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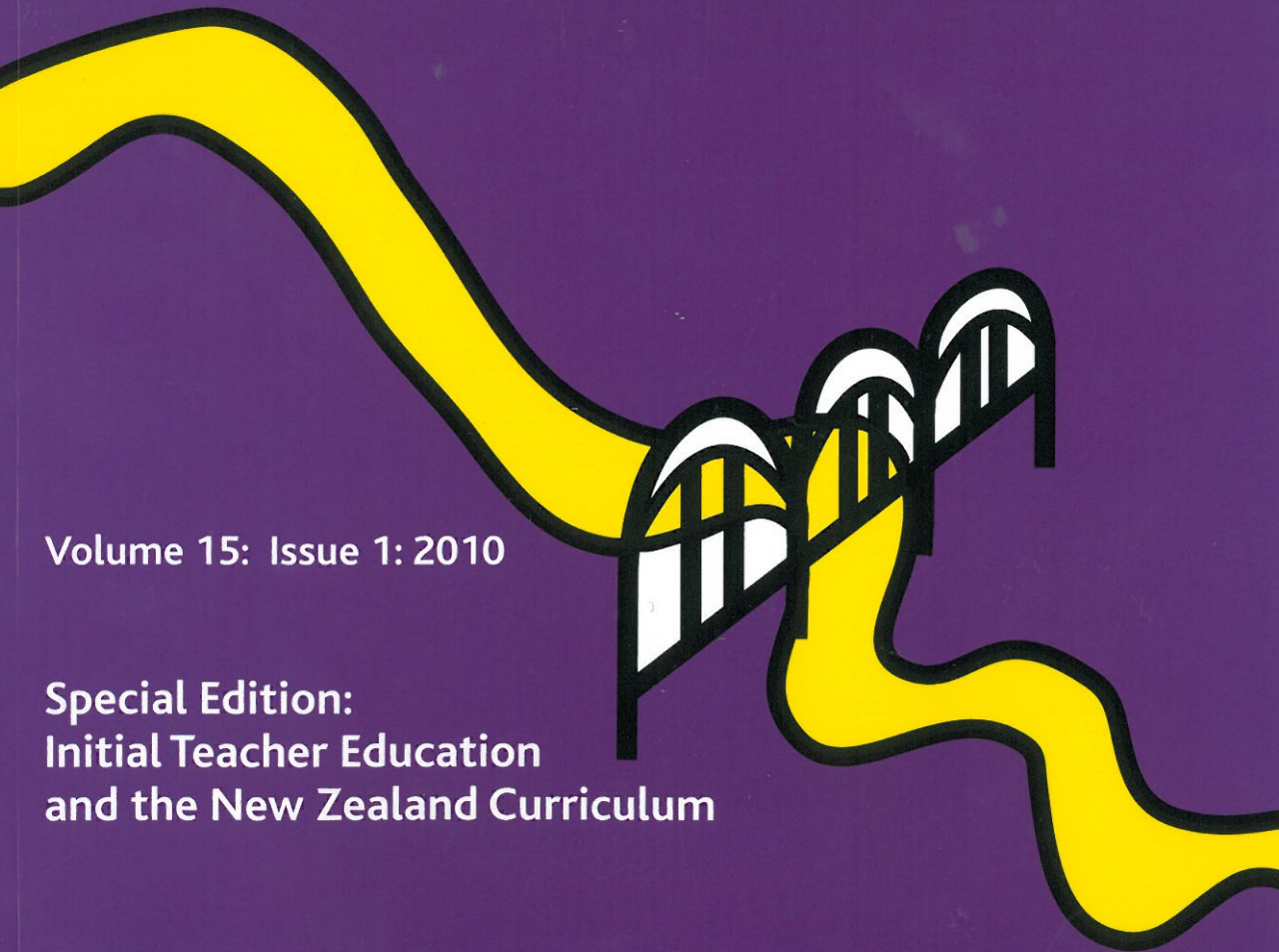
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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: ACTION RESEARCH IN TEACHING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper reports on a Te Ao Māori based teacher education programme and how it used action research as a guide. This paper specifically reports on the first cohort that has progressed through this three-year programme. The results of this study indicate that those student teachers who participated in this realistic style of teacher education were able to gain a sense of self-efficacy, self-determination and self-as-teacher. The implications of this study impact on how initial teacher education programmes in New Zealand are structured and delivered.*

