10

Teacher education in ECCE

Desma Hughes, Ufemia Camaitoga and Jessie Fuamatu

In this chapter, we describe the early childhood teacher education programmes in the institutions where we teach: the University of the South Pacific (USP), Lautoka Teachers’ College and Fulton College. While these institutions are situated in Fiji, USP also has campuses in the 12 Pacific Island countries that make up the University. The USP programme is, therefore, a regional one.

The University of the South Pacific

Desma Hughes

Early childhood teacher training began at USP in 1982 with the Pacific Preschool Teachers Certificate programme offered through the Continuing Education Section. The certificate was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Pacific Preschool Council, Continuing Education and the Institute of Education of USP. The programme consisted of three modules which could be studied over three semesters through distance education. This qualification was initially aimed at further developing early childhood education teachers’ knowledge and skills in working with young children and their families in the region.
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

Over a number of years, many teachers from all the USP member countries, but especially Fiji, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, were awarded the certificate. At its Conference in 1985 at USP, the Pacific Preschool Council discussed the possibility of an advanced course to be offered after the certificate programme, in response to requests from the certificate graduates. Funding to write courses and provide ECCE books for a Diploma in Early Childhood Education through the distance mode was provided by UNICEF. Several writers were involved in this and, in 1994, USP offered the Diploma in ECE for the first time. In 1996 Ms Anne Glover was seconded from the University of South Australia for a year to reorganise as well as revise some units of the Diploma programme. There were only six students in the first intake, but numbers grew steadily and, in 1998, a permanent ECE Coordinator took up the lecturer’s position. Over 100 students have now completed the ECE Diploma.

Early childhood education is a specialist area as this is where the foundation is laid for the child’s later development and learning. Additionally, parent and family involvement is an integral part of any early childhood programme as they are viewed as partners in their children’s education. The period of early childhood (birth to eight years of age) is a time when children are still developing and are vulnerable, so the focus of an early childhood curriculum should be holistic, caring, and developmentally as well as culturally appropriate. If children’s development is well rounded in the five areas (emotional, social, intellectual, physical and language), they are more likely to succeed in school. On the other hand, if children’s development is poor in these areas, they are likely to fall behind. Too often in the Pacific the value of early childhood education is underestimated and not seen as crucial to a child’s later achievements.

The philosophy of teaching and learning in early childhood education is very different from other teaching areas in that it uses a play-based approach, with a focus on individuality and the uniqueness of each child, rather than seeing children as a fairly homogenous group. ECCE uses a broad base of knowledge which includes health, nutrition, holistic development, developmental psychology, leadership, art, craft, music, movement, language, working with families, and early intervention.
Since the introduction of better teacher training programmes in recent years, communities have begun to see the value of ECCE programmes and teacher training. In urban areas, where extended family members are often absent and cannot look after children, preschool enrolments have burgeoned. This increase and the establishment of new centres (pre-schools, kindergartens and day-care centres) have led to a rising demand for teachers.

In addition, as a result of the Education for All programme, many Pacific Island governments are focussing on the ECE sector and have made early childhood education a priority, persuaded by the growing amount of research evidence showing that quality in early childhood education gives children a stronger foundation for formal education.

As a consequence, changes have occurred in the delivery of early childhood education. For example, in the Marshall Islands, kindergarten classes are now overseen by the Ministry of Education and are part of the formal education system. The RMI has also prioritised ECCE teacher training and their USP Centre in Majuro has made ECCE a priority. To assist this, AusAID gave scholarships to ten students to enrol in the ECCE degree programme.

The Cook Islands will start a Diploma in ECE training programme with USP in 2008. This training will most likely lead students into the degree in ECE. In Fiji, early childhood centres are already regulated by the Ministry of Education and they too are upgrading the minimum level of training for ECCE teachers. The Fiji Ministry of Education has pledged their support for the USP ECE degree. In Vanuatu, the Ministry of Education is beginning to regulate preschool education and it is expected that all teachers will have a qualification or will have upgraded existing qualifications by 2010.

