, detailed in the following sections, really stood out as contrasting and in the process of seeing them I was challenged to rethink my understandings of schools and teaching.

The demands of the context

A day of teaching is exhausting. Being in a primary classroom was significantly more demanding than my memory served me of teaching young adults in a secondary school. The expectation in the primary school is that you cater to the varied needs of, in my case, 28 different students across the period of the whole day. You do not get rid of your group of students after one hour, but have to be constantly vigilant to their needs, demands, moods and changing relationships with their peers. Unlike being in a secondary school, where it was often possible to teach a similar lesson plan to all three of my year 9 classes, as a Year 2 teacher planning was much more intensive and varied. Planning included thinking about learning across eight curriculum areas, catering for a wide range of reading and writing levels and ensuring the programme across the day offered stimulating and engaging opportunities for all students.

An additional demand of this context was the parents. Year 2 parents were more involved in the life of the classroom, with a many parents popping in both before and after school and wanting to have a chat. Most were seeking updates on their child's progress, while a few wanted to discuss every decision that may have impacted on their child. For example, one parent wanted to have input into the seating plan, while others were focused on their child's progress in mathematics. Miss B was very happy to have someone to share the load of the parents each morning because this meant that while one of us dealt with the parents the other could get on with sorting out resources and learning activities for the day.

Routines of practice

As in any institution, there are ways of operating and routines that are unconsciously practiced by the *workforce* and reinforced by the school leaders. Having not spent such an extended period in a primary school as a teacher, it quickly became apparent that there were particular ways of doing things, such as the way you moved your class around the school, always having maths first thing every morning, and making sure children had a break from *academic* learning to “blow off steam” and get some “brain food” during fitness and fruit time. These *routines of practice* existed in the day-to-day patterns and appeared to be unquestioned by teachers. I found myself being socialised into following the routines and saw little opportunity or encouragement, except from Ms B, to challenge these practices. I was frustrated that I was succumbing to the processes of socialisation, particularly given that I engaged with the literature on teacher socialisation (Templin & Schempp, 1989; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996) and in some ways was better positioned to resist.

Fragmentation of curriculum

Unlike my experiences as a secondary teacher where I dealt with one curriculum area, being a primary school teacher meant that I had to be familiar with learning across all curriculum areas and had to try and negotiate ways to ensure that learning occurred across all. However, this proved to be difficult in the junior school where significant pressure from parents, senior teachers and new policy introduced by the Ministry of Education, (Tolley, 2009) centred on numeracy and literacy. This meant that every day the focus of learning before lunch centred on mathematics, reading, and writing, leaving afternoons for the *other* areas.

There appeared to be little sense of an integrated approach and I struggled with the *timetabled* fragmented approach to learning. In trying to make sense of the rationale behind this approach, it became evident from Miss B that this was the “expected” way to do it, “that is the timetable for the junior syndicate” (Ms B). We were both aware that if the principal came in we needed to be doing maths first up. Teachers appear to work across the curriculum in less holistic or integrated ways than I might idealistically have hoped they would, or in ways that aligned with *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) that encourages integration.

There were difficulties and pressures with a crowded curriculum that were soon apparent, and the emphasis on reading, writing and maths meant limited time to *do it all*. This challenged me to rethink how I position HPE in our teacher education course. I realised the need to reconsider when and how HPE is delivered in the primary school context, and how we support student teachers to be able to make sense of HPE as they negotiate all the other curriculum demands. Without the opportunity to live practice in the field I doubt my sense of where HPE fitted in a primary school programme would have evolved as it has done.

Being “Miss Peachtree”

Being a classroom teacher was an uplifting experience. It is not possible in the space of this paper to describe all of my reflections on the experience. However, three important revelations are discussed briefly as they relate to my experience of the reality of teaching in a primary school, first, the opportunity to know my students, second, the renewed sense of the joy in learning through practice, and third, the fear of not doing *it* right.

Knowing my class

Being in Room 16 with the same students all day really gave me a chance to get to know them all and their unique personalities, strengths, areas for development, and of course, both their endearing and annoying habits. Unlike being a secondary teacher, where you might see 30 different students every teaching hour, the primary school teacher spends the whole school day with the same group of students. This felt like both an honour and a burden as there was no escape when I’d “had enough” of them, but the feeling of connection with each student outweighed this. Even now, months after the experience I still talk about them as “my class”, and could describe each of them as both learner and personality. The opportunity to know the students positioned me better to design learning experiences that better catered for the individual needs of each student.