KEY WORDS

Initial teacher education, primary education, Māori education, action research

THE ISSUE

The status of initial teacher education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand at the start of the 21st century was summarised by Kane (2005) in her final report to the Ministry of Education on the policy and practice of Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary providers. In this report Kane identified several curriculum implications that have impacted on this study. First, student teachers are expected to develop a range of knowledge, understanding, characteristics and competencies to enable them to manage effectively in a classroom. A major challenge for initial teacher education is to decide what is needed in programmes of study and what can reasonably be left for the provisionally registered teacher to develop on the job. Second, providers should be encouraged to engage in critical examination of the conceptual framework of their programmes. The revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) has again made it important to consider changes in ITE such as curricular integration, key competencies and the Treaty of Waitangi. Third, providers need to ensure that all qualifications are built upon good teaching practice that is supported by a sound theoretical foundation to include relevant research on teacher education, the design of teacher education programmes, quality teaching, how people learn and how people learn to teach. Finally, providers also need to give attention to the identification of ways in which their student teachers develop and demonstrate the professionalism needed to meet the educational needs of a diverse range of children with the explicit intention of promoting inclusion and social justice as educational goals (Kane, 2005, pp. 236–7).

The study being reported on has been in progress since July 2007. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is a tertiary provider that promotes Māori education through tikanga (customs) and āhuatanga (characteristic, feature, attribute) Māori. The Te Korowai Ākonga (Bachelor of Teaching–Primary) programme is accredited to be delivered

through the English-language medium. As a Māori focused organisation this programme has a foundation in Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview). This means that while the content is primarily delivered in English the explicit usage of traditional Māori pedagogies (Hemara, 2000) are incorporated (Sexton, 2008). Specifically, this paper reports on how a Te Ao Māori based teacher education programme modelling action research in the classroom impacted on the formation of the teacher role identity of thirteen Year 3 student teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the strongest findings regarding the recruitment of quality beginning teachers related to the serious concerns teachers and principals had about the variable quality of graduates of initial teacher education. Kane and Mallon (2006) reported widespread dissatisfaction with current initial teacher education across all sectors. This dissatisfaction resulted from education stakeholders who felt there were too many providers and that some entry requirements were not rigorous enough. These stakeholders also expressed concern over school-based teaching practice and graduates who lacked a sense of professionalism. Kane and Mallon (2006) stated “teachers, principals and student teachers generally all questioned the quality of preservice education and the sense of preparedness it fostered for beginning teachers” (p. 29).

Initial teacher education is widely accepted as the beginning of a teacher’s professional career (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that initial teacher education should model what it is to be a teacher in the classroom. As such, the content of initial teacher education should reflect the content of professional learning opportunities. Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007), in their best evidence synthesis on teacher professional learning and development, identified three conceptual understanding and skills that deepened through professional learning activities

1. Understanding that could be used to inform practice such as knowledge of the subject, curriculum, pedagogy, student characteristics and theoretical frameworks;
2. Understandings related to teachers’ own practice such as how practice impacts on a diverse range of students; and
3. Methods of inquiry that challenged teacher practice. (p. 28)

Timperley et al. (2007) then went on to identify eleven professional development/professional learning activities designed to develop and deepen these professional understandings and skills:

1. Listening;
2. Watching;
3. Being observed and receiving feedback;
4. Receiving student activities and materials;
5. Engaging with professional readings;
6. Discussing practice with someone more expert;

7. Authentic experience of subject in action;
8. Discussing own theories of practice and their implications;
9. Examining student understandings and outcomes;
10. Analysis of current practice and reconstruction of new practice; and
11. Discussing self or mutually identified issues. (p. 29)

It must be noted that while Timperley et al.'s (2007) best evidence synthesis drew together a wide body of both New Zealand and international research, its purpose was to inform teaching practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was also noted by Pakai (2007) in her report on initial teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand that Māori needed to have self-determination to enhance and improve their own educational achievement. Pakai reported that societal inequalities could be addressed by initial teacher education programmes to rural and Māori communities. These programmes could provide student teachers with opportunities to work with a diverse range of students to inform their own learning that can then be applied to children's learning. These two ideas come together in Timperley's (2008) *Educational Practices Series*—18.

