

MOTHERS WHO ARE STUDENT TEACHERS: NAVIGATING THEIR DUAL ROLES IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT

Many students in New Zealand are now of mature age, female, and mothers of dependent children (McAllister, Newell, Perry, & Scott, 2006). These students typically experience the challenge of sharing themselves between their children, partners, extended families and their fellow students, lecturers and studying. This research explored how a group of student-teachers who were also mothers experienced these dual roles and sought to document their beliefs, motivations, attitudes to these roles from the time they had entered teacher education. The following key themes emerged from the in-depth interviews with the women: strong motivation for wanting to become primary school teachers; the impact this decision had on the lives of their children, partners and extended families; the particular issues they faced as they tried to navigate the roles of mother and student-teacher; and the suggestions they had for continuing education and tertiary institutions to improve opportunities for other mothers wanting to study. This last theme is perhaps the most pertinent, as it offers implications for continuing education institutions wanting to attract and retain these students, who, as a group, represent a growing demographic trend in the student population.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teacher education courses have traditionally attracted a clientele of school-leavers, but over the last 10 years, there has been a change in the demographics of the student population engaging in this form of continuing education. The students' ages, life experiences and previous work experiences have changed. In line with international

trends (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000), increasing numbers of students participating in higher education are of mature age, with many of them female and mothers.

The number of mature students enrolling in public tertiary institutions in New Zealand has increased dramatically in recent years. In particular, there are a large number of mature students enrolling in teacher education courses (O'Connell, 2005). A third of 841 first- and second-year teachers surveyed by the New Zealand University Students Association had dependent children, and 51% percent of them claimed that their student debt influenced their ability to provide childcare for their children (O'Connell, 2005).

The most recent statistics from New Zealand show that in 2004 there were 3.7 times as many women as men enrolled in teacher training, a figure that reflects a pattern of more female than male teachers in early childhood education and care, primary schools and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2006). This trend also shows the changing profile of these women in terms of their age (more women in older age brackets rather than primarily school-leavers), life experiences (broader), employment histories (experience in one or more spheres of work) and domestic status (partnered or previously partnered and mothers of dependent children) (see Callister, Newell, Perry, & Scott, 2006).

The student demographic in this particular sphere of continuing education raises questions about the intersection between traditional gendered roles within society and the role of student. One group who can be considered in this regard are mothers with dependent children. The responsibilities typically associated with the role of mother tend to change at home when these women become students (Callister et al., 2006; White, 2006). As Walkup (2006) observes, how these women manage this new role in their lives and the effects that change has on their families could interest other mothers who may be contemplating further education. Walkup (2006) argues that the dissemination of research about students who are mothers should allow easy access by and be meaningful to those outside of the "academy". Such research should also make managers and academics in higher education aware of possible sources of student discontent. This research, then, is important not only for students and people interested in undertaking

further study, but also for individuals who deliver teacher education courses and for government officials and policymakers endeavouring to widen participation in continuing education.

As an educator of student-teachers, 30% of whom over the last 5 years are also mothers, I was interested in investigating if the experiences of student-teachers who are mothers approximated that of the student-teachers who are mothers in Lidgard's (2004) study and mothers who are students in other areas of study (Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997; Lynch, 1997 & Stanley-Clark, 2000). I also wanted to determine if any problems these women were experiencing were different from those typically experienced by the general student body. One of the aims in conducting this research was to provide people delivering continuing education not only with additional or confirming information on the specific needs of this group of students but also some guidance on how they might address these needs. Another aim was to add to the somewhat limited research specific to pre-service teacher education and those mothers who are also student teachers.

MOTHERS WHO STUDY

Research shows that students who are mothers generally have to overcome particular barriers to successfully pursue and reach their educational goals. In 2003, as part of a survey of the needs of students who care for children conducted by the New Zealand University Students' Association, Lidgard collected data from a sample of the Christchurch College of Education student body, of which 84% were women and 16% were males. The key issues for those students who were parents were finding the time to juggle the two roles of parent and student successfully, balancing the workload of their studies with family life and responsibilities, clashing of college times with parenting times (evenings, placement times), children becoming ill and needing their parent with them, childcare issues, and financial issues (Lidgard, 2004).

Situating this within a global context to compare with international trends discovered that work in the United Kingdom by Arskey, Marchant, and Simmill (1994) also showed

mature students found balancing work, study and family life particularly problematic. Dewart (1996) provides a more specific insight. Common issues and anxieties for the mothers in this study included lack of time, difficulty meeting family demands, fear of failure, stress and anxiety, the need to set priorities, and integrating family issues with study issues.