The joy of learning through practice

Being in a new environment positioned me as learner. I was learning about the context, the students, and the practice of teaching in the junior syndicate. In addition, I was consistently reflecting on what this learning meant for me as a teacher educator. Previous reading, visits to primary schools, and discussions with primary teaching colleagues had provided me with many opportunities to make sense of teaching and learning in primary schools. These were like dipping my toe in the ocean compared with the plunge I took when I became “Miss Peachtree” for those six weeks.

My experience demonstrated that many of the activities and ideas I shared with my classes at the university were not quite so simple to carry out when teaching this age group. More than anything, being in a classroom of 28 Year 2 students for six weeks allowed me to apply my theoretical understandings of effective teaching to the realities of the primary school classroom. This demonstrated that the gap between craft knowledge (learnt in relation to teaching Year 7–13 students) and the ability to apply it in practice with Year 2 students, can produce varied outcomes, some extremely successful and others shambolic. Teaching at this level requires a rethink of the

- language for instructions that is age-appropriate and inclusive;
- design of age and ability-appropriate activities that allow all students to experience challenge and success;

- management techniques that also assist students to understand and take responsibility for themselves and others' safety;
- progression of the learning activities so that students get the opportunity to achieve the desired learning outcomes; and
- need for teaching the most simple things, such as how to wait patiently in a group or how to move from one point to another without disrupting or hurting others.

While I had developed understandings of the importance of these pedagogical practices throughout my years of teaching in secondary school contexts, what worked for secondary did not necessarily work for younger 5–7 year olds. My knowledge of learners and learning in secondary schools had not prepared me for working in the primary school. Teaching Year 2 required me to develop new knowledge of teaching HPE (and other subjects) that was level-appropriate, and took into account the unique needs of younger learners. It is possible, of course, that I may have—to an extent, at least—overlooked such things as a secondary teacher.

In addition, the experience of planning and teaching in my Year 2 class made it apparent that many of the ideas and suggestions for good HPE practice that I had previously shared with primary school ITE students simply did not work in the reality of dealing with younger children. It became evident that ideas and activities I recommend to my students from support materials, e.g. *KiwiDex* (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2007); the *Curriculum In Action* series (for example: Ministry of Education & Learning Media, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) needed to be unpacked and reworked in order to ensure they ran smoothly with actual children.

The Fear

While teaching my Year 2's I was frequently paralysed by *the fear* that I would not do it the *right way*, the way the *senior* teachers did or the way I sensed they thought it should be done. This was particularly evident when I was responsible for taking my class to swimming. To get to swimming we had to walk 25 metres through the school (behind three classroom) and then approximately 500 metres across the local fields. Once across the fields we had to cross a dirt road before arriving at the pool. In the first few days when we went across with the classroom teacher all the students had to walk in pairs, in lines. To me this seemed unnecessarily formal, because it generally caused more issues with pushing and arguments. So, when I took them on my own I let them walk or run in groups to a specific point, like the next goal post. We had to learn a few things, such as how to take off without pushing anyone else and how to wait patiently until the whole group caught up. The approach appeared to minimise disruptions and gave me a chance to talk to the stranglers. However, every time I did this I was extremely anxious about what the other teachers were thinking, especially when we would meet their classes on our return from the pool and they would all be walking in lines, even the Year 6 class. It made me really question my approach, while also trying to understand their rationale for the walking in lines. Not wanting to give up on the move from A to B in a responsible manner without lines, I worked hard with my class to move around the school as a class in a similar manner. Even though no teacher directly

challenged me on this I was acutely aware (I do not know why) that it was not the *done thing*. I think my paranoia came from the way the other junior school teachers made a point of lining their classes up every time we were doing a junior syndicate activity. I started to become paralysed by the fear that I was not doing the right thing and this made me resort to having my class move around the school in paired lines.

