



Nga Karekare Oranga



New Zealand College of  
Early Childhood Education  
*Te Whare Matauranga Kohungahunga o Aotearoa*  
Hand in hand with your success

# Facilitating critical thinking in initial teacher education (ITE) early years student teachers

Tui Summers Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

*Victoria University Institute for Early Childhood Studies 16th May 2015 (WA 206)*

# Acknowledgements



Rikke  
Tui

Judith

EYE hui @  
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2013

## *Setting the scene*

This research started as an EYE – Early Year Enquiry, project involving:

- Professor Judith Duncan - University of Canterbury
- Tui Summers - New Zealand College of Early Childhood Education (now employed at Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, previously known as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association)
- Rikke Betts - Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

# Objectives

- To develop critical thinking skills in final year ECE student teachers.
- To work with early childhood student teachers to apply discussions that emerged during learning circles and reading into their teaching practice.
- To create opportunities for early childhood student teachers to network within the wider ECE sector in Christchurch and learn to provide critical thinking feedback on their own and others practices.
- To build capacity in and bring innovation to the field of early childhood education in a chosen topic area of each ITE.
- To collect feedback on this model in order to inform future teaching models and initiatives with early childhood ITE.
- To recommend strategies for implementing critical thinking development with early childhood student teachers beyond this project.
- To develop an effective tool/model for supporting critical thinking in initial teacher education students.

## ***Why research critical thinking skills?***

The teaching profession needs teachers who are more than ‘technicians’ but thinkers, especially critical thinkers who are able to make ‘wise decisions’ in relation to curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Tertiary providers have been using a variety of teaching strategies to build reflective critical thinkers in their early childhood student teachers – with limited success.

Yet, the ability to think critically is reflected in the Graduating Teacher Criteria required by early childhood teachers on completion of their initial teacher education (ITE) training.

We are challenging ITE providers to change the culture of final year students to move from expecting they are finished and having the recipes they need to be successful teachers.

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CHALLENGES  
CHALLENGE  
YOUR LIMITS**

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We propose that trialing new ways of supporting critical thinking whilst in ITE may help in some ways towards a sustainable attitude to teaching and learning in the community including the initial teacher education community.



# ***Methodology***

- Ethics
- Participants
- Specific focus for each institution
- Learning circles and sharing circles
- Kaumatua consultation
- 6 month follow up - June 2015
- Confidentiality
- Koha
- Analysis of results
- Tool for promoting critical thinking

## ***Method***

The 'learning and sharing circles' approach has been used successfully with early childhood teachers in Sweden (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007) and Canada (Atkinson & Eliot, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Nxumalo, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011).

## *Learning Circles*

Learning circles are an opportunity for participants to discuss new ideas in relation to readings provided on the specific topic for each institution.

Learning circles are held at the institution in which the participants are based in one of the teaching rooms.

The specific topic used at each institution was a vehicle for the development of critical thinking

## *Sharing Circles*

Sharing circles brought together participants and facilitators from both institutions to interact and discuss the work from the learning circles.

The facilitators provoked and enriched the discussions.



## ***Emerging themes***

- Development of critical thinking
- Impact on practice : Relationships and time

## *Development of critical thinking*

“I think its looking at others’ perspectives and seeing their points. They make good arguments so just taking that on board. That knowing what’s right or wrong. And if someone has a good argument...they are open minded” (Andrea - sharing circle 1).

“And asking people, your co-workers or other people in the field why they are doing things because their explanation on why they are doing things might be different to your interpretation if you do go back and think about it so I think that’s really important to be open to people, asking you why you are doing things and not being defensive” (Cindy - sharing circle 1).

“In light of my thinking I’m able to back myself umm, I’m not the most confident and I don’t voice my opinions but like I said in our last um learning circle I was able to back up some points in discussion with my parents and change their points of view about what they believe and even that was small but substantial” (Anne - sharing circle 2).

“I think I am better at putting my point across and backing myself up. Um if somebody asks me, why do you do this in practice I used to say, well just because but now I am more confident in backing myself up and the reasons I do it and I think its not just backing myself up its also sharing that knowledge with someone else. I’m like, oh, actually you just made a really good point so maybe I’ll try that tack next time” (Andrea - sharing circle 2).

“From doing this project I can go into my centre and put forward ideas and back them up because I’ve got the confidence and I can take on others perspectives and listen to them and see what they might have because they might have some more knowledge that I don’t have but then again I think it always comes back to that willingness and openness and respecting that person’s ideas. It has definitely enhanced my confidence and has enhanced my philosophy and has underpinned who I want to be as a teacher”

(Edith - sharing circle 2).

## ***Impact on practice: Relationships***

“I think it comes down to relationships and how you know that person and when you’ve been in the centre for ‘x’ amount of weeks and they are showing their really good side to you as a mentor” (Beth - sharing circle 2).

“Of course we are not always going to agree, that’s human nature but to have those supportive reciprocal, professional relationships, that’s really important” (Cindy - sharing circle 2).

# ***Impact on practice: Time***

“I’m quite a fast paced person, quite busy. And I realized I was doing things because people were telling me to or instantly have a discussion about it, but it wasn’t critical, it was my opinion so stopping and thinking even overnight or for a few days and then re-approaching it has worked for me. That’s been more professional and I’ve had better outcomes in my practice and also I feel like it’s not eating away at me. I’m not holding any grudges. I’m dealing with it but I’m taking my time to deal with it and there are processes in place for it” (Cindy - Sharing circle 2)



“I know for me, especially on my last practicum I had quite a challenging practicum and if I’d had that last year or in my first year I probably would have just given up. But, just being able to take all of her feedback even if that wasn't in a positive way I was quite upset at the time about what she had said. Later I could go back about what she had done and rather than going back to her and saying ‘what do you want me to do’ I was able to think about it and what I could do rather than asking her what she wanted me to do and I actually quite valued that. Because I recognized I took the opportunity to do that” (Nicole - sharing circle 2).

# ***Recommendations***

- Give time
- Build relationships
- Encourage others to share their perspectives
- Encourage students to listen and reflect on others perspectives
- Encourage students to articulate 'why' pedagogical decisions are made and practice this as an associate
- Build confidence

# References

Atkinson, K., & Elliot, E. (2013). An ongoing exploration of uncertainty: Ethical identities – Ours and children's. In J Duncan and L Conner. *Research partnerships in early childhood education: Teachers and researchers in collaboration* (pp. 115- 134). New York, NY: Palgrave.

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# ***Feedback***

What would you need to facilitate a learning / sharing circle format?

How would you apply the learning /sharing circle format in an ECE setting or ITE setting?

What are the obstacles?





# Critical thinking