

Course Director's Report – Finding a Place Here in Aotearoa New Zealand

TRCC Course for EC Teachers held at Brentwood Hotel, 18th-20th April 2018.

Course Director – Cathy Sheppard

Committee Members – Kaniz Ali (Newlands Childcare Centre) and Rebecca Miller (Mt Cook Preschool)

TRCC Liaison – Diane Lawrence

This course was aimed at teachers who are working with families who have immigrated to New Zealand from Asia, the Middle East, and refugee families. The numbers of families and children from these backgrounds in our early childhood centres have been increasing rapidly over the last few years, and there is little professional development available to help increase people's understanding of the unique situations facing these families in culture, language, difficulties they're facing to settle into New Zealand, as well as responding to support trauma they've experienced. The aim was to help people develop a greater understanding of different cultures beyond the Pacific, and how to use this understanding to build stronger early childhood communities which support children and families to find a place here.

Day 1: Setting the scene

Opening session: Introduction to Culture and different World Views – Cathy Sheppard and committee

Personal Journeys: Rebecca Miller and Cathy Sheppard

Centre Journey: Newlands Childcare Centre with Veronica Simonsen and Kaniz Ali

Day 2: Developing tools and understanding

Key note: Jenny Ritchie – Tangata Whenua/Tangata Tiriti

Key note: Sarah Best – Brainwave Trust presentation on Brain Development, Attachment, Language Development

Workshops: Choose 2 of 3 available

- Sarah Best – Impact of trauma and stress
- Anna Strycharz-Banaz – building connections with people
- Centre Journeys – Berhampore & Newtown Kindergartens

Day 3: The final touches

Panel presentation:

- Refugee families tell their stories
- Ruth from the Early Childhood Centre at Mangere
- Angela from Dunedin, working to develop systems to support families, centres and schools in Otago

Putting it into place: reflecting on personal and centre philosophies, creating action plans

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Reflections:

I was very happy with how the course turned out and the engagement of everyone with it throughout the course. The topic is a huge one, and it was not easy to work out what the best messages were to communicate, and how to do it justice in just three days when these are people's lives. I think the course we developed was coherent and appropriate, and supported people's learning journeys in this area. This was reflected in the feedback, with 96% of people giving the course a rating of 4 or 5 on a scale of 5 for the programme being effective and appropriate. (100% of participants rated 3 or above.)

I can't talk highly enough about the support I had particularly from Diane, both before and during the course. Having Serina there for the duration was a massive bonus too, thank you. I also must thank Eseta for all her work and support through the planning stages of the course. Thanks also to Eseta and Chris for making sure we had everything needed for the start of the course itself – all the bookings, the certificates, the printed booklets, name tags, pens, bags, etc. Organising everything required for a course is massive, and it's fantastic when it all comes together. When it's good, then the space is created for the participants to learn and grow, enabling learning that will impact on their lives and those of whom they work with. Thank you to you all for enabling this.

Rebecca, Ali and I were very happy with how the course went, and the growth we saw in people. One thing about this course is that it touched on very personal journeys for many people, journeys of exploring identity, culture, assumptions and judgements, what makes us human regardless of background, and the importance of connection and relationship. We know that this was explored powerfully over the 3 days – with many people saying on the last day that this course had involved tears.

It was really pleasing to see that the growth we saw in people has been reflected in the feedback from the course. I am delighted to see the shifts in every area for people from the before and after course surveys, with huge shifts in the areas of leadership, ability to understand different cultural backgrounds, building inclusive centres, ability to respond to individual students, and engage effectively with families and communities.

Our aims for the course were to increase people's leadership abilities, deepen understanding of different cultural backgrounds, and to build an inclusive centre responsive to the needs of all families. The shifts here are a good representation of the shifts in each area of the course, with those answering good or above increasing to 80% or above in almost every area (7 out of 9 questions), while those needing development or developing reduced to 20% or below in almost every area (again 7 out of 9 questions).

1. 'Finding a Place Here' is going to provide you with opportunities to increase your knowledge about: developing yourself as a leader; deepening your understanding of different cultural backgrounds, and building an inclusive centre that is responsive to the needs of all families. How would you rate your current knowledge of these topics collectively?