I had been socialised into the school habits, practices and expectations. The culture of fear, although not explicit, meant the reproduction and reinforcement of ingrained patterns of practice. It felt like there was no room to challenge or step outside this vacuum of practice. To resist would have been risking isolation and possible censure from my new colleagues. I felt the pressure to conform and this made me question what this must mean for my student teachers during practicum and as beginning teachers and what I was doing in my ITE programme that supported them to negotiate these fears and the pressure to conform.

Being back in Initial Teacher Education

Going into the classroom and teaching a year level I had no previous experience of working with firmly placed me in the shoes of my first year teacher education students. I felt like a student teacher out on practicum, but with the luxury of insight gained from 15-years in teaching and none of the *real* responsibilities such as duty, report writing and planning for learning across all curriculum areas. In addition to helping me connect with the anxieties of my students, this experience challenged and supported me to develop in my role as an initial teacher educator. The impacts of this teaching experience for my role as a lecturer are now detailed.

Taking off the specialist hat

Knowledge of content does not help if we do not have knowledge of context and learners. As a specialist HPE teacher, who now fills the role of lecturer in HPE, I have the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) appropriate for teaching in secondary school contexts. The experience of being “Miss Peachtree” taught me that this “specialist” knowledge is of little use if I do not understand what constitutes relevant programmes of learning for primary school children at more than a theoretical level.

As a HPE specialist, I appeared to be driven by idealised theoretical views of what HPE should be like in a primary school. Before my experiences as part of my doctoral studies and the time spent in a school, these perspectives informed the basis of the content and delivery of our initial teacher education course, and how I have advocated for HPE in wider circles. Being “Miss Peachtree” and developing an understanding of the context and learners in a primary school has helped close the gap between theoretical, idealistic perspectives and the reality of life in a school. This experience reminded me of the need to take off my HPE secondary teacher hat and think like a primary school teacher.

Understanding ITE students' learning

Given that we only have limited face-to-face hours with our ITE students to examine teaching HPE in primary schools, decisions about the enduring understandings (McTighe & Wiggins, 1999) students will have at the end of the course have consistently vexed the teaching team. Being “Miss Peachtree” helped me make sense of what would best support my first year ITE students as they grappled with learning to become primary school teachers of HPE. It has meant some rethinking of the compulsory HPE course and the associated assessment tasks. The rewritten course now draws on research evidence, theories about HPE, and on evidence drawn from lived practice, based in reality.

Real life examples

Sharing my own successes, failures and insights as a Year 2 teacher appears to be a powerful way to bring the classroom and the realities of being the teacher to life for my student teachers. Through stories, photos and video footage of my own teaching I have been able to support them to make sense of what HPE might look like in the primary school. It has also allowed me to provide explicit examples of management techniques, the language of giving instructions and strategies for making HPE more visible in a crowded curriculum.

In highlighting my own struggles and the mistakes I made as a *new* primary school teacher, it appears to have helped create a learning environment where students feel comfortable being challenged and making mistakes. Their eagerness to critique my teaching practices as they develop new knowledge about teaching and learning appears to be helping them make sense of their own understandings of what it is to be an effective teacher.

It seems that the experience of being in the primary school has allowed me, the specialist PE teacher, to be better positioned to teach future primary school teachers about teaching. Now as a teacher of teaching, I feel I am more responsive to the issues, needs and concerns of my ITE students, as I pull together the knowledge, concepts and practices of both the specialist world view, and the newly developed understandings of the world of a primary school (Loughran, 2006).

DISCUSSION

On reflection, six weeks in a primary school filled up my soul. It reminded me of why I am a teacher, and invigorated me to ensure I do my very best as an up to date, evidence-based and practice-based teacher educator, who remains in touch with the realities of the primary school classroom. In addition, the experience benefited more than just me; it challenged me to think about the appropriateness of the specialist as a teacher educator for future primary school teachers; and raised concerns about the purpose of study leave. These three points are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Who benefits?

The benefits of the experience for me as an initial teacher educator were extensive, however it is important to note how this experience appears to have also supported the development of others. While it may be evident from the discussion above that my learning has had spin-offs for the students in my ITE classes, what is less clear is how the experience appeared to support Miss B and other staff in the school, my colleagues in ITE, and myself as a researcher.