Heenan (2002) identifies that the three main obstacles for women progressing further with higher education are their caring responsibilities, financial constraints, and lack of career advice. Walkup (2006) also confirms the particular problems for such students to be time poverty, as a result of managing academic, childcare and domestic tasks, feelings of exclusion because the tertiary education provider fails or has a limited approach to meeting specific needs, emotional stress about child-care provision, and guilt in relation to the conflicting roles of “mother” and “student”.

Finding childcare is perhaps the most consistent problem faced by mothers who are students (Griffiths, 2002; Lidgard, 2004). Alongside this is the emotional impact on the mothers in dealing with the attitudes and behaviours of their children as they spend more time away from home (Griffiths, 2002). Having available people who positively support them in this respect, including extended family members, friends and partners, seems vital in determining how well mothers cope with these experiences (Bay, 1999; Duncan, 2000a; Griffiths, 2002; Kantanis, 2002). In contrast to this however, can be the issue of partners who are not so supportive and Whisker (1996) and Merrill (1999) discuss the emotional costs for mature women whose partners feel threatened by their participation in higher education.

Students who are also mothers often feel they are adversely affected by increased financial pressures and become very reliant on positive support from their partner and/or family (Kantanis, 2002). The financial pressures of paying for childcare in addition to everyday living costs and the costs associated with study (for example, course fees, books, travel) also burden mothers participating in higher education (Astin, 1993; Duncan, 2000a; Griffiths, 2002; Lidgard, 2004). This is particularly problematic for

student teachers because of the practical component of their degree which means additional costs for travel to schools, resources for teaching and an appropriate and professional standard of dress.

Another significant difficulty for mothers who are student teachers is lack of time to spend with their children, partners, extended families and friends, and to study and complete assignments (Bay, 1999; Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Lidgard, 2004). Taking time out from their traditional roles at home to prepare for and complete their professional teaching practices can cause these student teachers particular anxiety. Finding the time to manage their teaching requirements and the needs of their families can be very stressful. Merrill (1999) notes that a lack of integration between home and university life often requires students to engage in complex coping strategies and the pressures of work and family life often force students to assign lower priority to their study (Neale, 2001).

In terms of navigating the dual roles of mother and student teacher, Edwards (1993) found that students who are also mothers had various ways of both separating and connecting these dual roles. In most cases, these women simply added studying to their traditional domestic roles, a stance that required them to find new or additional ways of managing their domestic responsibilities and childcare arrangements. Thompson (2000) reported that mothers feel constrained by having to look after their family while also attending university. Neale (2001) identified dealing with family issues and problems at home as one of the main barriers preventing or limiting mothers' ability to achieve their higher education aims. Whisker (1996) and Merrill (1999) discuss the emotional costs for mature women whose partners feel threatened by their participation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Six mothers enrolled in a pre-service teacher education degree at a New Zealand college of education were invited to participate in this study, and all agreed to do so. It was known that each of them had a dependent child or children and would be available, due to

their course selections, to participate during the proposed data-collection period. The women's ages ranged from 22 years to 49 years, and the numbers of their dependent children ranged from one to four. The ages of the children ranged from two to 23 years; three of the women had children who were pre-schoolers. Two of the women were married, one lived with her partner, and three were sole parents. Five of the women were also engaged in part-time employment. Three of the women had earlier experiences at higher education but had left due to the births of their first children.

Interviews with the women followed the "feminist sociology norm" as articulated by Duncan and Edwards (1999). Within this framework, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted in an environment where the subjects feel safe and positive. The interviews, conducted by the researcher, were an hour long each and began with the women sharing information about their children. The women were also asked to discuss how becoming a student had affected their children, wider family and financial status, and how being a student had affected their personal relationships with their partners, wider family, and friends. Another question asked them what they thought their training provider could do to make life easier for them and their families while they were studying. These questions, along with prompts and pursuits, sought to uncover information about these women's experiences from the time they had entered teacher education, as well as some sense of their beliefs, motivations, and attitudes about and towards those experiences. While this appeared an effective interview process at the time, a possible problem with this type of questioning was that the range of questions provided a lot of general response data, whereas a more specific line of investigation may have provided more depth and insight into one particular area.