- those answering needs development or developing reduced from 65% to 20%
- those answering good or above increased from 35% to 80%
- with those answering very good or above increasing from 10 to 45%

While still a good shift, the smallest was in the area of understanding the needs of immigrants. Several sessions addressed this – the workshop with Anna on the Thursday, and the session on the Friday morning with the Refugee families, Angela, and Ruth. In the feedback after the course, people mentioned that everyone needed to have attended Anna's workshop – it was so powerful. Also, I believe enabling Angela and Ruth to have more time to talk about their work and experiences would have helped increase these shifts.

We started the course with a day exploring culture and personal journeys. The first session was an eye opener for most of the people in the room, as we explored different ways that people do things, that are just accepted as part of their culture as the right way of doing things. Seeing people's visceral reactions to the idea of sniffing or eating noisily being appropriate behaviour was very telling for them all. It was a thought provoking session that enabled lots of conversations and provided a great introduction to the course as a whole.

Language and its place in culture and identity was a key theme throughout the course. The impact of not being able to speak a language to people's identity and ability to form relationships, or communicate effectively was seen through many stories, both as part of my own and my family's journey, and hearing from the families that came in on the third day. This impact is huge and long lasting – affecting the individuals and families in different ways for the rest of their lives. There were only four people in that room who spoke more than English, (4 out of about 35), so this was a key area of learning for many.

We were delighted with the speakers that came in to support the kaupapa. The anecdotal feedback from people was also extremely positive, and has been backed up by the written feedback collected after the course. The session from Jenny Ritchie on Tangata Whenua/Tangata Tiriti was fabulous. Sarah Best from the Brainwave Trust's keynote address on brain development and attachment was very well received, and her workshops in the afternoon on the effects of trauma and how to support this were good too. Anna's sessions were so simple and powerful – so many people talked about the impact of these that evening and the following day. This was backed up in the written feedback, with many people recommending her sessions as having been important for everyone to attend. She was able to distill everything down so simply and show people how to enable deep connection. An amazing experience for many – I highly recommend her for future courses wherever possible! Having the 2 kindergartens share their very practical experiences of working in their centres with the many different families, and enable people to explore this in the smaller sessions, was really good too. People did want clearer descriptions of the content of the workshops to enable making a choice easier.

From the participant's feedback, many people wished they could have attended all three of these workshops, and this is what I think too. When we were originally planning the course, we were planning for 80 – 100 people. With these numbers, and because of the way many of the other TRCC courses are run, the aim was to have quite a few workshops for participants to choose from, so they could follow their interests. If we had originally known that there would only be around 30 participants, then these workshop sessions would have been planned differently, enabling people to attend all three and building a stronger cohesion over the course. (Probably more similar to the TRCC ECE Leadership Workshop He Waka Eke Noa, where the group was split into two for some parts and workshops were repeated.)

I thank Diane and Serina for the way they organised it so people were well spread over the workshops on the day. One of the difficulties was having the smaller numbers to spread over 3 great workshops that were being repeated. It would have been hard to choose!

The final day started with very powerful stories from 3 families (4 parents plus their children) telling their stories of being refugees, what life was like for them in their countries, in the camps, what their childhood and schooling experiences had been, (how different school is!!!), and then the difficulties of coming to NZ – the cold, the language, the pain of watching your children struggling, the grief of leaving their countries, the difficulties of making new relationships, learning a new way of living, etc, etc, etc. This was followed by hearing from Ruth from the ECE centre in Mangere, and Angela who is working in Dunedin with schools and centres enabling a network to support these families transitioning in. Hearing these aspects of the picture was also fabulous. The hardest questions Ruth has to answer is "Will the teachers in the centres we're going to be like you?"

It would have been even better to have enabled Ruth and Angela to have more time talking about their work with families and centres, and this is reflected in the feedback from participants as well.

The final sessions enabled all the participants to reflect on the learning over the three days, and to reflect on how this learning fits into their philosophy. This time for reflection on people's personal and centre philosophy was something all three of us on the planning committee felt was vital, and we were very pleased to watch the engagement of people in this process, especially as so many of the conversations with teachers over the three days told of the lack of time to do anything extra in centres – the stress, the busy-ness, the constant pulls in multiple directions. Hearing these stories goes to show how important it was to set aside this time near the end of this course to do this reflection.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to lead this course – It was great to be able to work with Rebecca and Ali, and see their growth as teachers through the process too. I think this course has key learnings for ECE teachers across Aotearoa for the families they are working with, and would love to see it run again if possible. I would be willing to course direct again, or to be involved in some other way in the future, if this is wanted by TRCC.

Ngā mihi nui
Cathy

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