The School

Being the outsider with limited accountability to the principal, who in many ways became an insider in Rm 16, allowed me to ask questions about current practices that helped me make sense of the context and the reasoning behind decisions. It appeared that I had a degree of immunity that did not extend to Miss B or the other classroom teachers, who had to *answer* to the senior teachers and principal. This meant the Principal engaged me to discuss broader issues to do with HPE or my perspective on the school culture and curriculum, and he allowed me to ask challenging questions about why certain routines of practice existed. While I was learning about the school context, it appeared that he was also taking the opportunity to develop his knowledge of current practices in HPE, and broader issues to do with education. Post the experience, the conversations continue, as does the learning for both parties.

Other teachers in the junior school also appear to have benefited from my visit. Having observed me teach the Year 2's they were interested to find out more about the activities I was using, and even more excited by the novel equipment that I had purchased as a gift for the school. It seemed that my presence provided them with professional development in relation to activities and resources that would support student engagement and learning in relation to HPE. The head of the junior school has since been in contact seeking ideas for further equipment purchases, and asking about any new activity or unit planning ideas that she might use to support the development of their HPE programme.

Miss B

I learnt a lot from working with Miss B, but it appears that the opportunity of having an “extra pair of eyes” in her classroom was also a beneficial learning experience for her. While initially I just observed and “chipped in” when I could, as our relationship developed I became more curious about the practices of the classroom and the school. Even though Miss B had only four years teaching experience she became my teacher, the respondent to the *millions* of queries. My daily questions, while initially off-putting for Miss B, begun to evolve from one-sided question-response, into broader conversations about practice. It appeared that having me in her room provided Miss B with a *critical friend* who shared the frustration and the joys of the classroom and challenged her to reflect on her practice and the routines of practice evident in the school. The change was evident when Miss B started arriving in the morning with questions or thoughts about

practice that she had been mulling over. One of our on-going discussions centred around what it meant to be a junior school teacher and how the role differs for those focused on institutionalising students versus those teachers more committed to creating independent learners. With time, my relationship with Miss B developed and our roles as teacher/learner consistently shifted as we became sense makers of our own practice and understandings, and those of the other. We also became allies, questioning and where appropriate, challenging the status quo. Together it was easier to resist the need to conform, and it was apparent that it is far less isolating when you have someone else who is on your side.

Initial Teacher Education colleagues

As my understandings have changed, my colleagues in the HPE courses have had to deal with my constant reminders to remove our specialist hats. These shifting understandings have generated many discussions about the nature, purpose and content of our first year *Learning and Teaching HPE in the Primary School* course, making for an organic and evolving programme. We have all enjoyed my tales of success and the struggles I had being “Miss Peachtree”, and it appears to have repositioned us all as learners.

Me–The researcher

How the experience has affected me as a researcher is worth a brief mention. No longer is it enough to be a good teacher educator, we are also now all required to be producing quality research. The classroom experience in many ways provided me with evidence on which to base my practice, as detailed in earlier sections. Furthermore, it helped me make sense of the context in which most of my current and future research is based.

Working with Year 2 students provided me with the opportunity to practice questioning in language appropriate to the children’s level and understand the complexities of group work. This will be useful when I undertake interviews, including focus groups, with younger participants. In addition, knowing the teachers, the complexities of their roles and the demands on their time have made me more sensitive to the impact data collection processes and professional learning opportunities have on their workload, and their pragmatic responses.

Understanding the context, roles, routines and people of the primary school is essential to designing research programmes that are beneficial to the wider education community and most importantly support the teacher, students and the school. Finally, the six weeks has also helped me refocus on what research might be most useful to support the development of HPE and what might be broader research projects that work to enhance the learning of teachers and students in New Zealand primary schools.

Specialist teachers leading learning for classroom generalist teachers

It appears that in the New Zealand teacher education system curriculum specialists are frequently appointed to teach in ITE courses because they bring with them significant professional knowledge, including extensive subject specific curriculum

and content knowledge, gained from working in the secondary school context, and from their undergraduate qualifications. These high levels of teaching expertise and content knowledge may be worth little in their new role as teacher educator, if they do not have level appropriate knowledge of the primary school aged learners or do not know the context of primary schools, or if the theory and practice divide is too great.

