

Relating philosophy
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Relating philosophy to pedagogy – how my personal values influence my way of teaching Within any early childhood education (ECE) setting the pedagogy of the educators will have great impact on the programmes and philosophies which the children within that setting will be influenced by. Teachers have a responsibility to build and maintain authentic, open, reciprocal relationships with children, families and the community (Gailer, 2010).

This is not only an integral part of the early childhood curriculum Te Whariki which has relationships as one of its four foundation principles (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996) but also part of the teaching standards and ethics. As a teacher I relish in the chance to build relationships with many different children, all unique in their culture, strengths, ideas and way of being. The importance I place on relationships sits well with both Vygotsky's and Bronfenbrenner's sociocultural theories. Vygotsky emphasised the importance of the people surrounding a child, seeing them crucial for supporting and enhancing the child's development.

Bronfenbrenner extended this into a model of contextual factors, using ideas about five kinds of contexts surrounding the individual child including their micro- and meso-systems where the interactions of their day-to-day realities occur (Drewery & Bird, 2004). These theories have been vital in the development of New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki, and so my understandings of these and with my personal philosophy I hope to have the skills to be able to build respectful reciprocal relationships with all learners. Building these relationships however is not as easy as people outside of the profession often assume.

Appendix 2 shows Suzie Gailer's (2010) article on being professional, the article discusses how professional integrity of practice is reliant on teachers having a particular set of values, respect, authenticity, empowerment and transparency. The image of the child is culturally constructed and linked to our time and place in history, the image I have as a teacher today of children is very different to that of which I was viewed as a child. My image of the child has altered as I have gained both practical and theoretical teaching experience.

In my first practicums I did not necessarily know what to expect about building initial relationships with children but as I have gained knowledge I now know that children can be trusted to build these relationships in timeframes which are right for them. Te Whariki (MoE, 1996) presents the image of children as competent learners and communicators and I now uphold this image in my teaching practice and as a parent (Appendices 3, 4 & 5), along with the values of respect which I have articulated through the following of Magda Gerber's work.

From my own relatively limited practical experience and theoretical knowledge I can relate to the notion of Edwards & Nuttall (2005) where "the pedagogy, or 'the act of teaching', is not only mediated by educators' understandings about the children, learning, and the curriculum; their understandings about the social settings in which they work, their personal experiences beyond the workplace and their engagement with the centre's wider community all have a role in determining the educator's actions" (p. 36).

My own underlying beliefs, values and philosophies all impact on my teaching style and, although often unconsciously, on the way I relate to individuals. Commitment to reflective practice, the personal philosophy I have articulated and the desire for professional development will aid me in holding true to a pedagogy which is responsive in time as well as to individuals. This pedagogy with its identified aspects of assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation is influenced by my values and experiences and I attempt to explain and reflect upon these in this essay.

The main assessment process I use is ' Learning Stories', an approach developed by Dr. Margaret Carr. Learning stories show a snapshot of a learning experience which has been shared with the child or children involved and are a record of the interests and strengths of the child. Research shows that learning is more effective when it is derived from interests, encouraging motivation and the sense of confidence that comes from working within one's own strengths.

The learning story framework is based on the belief that developing good learning dispositions is the most important skill in early childhood and this fits well with my values of respect and having the Te Whariki image of the child, a confident, competent learner and communicator. The foundations of learning stories are the dispositions found in Te Whariki and in my own learning stories these are highlighted, showing fellow educators, parents and whanau how I work to support children's learning in all aspects of the programme and curriculum (Appendices 4, 6 & 7).

Upholding this image of children in practice is however met with challenges.

Woodrow (1999) describes how there are resulting constructions of <https://assignbuster.com/relating-philosophy-to-pedagogy-how-my-personal-values-influence-my-way-of-teaching/>

childhood based on how individuals experienced childhood, on cultural artefacts and on professional knowledge, Ellen Pifer (2000) also describes these conflicting images in her book *Demon or Doll* (Appendix 8) which has truly opened my mind to ways of seeing individuals. Other teaching professionals may hold different images of children such as the child as innocent or as an embryo adult and this will impact on the way they act around and towards children.

Having a commitment towards reflective practice and regularly evaluating my personal pedagogy will allow me to deal with these challenges, giving me the skills to explain my viewpoint and understand that of others so that the best possible outcome is achieved. To undertake such assessment it is important to build a relationship with the children and these reciprocal relationships are another key part of my philosophy.