The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed in order to allow a detailed grounded interview analysis (Duncan, 2000b). The responses for each question were grouped together and themes were identified through frequency of common responses. Limitations in terms of using semi-structured interviews are that these access information at the individual level rather than both the individual and the collective level, there is potential for the respondent to reply in terms of a discourse she feels is expected, and the

process is weak in accessing general patterns (Duncan, 2000b). One way to compensate for these weaknesses could be the addition of a focus group, which would allow, through group discussion, access to and identification of dominant issues. Another would be interpretive biography, in order to access individual belief systems and determine how these have emerged in relation to the respondent's social contexts and experiences (Duncan, 2000b).

The small sample size of this study may be questioned in terms of whether the data gathered from six women can be validly used to represent an understanding of the experience of other mothers who are also student-teachers. As with Duncan and Edwards' "lone mothers project" (1999), this small group design can be justified by reference to Sayer's (1992) realistic account of explanation in social science, where intensive work of this type is posited as superior in accessing social process and in establishing social cause. Maguire (2001) also used a small sample size in her investigation which focused on seven women in a specified older age bracket who taught teachers, and was able to validate the insights that such research can give, and suggests small numbers can still reflect the worlds of the people represented by the research participants.

ETHICAL ISSUES

As a woman known to the students, and as both a lecturer and a mother, the researcher's position was open and transparent. The commonalities shared with these women by virtue of the same gender seemed to enable the participants to share their stories willingly and eagerly. Throughout the research process, every effort was made to acknowledge and protect the rights, interests and sensitivities of the participants at all times. For example, during the data analysis, only the pseudonyms of the participants were used, and any drafts of information were destroyed three months after completing the research.

However, it needs to also be noted that in the position as their lecturer, the researcher's role as an insider-researcher meant that other information about these students that was not necessarily divulged through the research, came to her attention later on in the year. Such things were the knowledge of problems within a marriage of one of the participants, leading then to a break up, and having to fail another of the participants on a Professional Practice later in 2005. It was therefore extremely important not to exploit or manipulate such knowledge to influence the research which proved to be challenging and perhaps a limitation of the process. This project gained approval from the ethics committee of the institution.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of the interview data for this group of student-teachers who were also mothers highlighted the following key themes:

1. The women's strong motivation for wanting to become primary school teachers.
2. The impact this decision had on the lives of their children, partners and extended families.
3. The particular issues they faced as they tried to navigate the roles of mother and student-teacher.
4. The suggestions they had for continuing education and tertiary institutions to improve opportunities for other mothers wanting to study.

Motivation for Becoming Teachers

The six women said they decided to return to study once they considered the timing was right for them and their families. This timing was, however, different for each of the women in terms of their financial situations, the ages of their children and their confidence to engage in full-time study. These mothers said they returned to study because they wanted to improve their employment and financial prospects, "to improve" themselves, and to enhance their self-esteem (Parr, 2000). As Rachel (aged 40, three children) said, she "wanted to be more than just 'Mum'". The two older participants

(Rachel and Justine) had husbands and older children, and were particularly motivated by doing something worthwhile for themselves—to move beyond the boundaries of their domestic roles. They acknowledged they were placing stresses on their families, but said their desire and commitment to succeed in a field of employment overrode this concern (Thompson, 2000). The attitude in their stories is one of a desire for personal development (see also White, 2004, in this regard).

Rachel (aged 40, three children): I had some odd jobs while the children were growing up but really supported my husband in his career. His job involved a lot of hours so it meant that if I wanted to work more, I would have had to put the children into full-time care and only see them at night when I would be really tired, so by waiting until they were a lot older made sense for the whole family and gave me something of my own to do when the children were older.

Justine (aged 49, four children): I thought about applying for College, to prove something to myself that I could do something worthwhile, and I found the teacher aide course quite easy, and being successful in that gave me huge confidence in myself and my abilities. Also, the time was more suitable, too, as my youngest son was at school, and I could get the older children to help out a bit with caring for him when I wasn't home. I really wanted to have a good career again.

The women's decisions to return to study appeared to stem from an earlier desire to become primary school teachers and from the realisation that teaching would allow them to accommodate their family obligations. Five of the six participants had thought about being a teacher before having families. Justine (aged 49, four children) said that she became interested while at high school in the possibility of becoming a primary school teacher. She said positive experiences during her schooling and with her teachers had fostered this desire. Kaye (aged 28, one child) said that she had struggled over the years to find a job that would fit in with her role as a mother, and had kept returning to the notion that primary school teaching was the best option in this regard. Rachel (aged 40, three children) and Hayley (aged 42, three children) admitted they had wanted to be teachers from an early age, but that, as they both said, "Life had somehow got in the way." Rachel felt she could not enter teaching until her children had "grown up", and Hayley was inspired through working informally with a special needs child.