It is not clear from the literature on induction what important knowledges and experiences specialist teachers may need as they transition into the role of teacher educators focused on learning to teach in generalist positions. A range of texts are available to support teacher educators develop understandings and pedagogies for supporting the learning of student-teachers (for example: Cochran-Smith, et al., 2008; Loughran, 2004, 2006), and yet few materials are available that explore teacher educators as learners, and cover the skills and understandings teacher educators may need to develop to be better at their jobs. More recently, research (Murray, 2008) and programmes for induction have supported qualified schoolteachers to transition into the role of teacher educator. In the UK the Training and Development Agency for Schools asked professional associations across the curriculum to develop materials and networks that would serve to support new tutors and lecturers. The organisation PE Initial Teacher Training and Education (PEITTE – <http://www.peitte.net/>) took up the challenge of providing support materials to teachers to transition into their role as tutors and lecturers in ITE. While these materials offer specialists a range of useful ideas for dealing with the pragmatics of the role and the challenge of working with adults instead of students, they do not appear to address the need to understand the varied needs of the generalist teacher.

This raises questions about the design and delivery of the induction programmes used to support specialists make the transition into their new roles as teacher educators of classroom generalist teachers. Courses in tertiary teaching may be of benefit (or not if already a qualified teacher) and induction on university systems support new lecturers to understand the context of their new workplace. Nevertheless, it is not evident how secondary teachers with specialist knowledge of a subject (in this instance HPE) are supported to develop knowledge of the context and needs of students who are going to work in primary school settings. This area warrants further investigation.

The purpose of study leave

As is evidenced in the previous sections, my experiences in the primary school and being “Miss Peachtree” for six weeks have not only enhanced my understandings of teaching and learning in primary schools, but have also had significant impacts on my work as a teacher educator. It is, therefore, confounding that the option to return to a classroom and gain further experiences as a teacher is not taken by many teacher educators, and does not appear to be encouraged or supported in the process of designing study leave. Given that excellence in research and teaching are valued by universities, it appears contradictory that enhancing practice by experiencing teaching in a school, is only valued and made available if there is an academic output.

Instead of being viewed as an unusual choice, perhaps all teacher educators should consider, and be encouraged, to go back into the school classroom as a teacher or teacher/researcher. This may better support them to close the gaps between theory and reality, and develop teacher education programmes that are connected to the realities of school and the needs of their student teachers.

CONCLUSION

Six weeks of being “Miss Peachtree” in a Year 2 class created a unique learning opportunity for me. I now feel better positioned to develop my pedagogy as a teacher educator based on both my specialist PE knowledge and my knowledge of context, learning and learners in primary school settings. I have learnt that being an *expert* PE teacher does not mean that I can automatically assume the mantle as an *expert* teacher of teaching, especially in relation to the primary school context. In order to be better positioned to teach about teaching I needed to undertake PD beyond the learning that was available from the literature. My having the opportunity to close the theory and practical gap appears to be creating better learning opportunities for learners of teaching, my ITE students, which I hope in turn will mean they to provide better learning opportunities in HPE for their students.

Nevertheless, after six weeks in the school, aspects of practice and the relationship between ITE and schools remain unanswered. I am still vexed by the inane routines that all teachers come to practice without question, routines that do not appear to connect with visions of supporting students to become “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7). In addition, I continue to explore ways in which myself and colleagues as teacher educators can support our student teachers and practicing teachers to have the space, time, and appropriate challenges to allow them to develop as practitioners who ask hard questions of themselves and of the ways in which they are encouraged to teach. I have been left pondering

- what it means to be a specialist;
- how we view the associate teachers who work with our ITE students;
- who in the practicum situation is the teacher and who is the learner;
- the role visiting lecturers have and how they are perceived by classroom teachers, given how much a visiting lecturer may learn from a classroom teacher; and
- what we might do to encourage a more fluid teacher learner relationship between associate teachers, ITE students and visiting lecturers.

Finally, it seems timely, as I take responsibility for inducting three *new* teacher educators into our teaching team, to consider what support and PD is necessary to ensure that as teacher educators, with specialist PE knowledge, we can all provide contextually relevant learning opportunities for those learning to teach in primary schools.

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¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the identities of teachers, students and the school

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