Student voice

Becoming a Confident Teacher: Student Reflections on a Good Decision

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For a year or so in 2000 after finishing High School, you could say that I mucked around for a year (as most teenagers do) while I decided what it was that I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Now, being fresh out of school and only 18 years old it was a huge decision for me to make as I had no clue as to which career path I wanted to take. I fell upon early childhood purely by coincidence. I had started to become bored with café work and was telling my friend this when she had a brilliant idea. Why not come and work at an early childhood centre with her, where they were desperate for staff? I remember thinking ‘Ummm…..okay, why not?’

Previous to this I really didn’t have a lot to do with children, although they weren’t entirely new to me either, and I thought that this little amount of knowledge about children would see me through early childhood just fine. Unfortunately this was only the beginning of my naivety and ignorance towards the profession.

After working at the early childhood centre for a few months, I was exposed to a whole new world of early childhood education. I discovered and learnt so many things (both good and bad) while working with children. Fortunately, good commonsense prevailed and I was able to pick up the good and leave the bad behind. After working in early childhood for a couple of years, then being a nanny for about a year or so, I was approached by my old centre manager and asked to return to the centre to teach again. Missing adult interaction (as being a nanny can become quite lonely) I decided to return. There was only one condition with returning back to the centre and that was that I needed to study, as the New Zealand Government requirements for qualified early childhood teachers were upgrading. I thought about my options long and hard.

I had been in early childhood for almost five years and thought ‘was there anything else that I could really learn?’ What could a teaching and learning institution teach me? I had learnt everything on the job right? Wrong! Again my naivety and ignorance were coming into play. I don’t believe that this was helped with the lack of support I received from some of the ‘experienced’ ladies I worked with. When I informed them that I was going to be studying, some colleagues questioned whether a qualification was necessary, one commenting “Oh, I don’t believe in that studying rubbish. I’m a mother and early childhood is commonsense. There’s nothing that study can teach me”.

However I realised if I wanted to remain in early childhood (which I thoroughly enjoyed) I would need to study. I signed myself up to New Zealand Tertiary College as a distance learning student. I didn’t know just what I was getting myself in for.

When I started my first couple of papers I really struggled to get my head around the writing and the readings, a major part of the program. I wasn’t
sure what I was supposed to be writing about. Each time I asked a colleague to help, I found it hard to understand and comprehend the variety of jargon that they would use. Although the jargon that I was confused with is now second nature to me at first I found it confusing. For example, I am now familiar with the theories of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, but to begin with it was a lot to absorb!

What made a big difference was the wonderful and priceless help from my distance learning tutor, as well as other tutors from the college. The patience, support and understanding that NZTC tutors had with my hundreds of questions and queries was endless. As I was doing distance learning and not going to classes and meeting tutors face to face, there were many e-mails and phone calls that my tutor (or another) would take. When I had phoned for the third time that day I never got a “here we go again” feeling from them as they were always enthusiastic to help. This was invaluable during my third year, doing the ever stressful early childhood research project!

As for the amount of information I gathered, the many things I learnt and the way I developed as a teacher was incredible. As mentioned previously I thought that there was nothing else that I could learn. About halfway through my first year I gained an understanding of the importance of teacher education and just how wrong I had been about it.

The in-depth readings that were provided to me on a variety of subjects were really practical for the early childhood environment. Every reading that I was given was relevant and able to be applied to my everyday teaching practice. An example of this is before I started studying I was not even aware of what inclusive practice was, but through in-depth readings and research I gained a strong understanding on this subject.

Studying through distance learning opened me to studying opportunities that other facilities were unable to provide. I was able to do it in my free time, and organise my study around activities that I enjoyed, not having to sacrifice them instead.

Now that I have finished my study, I feel there is one word that sums me up and that is ‘confident’. I am confident in my ability to provide for children an enjoyable fun and worthwhile education. NZTC really has provided me with the tools that I need to be a really effective early childhood educator while still being able to have my own personal beliefs and teach in my own unique way.

Next up for me is my Bachelor. Why stop at just a Diploma? I’m sure there’s a whole lot more for me to learn…….