The women's comments showed that all six saw teaching as a career choice that fitted in with their roles as mothers. Primary school teaching, they said, provided hours, holidays and the type of satisfying work that would allow them to be at home for their children and husbands/partners. They also acknowledged the demands of the job, having experienced between two to four teaching practices, but were still motivated by the desire for a decent salary and good working conditions for themselves and their families.

The six women commented that their roles as mothers—their experiences with their own children and their schooling—had also influenced their choice to enter teaching. Parenting, they said, had given them the knowledge, experience and confidence to pursue this career, and had helped them overcome, to some degree, their nervousness over returning to study. They seemed to have come to the realisation that, as mothers, they had something to offer in a classroom, and having their children take pride in their mother's learning alongside that of their own, had positive spin-offs (Jarvis, 2001; Weatherald & Burns, 1999). For the five women who had considered teaching before having a family, their “mothering selves” appeared to have rekindled that earlier desire.

Justine (aged 49, four children): The school kept asking me back and then offered me a job as a teacher aide, which I did for two years and then completed a course in teacher aiding, but it just seemed to be an awful lot of work for such a small amount of pay.

Pam (aged 27, two children): My good friends really encouraged me by telling me that “I would be a great primary school teacher,” which I admit I had been thinking about for ages. They helped me put the application together and pushed me into sending it in.

Impact on the Lives of Children, Partners and Extended Families

The women said that their commitment to continuing studies had both positive and negative effects on their lives, and those of their children, partners (for those who had them) and wider family. The effects they described align with Griffiths' (2002)

conclusions from her study of student-teachers who were also mothers. The positive aspect centred mainly on their children, particularly the school-age children, who seemingly were happy with their respective parent's decision to "become a teacher", perhaps because learning was something to which the children could easily relate. Drawing from their learning about pedagogy and their own practical teaching and learning experiences while on professional practices, enabled the mothers to relate in a more informed manner with what their own children were doing at school.

Rachel (aged 40, three children): Sam thinks it's really cool. He wants to come into my classroom when I am on teaching practice so he can see where I am and find things that are the same in his classroom.

Alice (aged 22, one child): She's learning what I am hopefully going to be teaching some day, which is boosting her self-confidence. It's really great.

Of the negative aspects, the one that seemed to generate the most anguish and thought among all the participants was that their children generally wanted to spend more time with their mothers when they were at home. This desire was especially true of those children whose mothers had always been at home in the past. This proved more difficult when the mothers had assignments due, and when they were on professional teaching practice and needed to spend more time at home on planning, organisation of their documentation, marking children's work, evaluating, reflecting and assessing, in order to have a successful placement and meet the learning outcomes.

Hayley (aged 42, three children): Now when they need help with things, I can't always help because I am studying or trying to get assignments done.

The mothers with younger children reported that their children appeared to be clingier and needier than they had been before their mother took up study. For Kaye, for example, "Mummy, I want you" meant a greater demand for her time when she was at home coupled with behaviours like wanting to sleep in the mother's bed and clinging to her when being dropped off at preschool. The mother said she felt these behaviours were

indicative of her child having difficulty adjusting to her mother not being as available as she was previously.

The negative reactions from the children to their mothers' wish to study, as perceived by their mothers, thus appeared to relate to the mother moving out of her traditional role at home and into something unexpected and alien to the children's previous understanding of their mother's role. The comments of the women who were sole parents suggested that, for their children, negative reactions were heightened by the experience of being put into preschool or some other form of care and of being looked after by someone else. The older children, in particular, were obviously not used to their mothers being away from the home so much, nor were they used to them being preoccupied with studying and assignments when they were at home. Those children in two-parent homes also had to adapt to changes in the family dynamics, with fathers taking on some of the previously "mother-dominated" roles. For the mothers, the predominant feeling regarding all these scenarios seemed to be guilt, an emotion well documented in many other studies of women endeavouring to fulfil the roles of both mother and student and mother or paid worker (see, for example, Blaxter & Tight, 1994).