Another boost to numbers in the ECCE teacher training programmes results from funding agencies (e.g. AusAID and NZAID) which now provide scholarships to ECE students who in the past were self- or privately-funded. This has begun to impact on and increase numbers of students enrolling and completing ECCE programmes and will enable students to complete at a faster rate.
Early childhood education includes classes 1 and 2 in primary education. In many Pacific countries, certificated primary trained teachers who teach these classes in primary school find it difficult to work with 7 and 8 year-old children. To prepare themselves better, many have enrolled in the ECE Diploma programme. This will have a follow through effect into the degree programme since the level of study is related to salary scales.

In addition, regional teacher education institutions such as Lautoka Teachers’ College, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and Kiribati Teachers’ College have, or will shortly have, ECCE teacher training at the certificate or advanced certificate level and are encouraging their students to move into the diploma and degree programmes.

The USP degree programme

As senior lecturer in the School of Education at USP, I recently carried out a research project into the needs of ECE teachers. I interviewed and surveyed USP Diploma in ECE graduates. I found that 89% of the graduates indicated that they wished to do further studies in early childhood education. Many of them were already teachers in preschool and primary school, or were working in ministries of education as advisors or conducting special projects in the field to assist other early childhood education teachers. They believed that they were not adequately prepared for such positions by the certificate and diploma programmes. Many expressed a desire to do postgraduate study and carry out research in ECCE, which is sadly lacking in the Pacific context. As a consequence of this expressed desire and of the increasing numbers of centres, USP developed a bachelor’s degree in ECE. An Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives from most of the larger nations of the Pacific, met several times to discuss possible courses for the degree, based on perceived needs of existing teachers, and new courses were written, many of them by myself. The new courses studied in the degree are related to young children’s management and understanding of behaviour; language and literacy development; an inquiry approach to maths, science and the environment; art, craft, music, and movement; developing social competence and emotional health; play; health safety and nutrition; and early intervention (early special education).
Eight courses from the Diploma in ECE or the Advanced Certificate in ECE from Lautoka Teachers’ College can be cross-credited towards the new BEd.

Within the diploma there is a practicum. The practicum is a structured course with set tasks. It consists of a compulsory five-day workshop with the lecturer and a minimum 10-week placement in an approved ECCE centre. The student teacher is expected to demonstrate an ability to relate previously studied theoretical material to its application in set tasks such as child observations; planning individual and whole class programmes; planning, implementation and evaluation of programme plans; parent talks; administrative tasks and so on. By the completion of the practicum the student should be able to take responsibility for teaching and leadership/management tasks in an ECCE setting. In the degree programme, students perform practical activities and a short practicum may be included in the future.

Early childhood education is based on the context of the child. For example, a child who lives by the sea will experience many activities related to the sea. Most of the courses emphasise the context of the child and the family. The ECCE degree programme will be unique to the Pacific context—another priority area in the USP Strategic Plan.

The future of early childhood education rests with people who value it and make a commitment to this special branch of education—the families, teachers, early childhood workers, caregivers, ECCE leaders, ECCE senior guidance officers in ministries of education and teacher trainers. Already, teachers show a huge commitment by studying for few incentives, paying for their own studies, and teaching long hours for very low wages. They are shown little appreciation by many community members. It is hoped that the wider community will see the improved performance in primary school among children who have had quality early childhood education, and become advocates, putting pressure on governments to increase funding to ECCE, especially teacher training, teaching resources and books. Early childhood education in many countries only improves when the families join with the teachers to push for better conditions, funding and appreciation for this ‘poor cousin’ in education.
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

Lautoka Teachers’ College

Ufemia Camaitoga

The first Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate programme at Lautoka Teachers’ College (LTC) was offered in 1999. In that year, 15 in-service students from rural communities were enrolled into the one year on-campus programme. In 2003, a comprehensive review of LTC’s teacher-education programmes was conducted, beginning with ECE. The review was funded by AusAID and Dr Glen Palmer was the ECE consultant. She consulted extensively with key stakeholders during the review and recommended that the ECE courses be upgraded to what is currently the Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ACECE) with some modifications to the structure and pedagogies of the first certificate programme.

