



Submission to DEC

1 November 2012

To whom it may concern

Please find attached, a response to the *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: Discussion paper* from the Institute Advisory Board of the Institute of Early Childhood.

The Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University prepares teachers for working with children in the birth to 12 year age group. Therefore, Graduates may seek employment in government and non-government primary schools and in early childhood settings including preschools, kindergartens and long day care.

The Institute Advisory Board (IAB) draws its membership from representatives of two professional groups. The first group includes Macquarie University academic staff – the Faculty Dean, Head of Department and elected academic staff representatives. The second group are external members invited to be members of the IAB because they are persons of eminence holding responsibility in professional fields served by the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) and senior leaders from organisations which employ IEC graduates. The current membership includes professionals who are familiar with early childhood policy and practices and the employment of early childhood teachers in New South Wales. The IAB membership also includes individuals who hold significant positions in professional organisations and educational institutions.

Our response reflects our concerns about the significant gap throughout the Discussion paper in respect to teaching and learning in the years prior to school. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion through addressing this gap.

Please do not hesitate to contact me in the first instance should you require further clarification of issues addressed in our response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Joy Goodfellow'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

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Institute of Early Childhood - Institute Advisory Board

Response to NSW Department of Education and Communities *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: Discussion paper*

Summary

Graduate early childhood teachers are sought after for employment in both school and early childhood settings. Teachers choosing to work in government primary schools and associated preschools in NSW operate under standards, regulations and curriculum guidelines. These are established through statutory authorities responsible for school settings and for early childhood services catering for children from birth to school age. In this response to the NSW Department of Education and Communities - *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: Discussion paper*, we focus on early childhood teachers and education in the years prior to school - a significant gap in understanding evident throughout the Discussion paper.

There is variation in philosophical approaches to ways in which learning occurs from birth through the primary school years. In particular, early childhood curricula and programs adopt a view that honours children's agency and play as a context for learning, and acknowledges teachers' knowledge of child development and capacity to engage in curriculum decision making. Such decision making involves observation of children as a basis for curriculum intent and child or learning outcomes and recognises the importance of young children's learning beyond the classroom through valuing teacher/family partnerships. Our response elucidates these understandings and argues for the inclusion of these aspects of teaching children in the early years to be included in the discussion of teaching and learning in early childhood services as well as in NSW schools and preschools.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- That all references to teaching include the early years and the role of teachers working with children in the years prior to school entry.

Recommendation 2

- That the definition of teaching reflects pedagogical practices identified in the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) and acknowledges children learn from birth.

Recommendation 3

- That importance of play based learning as identified within the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) be acknowledged in any discussion of teaching and learning.

Recommendation 4

- That early childhood teacher induction, transition and remuneration reflect parity for all early childhood teachers wherever they are employed.

Recommendation 5

- That national professional teaching standards be mandated for early childhood teaching in the prior to school sector.

Recommendation 6

- That graduates of birth to eight teacher education degrees be eligible for teacher registration in NSW as is the case in every other state.

Recommendation 7

- That a national minimum standard for professional learning be established to support beginning teachers' induction to the profession and facilitate the retention of quality teachers.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade there has been increasing international focus on the importance of the prior-to-school years with UNESCO, the World Bank and OECD as well as other international organisations arguing for the economic and social benefits of quality early childhood education. Economic arguments highlight the value of investing in early childhood education in terms of reducing long-term costs with respect to welfare dependency, economic productivity and mental health services. From a social perspective, a myriad of studies converge in highlighting the significance of quality early childhood prior-to-school educational experiences for children's socio-emotional wellbeing and academic development. In line with these arguments, researchers from around the globe have begun to examine the inherent characteristics of quality in early childhood education. While quality education encompasses such things as curriculum content, pedagogy and physical environments, it is the role of early childhood teachers working in birth to 5 settings that is of particular significance when examining child outcomes. The Discussion paper is silent with respect to early childhood teachers and teaching/learning in the prior-to-school years.

The Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) at Macquarie University prepares teachers for working with children in the birth to 12 year age group. That is, graduates may seek employment in government and non-government primary schools and in early childhood settings including preschools, kindergartens and long day care. Underpinning the approach to teacher education adopted by the IEC are values, traditions and practices supported by national and international research that acknowledges the importance of education and learning during the early years.