Of the three student-teachers who had partners, two indicated that their partners had been supportive of them while they were studying. This support centred on practical help, such as getting out of bed after night shift to take children to school while the student completed an assignment, and doing more of the housework and daily chores. It also involved the less tangible support of "putting up with the increased workload and time commitment", as one woman expressed it (Bird & Morgan, 2003; Duncan, 2000a). Once again, this appeared to be more prevalent while the students were on professional teaching practice and were required to be at their respective schools before their own children could be dropped off, and committed to after school meetings with their associate teachers, syndicate meetings and staff meetings.

Justine (aged 49, four children): When I've got assignments on or pressure, he kind of gets in there and does the ironing and makes the school lunches. He realises that I do quite a lot that doesn't always look as though it's been done.

However, two of the women with partners had also experienced personal difficulties with their partners while enrolled in the course. These included less opportunity than previously for each couple to spend time together and the students no longer doing certain tasks at home due to the added pressures of the teaching practice component of the course.

Rachel (aged 40, three children): It can be very difficult because he is used to me being home running around after him and now I am not doing that! I've put myself first. We've even been to counselling and were very close to splitting up, but he has made an effort to save our marriage. He has had to do a lot of changing—it was an unexpected strain.

This student's honest reflection of the unexpected outcome of her desire to have a career illustrates the sometimes very personal and inward dilemmas and sacrifices that women often have to deal with when they choose to change the status quo at home.

Relying on extended family and friends to assist with childcare was also a feature of the women's accounts of how studying had affected their friends and family (Bird & Morgan, 2003; Griffiths, 2002). Five of the six women stated that their parents and family members provided much needed support in the form of looking after their children at various stages of their training. These people sometimes cared for the preschool children while the students were working part time or studying at the library in the evenings or at weekends.

Having family members or friends assist with dropping off and picking up school-age children while the students were in classes or on professional practice was also deemed very necessary in terms of allowing the women to manage their study successfully. However, this reliance on others seemed to add to the students' feelings of guilt.

Rachel (aged 40, three children): Mum picks my youngest up from school and takes him home to her house until I am finished and can come and get him. I feel bad about that for both of them, but what can I do, especially when I am on teaching practice? I can't get away until late.

Alice (aged 22, one child): My parents have her on Saturday so I can go to work at the rugby club, which I feel bad about because it means they can't even do their own thing.

Financial pressure and economic dependence were also having an adverse impact on the women's lives and those of their families (Duncan, 2000a; Griffiths, 2002; Lidgard, 2004). Although the women's financial circumstances varied, all six stated that money had become a considerable concern from the time they entered college. The three sole-parent mothers were receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), a monetary allowance for sole-parent families from the government, and therefore were also eligible to obtain an extra lump sum to pay for course fees, several basic textbooks and childcare. However, they maintained that even this extra amount was insufficient to pay for all of the necessities required to study full time with dependent children, particularly while they were on professional teaching practice and needed extra money for transport to their schools, appropriate professional dress, resources and teaching materials.

Kaye (aged 28, one child): The money coming in from the benefit can pay for costs and stuff, but there isn't enough for some of the really important textbooks that I need.

Alice (aged 22, one child): It's not bad with benefit money to pay for fees, but it's the travelling in and out of college from where I live in the country that is hard—the petrol costs are high.

Justine (aged 49, four children): We're just getting deeper and deeper into debt and have had to re-mortgage the house just to live.

Three of the students had acquired student loans and were using this money to pay fees, book costs, and some childcare costs. However, they were very aware of the eventual need to pay the loans back. Five of the six women were also in part-time paid employment, in an effort to ease the financial pressure on their families.

Pam (aged 28, two children): I'm working part time to lighten the financial load—that's the only reason—[and] to take the stress off my partner.

Navigating the Dual Roles of Mother and Student-Teacher

The major difficulty these women had while navigating their dual roles of mother and student teacher related to childcare. For the six women, the lack of available affordable childcare required them to juggle the emotional and physical needs of their children and their responsibilities as a student. As Lynch (1997) and Stanley-Clarke (2000) confirm, this feeling of carrying a double burden typically creates considerable feelings of guilt and anxiety for women. Stanley-Clarke (2000) posits that because women have traditionally accepted the primary responsibility of caring for their children, it is women who assume the role of locating and paying for this care if they choose to take up paid employment and/or study. This is particularly more problematic for mothers who are training to be teachers due to their commitments during the professional practice component of their programme.