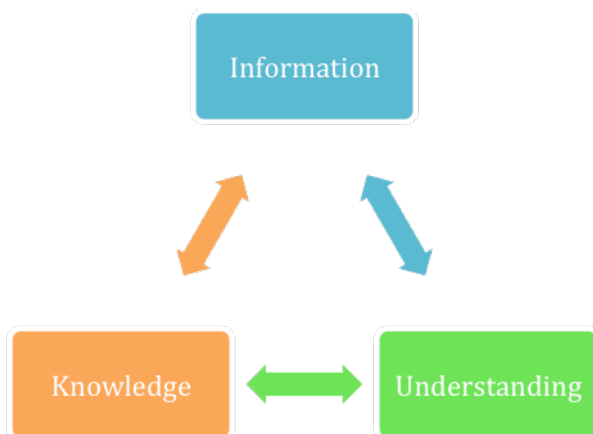
Timperley (2008) identified ten key principles that have been seen in the international research to have positive impacts on student outcomes. More importantly to this study, she prefaces these key principles with four important understandings:

1. Notwithstanding the influence of factors such as socio-economic status, home, and community, student learning is strongly influenced by what and how teachers teach.
2. Teaching is a complex activity. Factors affecting the decisions made include teacher's own ideological beliefs about what is important to teach, how they see students learning and external demands.
3. It is important to set up conditions that are responsive to the ways in which teachers learn.
4. Professional learning is strongly shaped by the context in which the teacher practices. (p. 6)

Finally, for Te Korowai Ākonga to align Timperley's (2008) and Timperley et al.'s (2007) teacher professional learning and development with Pakai's (2007) notion of initial teacher education addressing social inequalities required Aluli-Meyer's (2006) triangulation of meaning. Aluli-Meyer stated that meaning needs to be seen from all three sides: the body (objective/empirical knowing), mind (conscious subjectivity) and spirit (recognition and engagement with deeper realities). This triangulation is not linear but occurs simultaneously. Relevant to the present study is her description of this triangulation as information, knowledge and understanding (see Figure 1). It was with this notion that the intervention in a local school was conceived. The tauira had expressed concern that they were only getting the information and having to attempt to gain knowledge from in-class role-playing with colleagues. They wanted and needed the opportunities to engage in deeper realities while simultaneously applying the information and knowledge. It was

through the action research cycles that they felt they were finally putting it all together and reaching a point of understanding.

Figure 1. Triangulation of Meaning
(Adapted from Aluli-Meyer, 2006)



RATIONALE AND INTERVENTION METHOD

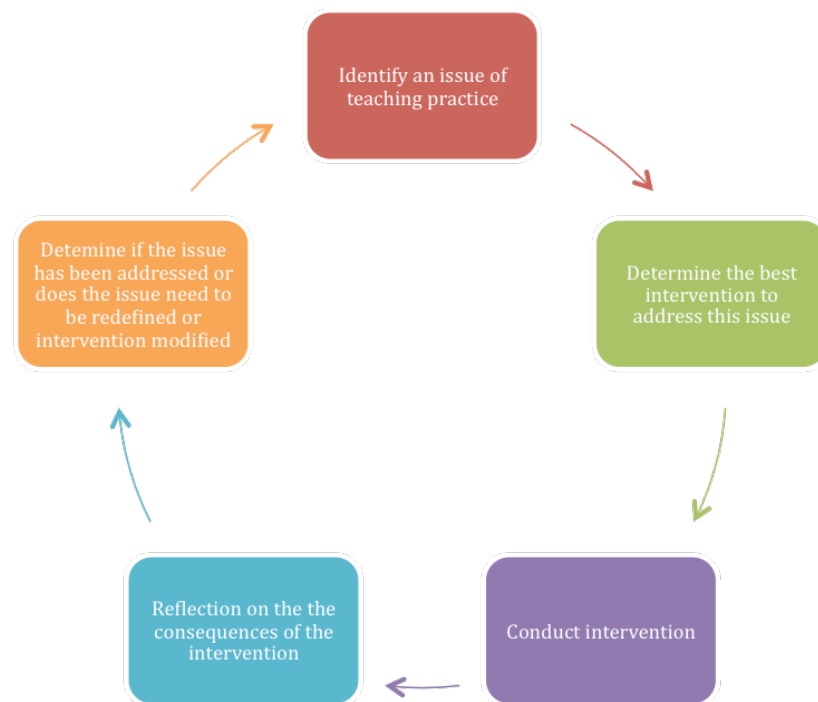
In 2007, Te Korowai-Akonga was modelling the 1993 New Zealand curriculum documents. As the second semester was about to begin, the kaiako (tutorial staff) decided to begin delivery using the 2006 draft document to prepare the taura (students) for the implementation of the revised curriculum that was to follow (Ministry of Education, 2007). The programme's intention was to prepare the then Year 1 cohort to graduate in October 2009 with a thorough foundation in the 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum* prior to its full implementation in schools from 2010.