The Institute Advisory Board (IAB) draws its membership from representatives of two professional groups. The first group includes Macquarie University academic staff – the Faculty Dean, Head of Department and elected academic staff representatives. The second group are external members invited to be members of the IAB because they are 'persons of eminence holding responsibility in professional fields' served by the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC)' and 'senior leaders from organisations which employ IEC graduates' as well as elected representatives (see IAB Constitution). The current membership includes professionals who are familiar with early childhood policy and practices and who have professional expertise relevant to the employment of early childhood teachers in New South Wales. Further, the IAB membership is diverse with individuals holding positions within various early childhood advisory and employing bodies as well as professional organisations and educational institutions.

The following response to the *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: Discussion paper* is drawn from IAB members':

- understanding of the importance of early education prior to school age as a basis for children's subsequent development;
- personal/professional knowledge and experience;
- understandings of recent international research;
- understandings of the professional expertise required to enhance young children's learning opportunities and

- professionally considered views drawn from experience in working in relevant fields of education including from birth through to school entry and subsequently, the early years of school.

2. Context of this response

There are over 4,500 early childhood teachers currently employed in New South Wales early education and care services yet the existence and expertise of these teachers as well as their training, professional responsibilities and career opportunities has been ignored in the Discussion paper. The National ECEC Workforce data collected in 2010 (DEEWR, 2010) indicated that there were nearly 64,000 children in New South Wales participating in a preschool program offered by an approved child care service (see p. 20). Again, in NSW, 55% of staff in preschool and 40% of staff in long day care who provided preschool programs held a Bachelor degree and above (see p. 24). Comparisons across Australian states and territories indicates that NSW is falling behind other states.

According to the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) website, the DEC 'regulates the operation of early childhood education and care services for children from birth through to and including school age'. Therefore, when considering teaching and learning DEC must not only take account of 100 government preschools attached to schools but the stand-alone community based, privately owned or council operated services as well as other service types such as long day care and even mobile services.

Early childhood service regulations require that an early childhood teacher must be employed in a service where 25 or more children attend. Further to having completed an early childhood undergraduate program of study, early childhood teachers hold positions where they are responsible for:

- the inclusion of children who have additional and diverse needs;
- liaison with professionals from other disciplines;
- the management of the service including staff induction, support and development;
- liaison with committees and community members (including parents); and
- other functions indicative of holding a leadership position.

The DEC NSW Schools website notes that in preschools, 'the teacher plans an educational program that nurtures each child's self-esteem, wellbeing and development' (Schools, NSW). This has been a requirement for licensed services under children's services regulation for many years.

Early childhood teachers, while they are not included in the discussion of standards as they do not work within the Board of Studies curriculum, must be aware of and work within policies and regulations established by other authorities including, for example:

- *NSW Institute of Teachers* that requires all teachers working within 'schools' to be accredited. Teachers working in department preschools/schools are required to meet standards for teaching across the preschool/primary years. In 2011, all states and territories in Australia agreed to implement nationally consistent practices to guide

teachers' preparation, induction, professional development and return to the profession. Central to this was the endorsement of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*. The transition to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* for mandatory levels of accreditation will occur during 2013 and 2014.

- *Australian Children's Education & Care Authority (ACECQA)* sets standards for teachers in early childhood settings covered by the *National Quality Framework* and applicable across all states and territories. It monitors compliance with the National Law and National Regulations.
- *Australian Curriculum* identifies content to be addressed in 'school' environments and to be applied to preschools within school settings. There is a discrepancy between the application of the Australian Curriculum only to preschools within school setting and a requirement that *The Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) be applied to all early childhood learning environments.
- ACECQA has also established qualification and experience criteria as well as curriculum specifications required to be met by teacher education institutions preparing early childhood degree level graduates.
- *National Quality Standards* set a quality and regulatory benchmark for education and care services in the prior-to-compulsory school entry age sector.

Implications for early childhood teachers

Teachers choosing to work in government preschools in NSW operate under standards, regulations and curriculum guidelines that are applicable through statutory authorities responsible for school settings and for early childhood services catering for children from birth to school age. Graduate early childhood teachers can seek employment in, and are essentially sought after for, employment in both school and early childhood services. They also operate under regulations and national early years frameworks. However, there is a shortage of early childhood teachers. Lower wages than those paid to comparable teachers in schools, high regulatory demands and the nature of the early childhood workforce particularly with respect to recruitment are all reasons given for early childhood teacher shortages (Productivity Commission, 2011). In order to partly address this shortfall, the *Early Childhood Workforce Strategy*, supported by all governments in Australia, has suggested that 'cross-skilling initiatives (be developed) to enable primary school teachers to diversify their skills to become early childhood teachers' (SCSEEC, 2012, p.13). However, comparative remuneration and conditions may well be a barrier.