Generally, students are expected to complete two professional practice blocks each year as a full-time student. Across the length of their degree, they experience placements in different settings and are expected to complete placements at all class levels and in a range of schools. Students are placed with an associate teacher for the duration of their placements. This teacher has his or her own class and has been designated suitable as an associate by their principal. At second and third year levels of training, students are expected to take increasing responsibility for the class, spending up to a total of 15 days in their final placement. Their placement-related work includes planning, implementing, assessing children's learning, and evaluating a purposeful learning programme for the required number of days each time and often means they spend longer hours at school to meet these requirements.

The six students indicated that organising and maintaining childcare was a particular headache for them while they were studying at college. This issue was particularly problematic for the mothers with children of school age, and even more so when these women were on professional practice and expected to be at their schools before their own children were at theirs, and to remain there after the children had gone home.

Unwell children were another considerable concern for the women, and all said they had trouble knowing what to do at these times in relation to childcare. Two of the women said they had brought sick children to college classes with them, with the pre-arrangement and support of the lecturers concerned. However, all six women said they felt they needed to stay at home with sick children when they could, even if it meant getting behind in their work or missing classes. Once again, they felt more pressure around this when they were on professional practice and had increased workload issues and time commitments.

Hayley (aged 42, three children): It puts you way behind on college work. I can't afford to take the time off unless it is absolutely necessary.

Financial problems made it hard for these women to support the everyday needs of their families and to complete their college work with the added pressure of professional practice. The mothers felt they needed to have clothes that were suitable for the teaching profession as well as some funds to buy resources and the materials needed to teach successfully. The women talked about finding the "right balance" between family life, college, and part-time work. All five who worked part-time said they worked only for the financial benefits and, for all but one, the jobs involved very basic levels of skills.

Rachel (aged 40, three children): I do tutoring as well, which I could give away quite easily, but the money is too good.

For the six women, juggling paid employment, mothering and college responsibilities added to the complexity of organising the various facets of their own lives and those of their family members. The difficulties these women said they had experienced since taking up further study supports other work documenting the experiences of students who are also mothers (Bay, 1999; Cantwell & Mulhearn, 1997; Stanley-Clarke, 2000; White, 2006).

Suggestions on Improving Study Opportunities

The women in this study offered suggestions as to how their institution might support them as they juggled their varied responsibilities. These included the following points with comments on how realistic they might be to implement.

- Inviting the students' children, partners and other family members to visit the college after hours or one or two class sessions so as to include them in the student part of their lives.

The mothers felt this would be useful in showing their families where they were each day and what they were actually doing, as well as introducing them to their fellow student group.

- Providing a child-friendly space for parents to bring their children when they needed to be at college after hours.

The students (especially the sole parents) encountered extra pressure when they needed to return to College in the weekends or in the late afternoons and evenings to visit the library or computer suites to find resources or to study and complete assignments. The suggestion was for a room at College, perhaps staffed by fellow students at these times and organised by Student Services, to assist student teachers with children to manage these “out of work” hours.

- Offering such students priority to the College childcare centre and some after-school care.

The mothers with children who were pre-school aged complained that it was difficult to get them into the College pre-school and community facility and suggested a priority basis for those mothers who were actually studying at the College. After school care was an issue for the mothers of school –aged children, particularly when the mothers were on professional teaching practice and had later finishing times than their own children at school. However the logistics of transporting the children from a variety of schools to the College makes this an unlikely resolution. Perhaps subsidising payment of after-school care might be a more suitable option worth investigating.

- Asking beginning and experienced teachers who are also parents to talk about managing their families while teaching full time.
- Having access to such teachers to talk over issues one to one when needed

Observing both beginning and experienced teachers while on professional teaching practice enables the student teachers to imagine what life might be like when they graduate and are full time teachers. Being able to talk with practising teachers who are also mothers about how they manage the requirements of the job with the needs of their families was mentioned as something these mothers would like to do. One way of achieving this would be to invite teachers in to College to speak with these students or to ask for volunteers to act as mentors for informal discussions when required. Both of these could be set up through informal networks or by the Professional Practice office who regularly liaise with the associate teacher group.

- Reminding lecturers and tutors that students with children may need some leniency in relation to study commitments when it comes to caring for sick children.