Based on the review, Dr Glen Palmer, Biu Cava and I designed and developed twelve courses for the ACECE programme: Semester One courses are: child development, communication and study skills, early childhood learning environment, early language and literacy, language study (Fijian/Hindi/Tamil/Urdu/Rotuman) and music, movement and drama. Semester Two courses are: art for young children, management/leadership/advocacy, programming and planning, working with parents and families, foundations of maths and science, and health and nutrition.

Professional practice is built into each semester, totalling six weeks in the year. The establishment of a campus playgroup to support students’ observational research and training in collaboration with the parents paved the way for participatory action research.

ACECE students attend lectures with the pre-service diplomates in the following courses: child development, communication and study skills, language study. Both music and art are specialised areas so the diploma lecturers’ expertise is utilised, offering personal strands, whilst the professional strand is taken care of by the ECE lecturers. Assessment tasks are also shared to ensure articulation into the diploma programme.
Eight of the ACECE courses are cross-credited to the Bachelor in Education, EC (in-service) at USP.

Where to from here?

In the past three years, Dr Glen Palmer recommended in her report that the ACECE could articulate into the LTC Diploma in Primary Education programme, and we hope the College will respond positively to a new direction in what Fiji can call its own innovation in teacher-education. The issue of a growing lack of concern in teaching infant classes could be filled by early childhood graduates seeing the diploma programme has not articulated early childhood pedagogies with a strong focus on transition to primary school. The question of monitoring and evaluating graduates and practising teachers is of grave concern too. To do this, negotiations could begin with the Ministry of Education and Public Service Commission in allocating ten places from the pre-service programme for selected early childhood trainees to upskill to the first year in the diploma programme. This, I believe is the way forward for ECCD teacher education in Fiji.

Fulton College

Jessie Fuamatu

Fulton College provides a teacher training Primary Education course for many of the teachers in the Pacific. At present it is undergoing changes in staff and as a result new challenges have presented opportunities to develop our focus in the area of ECCE. Currently ECCE features in several courses in the Primary Diploma programme. These include the Learning and Teaching, Human Development, Philosophy on Christian Education, and Special Needs courses.

These courses provide students with knowledge and skills that build on quality foundations to enhance rich learning experiences in the early years. This quality in ECCE contributes directly to the success of children in primary school. The learning and teaching courses emphasise the importance of developing this quality learning experience through the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. This is all part of preparing children not only for primary schooling but also
Early childhood care and education in the Pacific

lifelong learning. Early childhood education will continue to feature prominently within the Primary programme and address the importance of the early years from birth to eight years of age.

We plan to offer some specialist courses in the area of early childhood education. Students will be provided with evidence from research on the significant benefits for children in the early years. These course will focus on the importance of nurturing children's mental, physical, social, and spiritual development. This ties in very closely with the principles and philosophy of Christian education and the special character of our institution.

Fulton College as a training institution offers not only Primary Education, Business, and IT courses; we also offer a Theology Diploma and B.A degree programme. Many of the men who study in these programmes at Fulton are married students and their wives are left at home with young children. The women decided to meet regularly as a group to prepare themselves for the roles they are expected to carry out when their husbands graduate. They started up a play group which meets once a month, with plans to increase the time when a more appropriate venue is established. This group was formed by the women of the College community and the purpose was to provide support for the mothers and allow children across campus to interact with one another. The women were keen to access information on the development of young children and the importance of play in the early years. This interest has created opportunities to share valuable information on healthy practices, and physical and cognitive development of young children.

One of our visionary educational goals is to explore the possibility of delivering a Certificate in ECCE and, later, developing this towards a Diploma and finally a Bachelor of Education course. These stages of development are the result of interest expressed by the women from the community group and the plans of the education staff on campus.

As an educational institution, Fulton College is committed to making a difference in people’s lives in the Pacific. We believe that early childhood education is a critical link to providing a strong foundation for children and it can bring communities