3. Organisation of response to the Discussion paper

Overall, in referring to the five areas considered important to supporting improvements in the quality of teaching and enhancing student learning, the Discussion paper has considered and valued aspects of teacher quality that contribute to student achievement. In particular, it draws attention not only to the importance of relevant discipline, content and pedagogical knowledge but the repertoire of skills that contribute to effective teaching. Further, the Discussion paper considers challenges associated with workforce participation including professional development and support as well as career rewards, recognition and retention for which it is commended. However, the Discussion paper regrettably ignores the whole early childhood sector for which the NSW

Department of Education and Communities is responsible through its preschools and through its role in assessing and rating under the national quality standards applicable to all preschools and long day care, Family Day Care and Outside School Hours Care in New South Wales. It also ignores approaches to working with young children through the early years curriculum – *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009).

The Discussion paper focuses on the ‘science of teaching’ but ignores the ‘art’ of teaching and ways in which teachers craft curriculum knowledge and understandings with those of children’s capacities and environmental/cultural and contextual factors. A recent report (under the leadership of internationally recognised experts Professor Sharon Kagan and Professor Christine Pascal) in which ‘preschool environments’ (i.e. for children between the ages of three and six in educational environments so may include kindergartens and nursery schools) (see p. 8) across 45 countries ranked Australia as 24th on a Starting Well Index that included quality. The report identified teacher quality and training as being one of the main elements that affect quality (Lien Foundation, 2012). In answer to the question of what governs quality, the report stated - ‘an inspirational teacher can make a substantial difference to a child, almost regardless of the quality of the environment and resources at hand’ (p. 25).

The Discussion paper addresses areas for improvement of quality teaching and enhanced student learning under the following headings:

- Inspired learning
- Initial teacher education
- Entry into the profession
- Develop and maintain professional practice
- Recognise and share outstanding practice

The following response to the Discussion paper is organised under each of the five areas identified in the Discussion paper:

1. The relationship between teacher characteristics and engaged learners
2. Pre-service teacher education
3. Entry into the profession and induction
4. Ongoing professional support and learning
5. Recognition of teacher performance within remuneration and career structures

4. Response to the Discussion paper

4.1 The relationship between teacher characteristics and engaged learners

Recent research within the early childhood sector recognises that teachers’ pedagogical knowledge compliments content knowledge to the extent that it encompasses curriculum decision making processes and takes account of the whole child. That is, early childhood teachers take account of all aspects of the child’s development including their social, cultural and emotional well-being. Teaching and learning go hand in hand. The early childhood teacher is not only concerned with imparting knowledge but recognises that learning occurs in many contexts including children’s engagement with their physical and social environments and through self-initiated exploration.

Pedagogic theory is about relationships (Petrie et al, 2008) and processes. That is, teaching (and learning) is not only about instruction but engagement and encounters. Recent longitudinal studies such as that lead by Sylva et al (2011) in the UK (sampling 3,000+ children across a range of early childhood services including nursery classes, private day nurseries, nursery schools and integrated centres) have demonstrated that ‘processes’ are an important element of quality.

High quality early education provision is a major contributing factor when determining the extent to which early education is predictive of long-term social and cognitive developmental outcomes in children through to age 11. There is substantive evidence that success at school is related to quality early education particularly for children from ‘impoverished backgrounds’.

Comment

The Discussion paper needs to give recognition to:

- *The importance of early educational experiences as a basis for children’s future development and acknowledge the value of early education as espoused in recent government policies/reform agenda such as the National Quality Framework. This includes provision for 15 hours of preschool education in the year before school entry provided by an early childhood teacher.*
- *The understanding that learning occurs from birth and that the years before formal school age are critical to future development and academic learning.*
- *Teaching and learning in the early years with a greater appreciation that learning occurs in context when families and teachers share this responsibility. Indeed children are born ready to learn. Through being engaged in play and guided by teachers who understand the process of knowledge acquisition, very young children’s learning includes language, maths, science and social/emotional self-regulation control and developing a disposition to learn (Katz, 1993; Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2010).*
- *The nature of curriculum decision making and curriculum development in the early years where curriculum frameworks and the early childhood teacher’s knowledge and expertise provide for a focus on ‘emergent’ curriculum that is supported by intentional planning and teaching.*

4.2 Pre-service teacher education

At least three elements of initial teacher education require consideration. The first is content, the second – processes and the third, the establishment of standards indicative of quality teaching. Content refers to knowledge and skills, processes refers to ways in which student teachers engage in learning and standards give recognition to measures of professionalism at both entry and exit points. Further, entry and exit levels need to acknowledge those personal and professional qualities that are deemed relevant to effective teaching.