This is easily achieved by constant communication with the lecturing staff and observing lecturers who visit the students while on professional practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this small study align with much of the research mentioned in the review of literature on mothers who study. Mothers studying to become teachers do experience the same problems as mothers studying for other qualifications, but the course work coupled with the professional teaching practice requirements does introduce a variety of issues specific to pre-service teacher education programmes. It is pertinent to note here that two of the six students who participated in this study did not graduate on their due dates because of the difficulties they experienced in navigating their dual roles as student teachers and mothers.

But what guidance can continuing education providers draw from this and supporting research as they endeavour to cater for the needs of increasingly diverse groups of students? The suggestions of the six students indicate some of the more simple provisions that can be made at the level of individual institutions. At this institution, providing a child friendly space within the library or computer suites, with adequate resources and

informal supervision could be easily managed, particularly by Student Services. Prioritising child care spaces at the College pre-school could be managed by the pre-school staff and having access to practising teachers who are parents could be informally organised through the Professional Practice office. However, a more encompassing approach is needed both across such institutions and by those bodies, such as governments, that influence the scope and nature of educational provision and the ability of people to access that provision.

White (2006) suggests institutions providing pre-service teacher education need to think of more innovative and creative ways of providing tangible and concrete support that truly reflect the changing demography of tertiary student populations. She says that students who are parents should be provided with accessibility to tertiary education to make their learning as successful as it can be, for the benefit of themselves, their children and their families, and, ultimately, for the benefit of society. These considerations apply not only to mothers training to be teachers, but to all mothers in any tertiary or higher education institution or, in fact, any student who is caring for others such as a sick partner or elderly relative.

As Bay (1999) and Griffiths (2002) have found, continuing education institutions can set up relatively simple support systems to benefit such students. They document such initiatives as small group meetings for students run by themselves, orientation sessions offering advice on studying and juggling multiple responsibilities, and access to an experienced counsellor to discuss issues such as time management, handling stress, balancing family responsibilities, developing confidence and refining goals.

For continuing education providers, finding ways to address these situations may be particularly challenging because of their often hidden nature, but as this present and other research studies show they are very real and significant issues for many students, particularly in pre-service teacher education. Further research into the extent to which such issues actually prevent students from completing their studies or from achieving as

well as they might could also offer continuing education providers with ideas on how to limit the impact of these difficulties for students.

This research captured the experiences of the women at one point in their lives. Further research could be undertaken as they leave college and become new beginning teachers, to investigate whether the issues affecting them and their children change and whether the issues they experienced as students become more or less intensive. Another area of focus for future research would be exploring what works (or is positive) for women with family and study commitments during their pre-service teacher education. Although some positive comments came through in the women's commentary, much of what they said related primarily to difficulties. A precedent for a more positive approach is seen in work by Bay (1999), who asked a group of mature age students what their greatest satisfactions had been on their return to study. Almost all acknowledged new knowledge and skills, a renewed sense of self, pleasure in achieving good grades, the making of new friends and receiving praise from their families.

It might also have been useful to ask the participants in this study to keep a journal while on professional practice, as some of the issues the women identified, such as childcare, seemed heightened at this time. The information captured in a reflective journal could have provided data that may have provided a form of triangulation when analysing the interview data, and also may have helped identify in what way problems experienced at this time differed from problems experienced when the women were involved in college classes on campus.

A comparison between the wider student population of on-campus students with dependent children and those studying by distance might also be another useful area of research. Here, the aim would be to investigate whether the issues experienced by women with dependent children studying on campus experience differ from or are the same as those with women studying at a distance.

Guilt (in relation to their children's feelings, putting them into childcare or having to find care for them), added financial strain on the whole family, lack of time for partners, children and wider family and friends, and changes in the family dynamics and domestic roles were difficulties all six mothers experienced. All said they found the struggle to manage and reconcile their two lives stressful and fatiguing, and that this struggle limited their energy for both studying and effective parenting. Work by Stanley-Clarke (2000) confirms that the double burden of study/work and child care creates considerable feelings of anguish for mothers engaged in further study. These feelings of guilt and anxiety must surely limit the motivation such women have to keep studying or to stay in the workforce.

In an era where attracting mature-age people to train as teachers is deemed important, those involved in providing teacher education need to seriously consider the issues raised by the six women and what can be done to help lessen these problems. Students who are parents, especially those who are mothers, need to feel that their tertiary study is of value to them and their families, and that traversing their dual roles of mother and student teacher is done in an environment that supports them and their specific needs. This consideration pertains equally well to any continuing education institution wanting to attract and retain people of calibre and who represent the diversity of society to their programmes of study and to the professions and careers that lead on from these.

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