For the remainder of the 2007 academic year all curriculum and theory papers were modified to use the terminology and content in the draft document. When the final curriculum was released, the draft documents were replaced in 2008 with the revised 2007 New Zealand curriculum document. The course was now to model the explicit usage of learning intentions, success criteria, key competencies, and integrated curriculum planning and learning experiences that were seen to be relevant, useful and meaningful to its taura. Te Korowai Ākonga kaiako were to model to taura through action research that it was hoped they would continue to do when they entered the profession as provisionally registered teachers.

O'Brien (2001) defined action research as learning by doing. This is a method that starts with first identifying a problem. Once a problem has been identified, a decision is needed on what can be done through an intervention. The next step is an analysis of how the intervention worked towards solving the issue. If the intervention did not fully succeed, the problem is redefined or modified and a further intervention is actioned (see Figure 2). What makes action research different to problem-solving is the co-learning of both the researcher and the participants in the theoretical considerations used to systematically address the issue (O'Brien,

2001) and the need for each intervention to be refined and designed to best address the evolving situation.

Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
(Adapted from O'Brien, 2001)



Action research was chosen as the best method for this programme because of its focus on turning the people involved into researchers. For Te Korowai Ākonga, this meant that the tauira needed to practice for themselves the theory that was being discussed in the classroom. In classroom discussion, the tauira became concerned that a great deal of theory was being discussed without linkage to professional practice. The significance and importance of the theory was being lost due to a lack of true understanding. Time was needed to put into practice what was being discussed in class.

It was decided that for these tauira to gain a better understanding, they needed time in the classroom beyond their practicum placements. The practicum placements gave the tauira the opportunity to see how classrooms function on a day-to-day basis. Most of these tauira reported in placement debriefs that they spent most of their time on management issues or requirements imposed upon them by either their associate teachers or the practicum assessment tasks. They believed they were not getting the time they felt they needed to think and reflect on what was happening and what they needed to do next. They were focusing on getting through the day and just getting to Friday before “collapsing” at the weekend.

To allow for this reflection time, permission was sought at a local school to allow these tauira additional teaching time in a classroom. A local primary school

agreed to allow the tauira to do a once a week placement over Term 2, 2009 for language and mathematics lessons. The language lessons were 75 minutes and the mathematics 50 minutes. The classroom teacher had already established routines for both subject areas and Te Korowai Ākonga agreed to work with her routines. This action research initially required the tauira to observe what the students were doing and to determine what they would need to do for the next lesson. This targeted classroom teaching practice would allow tauira the opportunities to plan, teach, reflect and then prepare the next lesson. The tauira were paired so that while both planned the lesson, one would teach while the other observed what was happening. Then both tauira were able to reflect on this experience as they were to swap roles for the next session the following week. Only after their reflections and peer discussion were complete would the kaiako then offer comments and suggestions. The tauira were now going to get the time to prepare, then practice and after that reflect before finally planning to go back and continue with the next learning experience.

FINDINGS

This study suggests action research as one such professional learning activity as defined by Timperley et al. (2007). Through action research in the classroom as a means of inquiry, tauira were given the opportunities to deepen their own understanding of content, pedagogy, own practice and how this impacted on a diverse range of students.