A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge not only understands how students construct knowledge and acquire skills but develops in students what Katz (1993) and Costa and Kallick (2008) has described as ‘habits of mind’ or ‘habits of intention’ that reflect the ‘disposition’ towards ‘inspired’ learning. Such dispositions are indicative of a capacity to analyse, theorise, be curious and creative (see Da Ros-Voseles & Fowler-Haughey (2007); Da Ros-Voseles & Moss (2007) for an

explanation). Further, the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) acknowledges the importance of building relationships in its definition of pedagogy as 'early childhood educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning' (p.46). As such, pedagogical knowledge requires teachers to have more than an understanding of cognitive, social and developmental theories of learning. They need to have the capacity to make judgements in their professional decision making whether in applying this knowledge and skill in planning for student learning or establishing learning environments.

The professional experience program is critical not only to student teacher learning but to the determination of suitability to participate in the teaching profession. Professional experience requirements associated with teacher education practicum placements provide an array of opportunities for student teachers to observe professional practices, engage in dialogue with experienced professionals, and undertake observation /planning and evaluation cycles relevant to student learning. High quality settings where provision is made to working effectively with student teachers, can provide a context for student teachers to reflect on their own capabilities within a supportive educational environment.

Comment

There is an assumption that ATAR scores are a measure of capacity to engage in tertiary study. However, an additional factor comes into play when considering a profession that requires the capacity to develop relationships with peers, professionals in other disciplines, children and parents/families. The personal/professional aspects of teaching need to be acknowledged and exit points available for those who do not meet the requirements. Further, with the number of graduate teachers exiting university programs and the perceived excess of graduates in the school sector's workforce, consideration should be given to the shortfall of early childhood graduates required to meet the need for early childhood qualified teachers both within the NSW Department of Education and Communities and in the early childhood sector as a whole.

Practicum placements for early childhood teacher education students must be found within schools as well as in early childhood services. It is distressing to note that while student teachers occupy 18,000 practicum places in schools each year, many do not seek/gain employment upon graduation. There is a significant wastage here when many student teachers undertaking initial early childhood teacher education degrees are unable to find suitable placements in schools. Yet, in the prior to school settings there is a significant shortfall of graduates available to work in these settings.

The quality of placement sites and the capacity of supervising teachers to effectively work with student teachers are issues. The relationship between placement sites and teacher education institutions is critical in order to ensure that both parties appreciate the professional experience expectations and requirements. Further, ongoing liaison between schools and representatives of teacher education institutions has the potential to be supportive of the professionalization of student teachers. Since onsite teachers are knowledgeable about the contexts for teaching and learning, having a 'master teacher' assigned to student teachers may provide enhanced opportunities for student teachers to be supported both in the risk taking in which they engage and in critical reflection on their experiences. While having a master teacher may be important, the

strategies that the master teacher uses in working with the student teacher, and the assignment of appropriate time and provision for considered review and feedback, are critical.

Practicum placements through internship models provide opportunities for student teachers to engage in sustained critical thinking. They are also sites where student teachers' suitability for entry into the profession can be ascertained. However, this will only occur if appropriate strategies are in place to support such decisions. Therefore, criteria for assessment of practicums are required to be in place as well as having 'assessors' who have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake such assessment.

The Discussion paper raises a question about Aboriginal Australians and Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds being encouraged into the teaching profession. Warawara at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, supports Aboriginal student teachers through their specialist program designed specifically to graduate early childhood teachers. However, the special needs of this group of students teachers have to be taken into account including financial support to attend residential schools and supervision/mentoring during practice teaching.

With respect to what is identified in the Discussion paper as 'specialisations', provision needs to be made within undergraduate programs to address diversity within the student populations including children with additional needs and children whose first language is not English. Within any group of children there will be diversity so this needs to be addressed while not excluding the possibilities of additional support that may be necessary from time to time. Like any teacher, early childhood teachers are required to work with families from diverse populations and, therefore, with professionals from other disciplines in order to best support student learning.