This value has changed with my experience and theoretical knowledge, in my initial practicum I was unsure about how to go about building relationships that are both respectful and reciprocal (Appendices 9 & 10) but my confidence in this has, and will continue, to grow (Appendix 11). I believe that building a reciprocal relationship means sharing aspects of my life with children and not expecting them to reveal themselves without the favour being returned. I have a huge passion towards animals and I have shared this with the children on my last two practicums by taking along my guinea pigs (Appendix 12).

The children feel aspects of empowerment and trust as I allow them to be intimately involved with a very important part of my personal life. Building such relationships prior to undertaking assessment highlights the spiral

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nature of teaching and the aspects of pedagogies. Taking the guinea pigs to the centre required planning and careful implementation, including discussion with staff and families to ensure cultural needs were met. Some cultures do not agree with the keeping of animals as pets and in order to uphold the respectful image of the child and relationships with the family and community I needed to accept and respect this belief.

The centre policies and legislation also play a role in planning and implementation, health and hygiene regulations needed to be considered for this activity and for others many different policies will come into play. For further assessment and planning the involvement of colleagues and whanau in the learning stories and other documentation would play a vital role in the continuation of the interest but unfortunately the short nature of the practicum did not allow for this.

Cultural needs and matches weight heavily in the planning and implementation stages of my pedagogy. This is linked to all the values in my philosophy; relationships, respect and equity. These values mean that I believe in focussing on skills and talents rather than on deficiencies to create learning environments, for example respecting that crying is a valid attempt at communication and can be a qualified learning experience (Appendix 11). Nyland (2004) describes how the participation rights and contexts of infants' knowledge can be overlooked in childcare settings.

On-line discussions with fellow students regarding this reading give support to the idea that disrespectful environments adversely affect the identity and participation of children. What happens in an environment when an identity is missing altogether and children are faced with images of white middle
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class able bodied members of society? What message is that giving to these children and their families? You don't belong? You are not a real member of our society? We don't value you? The environments we plan for the children speak volumes about how we view society and the people we respect and value (Ellis, R. , Fuamatu, P. Perry Smith, A. M. Moodle; September 2011). During planning I therefore need to think ahead about resources which reflect the cultures within the setting and the community. This can be achieved through communication with other educators in the setting, parents, and other members of the community such as kaumatua or the local priest. Planning for social occasions is also important to me as I feel they link the ECE setting with the wider community and social values. This includes events such as Mother's and Father's day (Appendix 13) as well as cultural occasions such as the Lantern Festival, Diwali and Pasifika events.

Although during such planning I am mindful of the goals and learning outcomes which Te Whariki and the teaching standards present I also constantly remind myself of the holistic nature in which the learning will occur. Lawrence (2004) describes the shift in thinking and programme planning in ECE settings over the past two decades, from keeping children busy to planning cycles and then Te Whariki. Lawrence clarifies that although the word planning is still used; it is not in the traditional sense of the word but rather can be seen as “ reflectively responding to children's thinking (p. 16). ” An example in her article shows how the learning experience of children can be very different to that pre-planned or expected by the teacher (Appendix 14). A challenge presents itself where teachers have been trained and had experience in times where different planning

programmes were utilised, disagreeing views and beliefs can lead to conflict within teaching teams and a dedication to reflective practice is required by all parties if favourable outcomes are to be reached. This reflective practice is a vital part of the evaluation process of my pedagogy. What worked? What didn't work? Where do I go from here?

Schon (2002) described how the entire process of reflection-in-action, where our knowing is in our action, is central to the skill practitioners have in dealing with situations of uncertainty, instability and uniqueness as well as valuing conflict. Holding true to a value where children are respected as individuals and valued for their own unique set of skills, uncertain and unique situations are inevitable in the day-to-day practice of an ECE setting. With the set of reflective skills I now possess I hope to be able to turn these situations of uncertainty into ones of learning, for both myself and children involved.

With continuing professional development and an ever increasing amount of practical experience I feel I am in good stead to continue my career as an early childhood educator and support the children within my influence to grow up in line with the aspirations of Te Whariki, “ competent and confident learners and communicators ... a valued contribution to society” (MoE, 1996, p. 9).
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