Over the duration of Term 2, 2009, these tauira were given the opportunity to put into practice what was being discussed in class. It was this time in the classroom undertaking lessons that finally gave them the chance to make linkages. The action research cycles gave them the time to plan, prepare, teach and then most importantly for this present study, time to reflect on what happened and where to go next. It was this reflection time that finally allowed these tauira the opportunity to concentrate on their own teaching practice and how it impacted on the students. As the teaching sessions were a week apart, tauira had the time to think about what happened individually and as a pair. A third opportunity followed with the kaiako before planning the next session. Linking the theory and practice outside the practicum placement was what worked for them.

DISCUSSION

Of the thirteen tauira in this cohort, four were approached to have their stories presented: Ruth, Normanda, Betty and Aroha. These four tauira were selected for the present study as they offered a cross-section of the tauira in Whirikōka's Te Korowai Ākonga. All are middle-aged Māori women who had negative schooling experiences growing up. They all left secondary schooling without any formal qualifications. In Aroha's case she left school almost a year before being legally able to withdraw. After several years of raising their own families, all had decided to go back to education. Ruth and Aroha went back as examples to their children of what they could achieve if they set a goal and worked towards it. Betty was working against some of her family to obtain this degree and has had to overcome

many personal obstacles over the past ten years to get to this point. Normanda spent over a decade travelling the world representing Māori through performing arts. When she became a mother and unable to travel she left the group and found herself with no employment opportunities. She viewed returning to education as her last option to obtain a career.

These tauira were asked to comment on how they saw their time in the classroom undertaking their own action research into their own teaching practice. They were asked by Year 2 tauira to comment on how they felt this targeted teaching time benefitted them. The kaiako wanted tauira to talk to tauira about what they did and how they felt about it. It is planned to make this action research a component of the Year 3 programme.

Ruth volunteered to tell her story. She told them she was a 40-ish aged Māori woman with several children and no formal education beyond age fifteen. She had began her education at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in the Mauri Ora programme and then proceeded to work her way through various other programmes. She was one of the last tauira to undertake the teacher aide programme that was offered before it was redeveloped into Te Korowai Ākonga. After several years working as a teacher aide, she then decided to enrol in the degree level programme. If successful, she will be the first member of her family to graduate with a tertiary degree.

She, like many of the tauira, expressed a weakness in mathematics in Year 1 and struggled with her own educational past in this subject area. Mathematics had always meant failure to her and she reported that she had been repeatedly told throughout her prior schooling that she could not do it and never would be able to do it. While practicum gave her the opportunity to plan and conduct whole class activities and work with different groups based on abilities, there was never enough time to reflect and think about what she was doing and why. After these sessions, Ruth changed her opinion, "I liked it, I really enjoyed my lessons I did in maths, I reflected and knew what I was doing, this is something we really need more of". When asked what made these sessions different from placement, Ruth explained

This was working with them [children], hands on, so even by the second lesson it was so much more fun, I was more organised, I had a better idea of what I wanted and what I needed ... what I mean is that by the second time I was more excited, more engaged, I got stuff from them, I found they knew more than what I expected.

When asked how these sessions would impact on her teaching, she summarised the whole experience simply as, "it makes you think more now, I think I could now".

Normanda explained that she joined this programme after transferring from a large mainstream university. She had completed her first year but did not feel she was going to be able to survive another two years. She felt that she was being isolated and marginalised by that system. She wanted to return home and sought whānau advice and support. Her mother-in-law is a kaiako at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and suggested she transfer to Te Korowai Ākonga in her local area. ITE was delivered face-to-face and maintained small class sizes to support

whakawhānaungatanga (relationships). She visited the campus, talked to several taura and then applied to enrol.

Normanda has a strong sense of cultural identity through performing arts and her reo. She has relied on this to help her mask her academic weaknesses. Specifically, she stated she had sought out practicum placements in schools where she could concentrate on her musical talents. As a result she felt she was not prepared to take on all the roles and responsibilities that will be required of a provisionally registered teacher. She told the second year cohort she did not want to be the school's kapa haka teacher; she wanted to be a teacher who had kapa haka as a skill she could bring to the school.