4.3 Entry into the profession and induction

The Discussion paper acknowledges that there are various pathways to teaching. 'New' teachers whether they are accepting appointment as new graduates from initial teacher education programs, or more experienced teachers re-entering the workforce, all require support through an induction process. The nature of that induction may vary depending on the 'cultural context' of the organisation within which graduate teachers will be working and their own learning and employment history. Where mentor teachers are appointed to support early career teachers then those mentor teachers need to be both motivated and skilled in such a role including being aware of recent innovative educational practices. Mentor teachers should not necessarily be assigned on the basis of seniority.

Statements in the Discussion paper are made about 'schools' and school environments with comments on support for 'classroom management'. However, such statements do not acknowledge the diverse early childhood learning environments in which early childhood teachers are employed. Further, the statements do not readily address the nature of the early childhood curriculum or pre-service education for early childhood teachers beyond preparation of teachers for employment in schools.

Comment

Early career teachers may generally require different models of professional learning opportunity from those of more experienced teachers and models that reflect the particular environment in which the teacher has gained employment. An internship model for beginning teachers is to be commended, particularly where there is an opportunity for close association with relevant teacher education institutions. However, induction needs to take account of the diverse employment opportunities for early childhood graduates where employment choices may be made based on such things as geographic location; and, knowledge of a community organisation's philosophy, values and practices and personal preferences. Some larger early childhood organisations provide a structured induction program to reflect the organisation's philosophy and practices, others do not.

4.4 Ongoing professional support and learning

Inspired learning requires passionate and inspired teachers. Inspired teaching is not only about imparting content knowledge and fostering the development of skills but creating learning environments where students learn and flourish, become worldly, acquire attitudes and develop habits of thinking and doing that energise their learning experiences. There is now considerable evidence that the most effective ways in which professional learning occurs is through collaborative and engaging activities that include observation, reflection and feedback. School leadership matters. Leaders can encourage and support great teaching through effective appraisal and feedback as well as providing specialist learning/professional development opportunities.

Comment

As indicated in the opening statements in this response to the Discussion paper, major changes are occurring in the field of early childhood education. These changes require all pre-service and graduate early childhood teachers to be familiar with new approaches to curriculum developments and accountabilities associated with standards and regulations. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has funded professional organisations to develop websites and provide community based learning opportunities so enabling early childhood teachers to become familiar with changes in the sector.

Time and availability are issues when considering the provision of professional learning opportunities provided outside the workplace. There also needs to be support (through time allocation) for the ongoing 'action research' in which early childhood teachers participate as part of the observation/documentation and analysis processes they engage in during planning for and recognition of children's learning.

In early childhood settings, one of the strategies for identification, review and determination of professional performance is through 'panel review'. At the pre-service level and through analysis of performance during practicum placements student teachers, mentor teachers and university representatives 'conference' student performance. During these sessions, students are encouraged to provide their reflective comments on performance indicators and, therefore, are encouraged to take responsibility for decision making about the quality of their professional practices. The same process can be adopted at an organisation level where mentor teachers or those in leadership positions engage in dialogue during regular performance reviews (i.e. appraisal) and goal setting.

However, practitioner performance review needs to be supported by appropriate professional development.

4.5 Recognition of teacher performance within remuneration and career structures

Recognition, progression and reward are critical to both teacher quality and retention. The ways in which this may be achieved are open to question. However, recognition based on time served is not necessarily appropriate as it does not recognise quality teaching. Who recognises quality teaching and how this might be undertaken appears to be critical to a career structure that acknowledges teaching as a craft as well as a science. School leadership and master teaching opportunities focus on two areas of responsibility that may well represent different pathways of progression, each with its own level of particular expertise. The assumption here is that leadership equates to the responsibilities of a Principal. However, reference to master teachers who have responsibility for 'improving teaching throughout the system' raises issues about benchmarks assigned to being a Master teacher and the capacity of master teachers to inspire their cohort.

Comment

Inspiring teachers should be recognised for their knowledge, skills and talents. They should also be recognised (and financially remunerated) for their capacity to engage with and inspire students. Unfortunately, outside the school sector, early childhood teachers receive lower salaries than their counterparts in schools, do not have strong career paths to pursue and often receive little recognition both at state and federal government and local levels for their work (Productivity Commission, 2011). While accreditation of early childhood services does acknowledge service quality and that level of attainment is reliant upon the capacity of staff to demonstrate quality practices, individual performances are not readily acknowledged through financial rewards.

5. Some additional gaps in the Discussion paper

There are at least three areas that require further attention in addition to those already identified in this response to the Discussion paper. They are:

- Reference to the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and implications for teachers and Principals
- Exploration of teachers' relationships with families and the significance of this for early learning
- Understandings about the importance of teachers' critical reflection and classroom based research as processes through which professional development can occur.

5.1 Reference to the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

The AEDI measures five areas of early childhood development:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence

- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge

These areas are closely linked to the predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes (see website http://ww2.rch.org.au/aedi/about.cfm?doc_id=13154).

The AEDI was first administered in 2009 with 15,522 teachers completing checklists for 261,147 children across Australia (Sayers et al, 2011). A total of 7,422 schools participated and this represented 95.6% of all eligible schools. A subsequent survey of teachers and Principals undertaken by Sawyers et al (2011) has indicated that, with respect to teachers' work:

Around 62% of teachers surveyed reported that completing the AEDI checklist was beneficial to their work. The most common reported benefit (85%) was that completing the checklist raised awareness of the needs of individual children. (Summary Report, p. 7).

Further, findings from the 2009 Index suggested that a significant proportion of Australian children present with special needs during their first year of full-time schooling, and that special needs are unevenly distributed across some demographic groups. Goldfeld et al (2012) in reporting on the prevalence of children with high support needs claimed:

'... a mismatch between the prevalence of developmental problems and the ability of schools to accommodate them... (and that)... there are substantial opportunities to change schooling and early childhood systems to better detect and accommodate the needs of these children, and improve their longer term developmental and educational outcomes' (p. 326).

The most recent period for AEDI data collection was between 1 May and 31 July 2012 so further exploration of prevalence issues should be forthcoming with implications for teachers' capacity to identify those children for whom early intervention has the potential to contribute to their development and subsequent wellbeing.

5.2 Exploration of teachers' relationships with families and the significance of this for early learning

Teachers in their role as community leaders have the capacity to appreciate that while 'schooling' is of significant benefit for children, their learning extends far beyond school boundaries. Further, an appreciation of children's learning histories and contexts can make a significant contribution to teachers' curriculum decision making. Researchers, both nationally and internationally, have identified partnerships with families as a critical element to ensure optimum outcomes for children. However, 'parents' are only mentioned three times in the Discussion paper – all in questions about 'working together with parents' and encouraging parents to 'have their say'. In contrast, early childhood teachers working in non-school settings are expected to listen to parents, gain insights

into children's development contexts and design curriculum with this knowledge and understanding in mind. The significance of developing reciprocal partnerships with families needs to be acknowledged and teachers need to be given guidance on how this partnership can be enacted to ensure the best outcomes for the children (see discussion in Waniganayaka et al., 2012, Chapter 10).

5.3 Understandings about the importance of teachers' critical reflection and classroom based research as processes through which professional development can occur

Reflection as a process that can enhance personal/professional development has been widely considered over recent years as an essential element of teachers' professional work. Researchers such as Jaruszewicz & White (2009) argue that to create a space for professional learning and change leaders of the program need to undertake intentional actions to develop a culture that challenges professional growth. Previous research has found that when professional development is undertaken outside of the workplace it is more difficult for the participants to implement changes in their work places (Morgan 2003). Professional development is more successful when the training is implemented in the work place, provides for both off site and on-site support, is aligned with outcomes and expectations, and provides opportunities for critical reflection (Clemans, Berry, & Loughran, 2010; Fleet & Patterson, 2009; Lieberman & Mace, 2009). However, the Discussion paper makes only three references to reflection – one in relation to inspired learning (p.3), another with respect to an international snapshot highlighting teacher preparation courses that have a strong focus on critical reflection (p. 5); and another with respect to employers' reporting on teachers Professional Teaching standards (p. 10).

6. Conclusion

The New South Wales Minister for Education is to be commended in broadly distributing a Discussion paper and encouraging teacher education students, parents and employers as well as Principals and teachers to respond to issues raised in the paper. The ensuing discussion provides an opportunity to garner the expertise of those responsible for our children's education and well-being and so contribute to debate about critical areas of teacher initial preparation, responsibilities for student learning and ongoing professional development. In taking this opportunity to respond to the *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Discussion paper* we have raised critical concerns and identified significant omissions relevant to an educational sector that appears to have been overlooked in the development of a way forward.

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