When asked how these sessions helped her overcome this, she responded that it was not as easy or fast for her as it was for Ruth, "it took five or six times but they got it". Normanda realised that her own teaching practice was going to impact on the students in her class. She realised she needed to think about what she was doing and how she was doing it. Normanda explained that for her, she could not just cover the basics and expect her students to respond. As she put it, "it helped me think about how I could extend them more and if I could have started extending them earlier".

When asked what she had gained the most from in these sessions, she bluntly stated it was guided reading with school journals. In class, working with peers, role playing with guided reading would often turn into silliness, but when working with actual nine-year old school students, she found that "the journals were now actually working for me as we learned how to really use them".

Betty told the class she been trying to further her education over the past decade. She began by undertaking her teacher training by distance learning until working alone became too much of a stumbling block and she could not continue. Not deterred she completed a degree in Te Reo Māori proving to herself she was academically capable of tertiary level study. A further attempt at a teaching diploma by distance learning again proved to be too difficult. She felt that she needed direct communication with other taura and kaiako to discuss the topics that she was studying.

When asked to explain how these sessions were different to practicum placements Betty stated

It was good to have hands on experience to put into practice what we are taught here, to actually have students unlike placement where we did get to spend more time with the students but you have to plan and implement the next day.

When asked to explain what she meant by put into practice the theory, she explained, "it was like PD [professional development], it was good". Unfortunately, she was called away due to a sick child at school and had to leave the discussion.

Aroha told the second years that she had started the programme full of self-doubt and burdened with family commitments that put a strain on her mental, physical and emotional reserves. She explained that she had actually left school almost a year before she was legally able to. When her mother went to school to formally withdraw her, they had not even bothered to track down a student who had

missed almost an entire year. She knew she was invisible at school and this only confirmed her impression of school. She did not want her children to have this same experience. She told them she would be the first member of her family on both her and her husband's side to gain a degree qualification. She also told them that all her children would be next.

Aroha gave a summary of how these teaching sessions impacted on her and her teaching, "having these opportunities to focus on only one lesson let me finally bring it all together". When asked to explain what she meant, she stated, "I finally figured out what to do, that was awesome". She also provided the best summary of how these sessions were different from practicum teaching, "I knew I could plan for my final placement but now I know I can teach my final placement, this really allowed me to put it all together".

CONCLUSION

Student teachers need to have experience in identifying, conducting, analysing and reflecting on how educational achievement can embrace a wide diversity in terms of backgrounds, experiences, skills, and characteristics in relation to their own learning. Then they will be more aware of how they can apply the same concepts to their own students' learning. As this study has shown, practicum placements do not always provide those opportunities. The student teachers in this study needed more time in the classroom to bring together the theories and concepts being discussed without the burden of day-to-day classroom control. This study has shown that targeted time in the classroom with a focus on an action research approach to the analysis of their own teaching practice was a method of inquiry that allowed positive professional development of these teachers.

There are implications for ITE. Initial teacher education has been recognised as a complex process (Timperley, 2008) with the goal of graduating qualified people able to enter the classroom as effective beginning professionals. Provisionally registered teachers are expected to possess a range of knowledge, understandings, characteristics and competencies to ensure high quality learning outcomes for all children and young people with whom they work (Kane, 2005). These teachers will need a sound theoretical foundation of teaching linked to current policies, documents and research and initiatives affecting schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The significance for ITE is how to provide the opportunities needed to not only develop but also demonstrate professionalism in catering for a diverse range of learners. It has been shown in this study that the use of action research as a means of analysing a student teacher's own professional development can be a powerful tool. Investigating their teaching practice gave these participating student teachers the opportunity to take information discussed and apply their own knowledge of classroom practice in a realistic setting to be able to understand it.

It was those opportunities to put into practice the eleven activities identified by Timperley et al. (2007) that deepened their own professional understanding and skills. These student teachers expressed how they were able to benefit from targeted time in an authentic classroom settings. They were able to listen, watch, observe and get feedback from both a peer and a more expert practitioner. These student teachers were able to draw together the course content material to understand their

own teaching practice. They were able to do this through reflection on their own practice, discussions with peers and experts about practice and then self-identification of issues about their own teaching practice.

As stated, Aroha summed up this experience for herself and her cohort, “I knew I could plan for my final placement but now I know I can teach my final placement”.

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