

MAKING A PLACE FOR VOICE:

STORIES OF SILENCING AND SPEAKING OUT IN ACADEMIA

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Abstract

In this article, we, the authors, revisit an event that occurred eighteen years ago in an academic setting and take a critical, retrospective look at how those events align with and reflect current situations in academia. In particular, the article draws on a research project that was guided by the authors and conducted by a group of recently-graduated teachers about their experiences of being silenced and unheard in an institutional environment as student teachers. The article addresses the aftermath and repercussions that resulted from the dissemination of the research as a presentation at a conference. The presentation revealed some raw and uncensored ‘truths’ or stories drawn from the teachers’ narratives. Continuing to draw on, as well as extending, the process of *daredevil research* (Jipson & Paley, 1997) and using a critical post-formal and post-structural lens, this writing, eighteen years later, is an endeavour to reveal, remember, rediscover, and uncover an event that occurred nearly twenty years ago; an event that, at the time, we had anticipated being a catalyst for changes in teacher education by encouraging the group of teachers to draw on elements of critical pedagogy in their presentation, while cognizant that this approach to pedagogy was very new, if not unknown, to teacher education at the time and thus presented a risk in terms of others’ understanding of the presentation.

Keywords: voice, institutional silencing, student experience, academia, power

We attempt to address the continued institutional silencing of student teachers' (predominantly women's) voices. In 2000, we suggested to the teachers that they draw on a specific *daredevil research* approach to research as an innovative and performative way of telling people's stories and drawing attention to those who are oftentimes unheard. Jipson and Paley (1997) state that *daredevil research* resists categorisation and expresses "shifts in critical thinking—or instances of creative analytic practices" (p. 8). All those years ago this research offered a legitimate entry point or invitation for the women to speak of their experiences within the ethical and moral realms of trust; trust that those listening to their stories would genuinely maintain their confidentiality and validate each person's experience through honoring the courage of the women to step up and disclose. While we acknowledge that the role of the educator-expert-researcher is still predominantly one of "transmitter of constructed knowledge within privileged academic venues" (Jipson & Paley, 1997, p. 12), we continue to make the case that people's narratives have the potential and the power to expose the subtleties of institutional oppression and exploitation while, concomitantly, strengthening the individual voice and making it possible to create changes to existing and oppressive regimes within academia. Questions still to address are whether the research and the presentation were effective, even in small ways, in creating change, and where, exactly, any change lay and, in addition, whether change in individuals is sufficient to resist the power of the academic institution in current times and beyond. Are we being overly optimistic in expecting to see change to institutional practices and experiences after almost 20 years?

THE PRESENTATION IN 2000: VOICELESSNESS— PURSUING VOICE AS STUDENT TEACHERS

The group of recently-graduated teachers who agreed to take part in the research and presentation were adamant that the New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, [MoE], 1996) should also act as a basis for the examination of their own eighteen months of learning to be early childhood teachers. Their view was that, if children are to be taught within a framework of empowerment, holistic development, family and community and

relationship (the four principles underpinning *Te Whāriki*), their own teacher education must be linked to the same principles or, at the very least, acknowledged as significant for adults as well as children. The four underpinning curricular principles of *Te Whāriki* are connected to five fundamental curricular strands: belonging, wellbeing, communication, exploration and contribution. These strands were also seen by the group of teachers as critical for adults as well as for children. Further, the 118 learning outcomes, linked to each strand, were debated by the teachers as a further extension of both adult and child wellbeing during the discussion and preparation leading up to the presentation. To this day, *Te Whāriki* is widely seen as a curriculum for humanity, for citizenship, and for democratic participation and, in many ways, the teachers' insights into an inclusive and human curriculum eighteen years ago, were ahead of the polarised adult-child views so prevalent at the time and arguably still persistent in teacher education programs today.

As the presentation begins one teacher stands alone on the stage arranging the overheads. In the large auditorium surrounded by conference participants, the other five teachers sit and wait to state their position. Initially, the eyes of the audience are fixed on the lone figure on stage. They are unaware that there are other presenters dispersed throughout the audience. Scattered randomly amongst the seated audience the other five presenters emerge from their midst. Two women stand up from their seated positions in the audience and step out into the aisle—another three women rise from their seats on the other side of the auditorium—all are dressed in black, but each is wearing an identifier such as an embroidered flower brooch. For a few minutes, they stand motionless and silent. Then, one by one they speak. Like a canon of voices, each person shares aspects of their stories and experiences. As the chorus of collective voices gathers momentum, the audience are catapulted into something akin to a tennis match. As one person begins speaking from one side of the auditorium the heads of the audience turn behind them and to the left. The camera capturing the event hovers and then moves to the other side as another teacher speaks, then moves back again to the other side of the auditorium for the third voice, all eyes and ears swivelling to

the right and again to the left. The camera continues to search for the next speaker. The voices of the five recently graduated teachers come clearly from their respective positions, replicating stereo speakers situated on each side of the auditorium. Amid the spoken voices, other voices from audio-recorded conversations are juxtaposed alongside the projection of slides of selected curriculum statements from *Te Whāriki* onto the large screen at the front of the auditorium. The spoken and recorded voices convey statements about their experiences as student that are in direct contradiction to the ideals, principles, strands and learning outcomes espoused in the early childhood curriculum and identified on the screen.

The mismatch between the taught teacher education curriculum and the practice experienced was a crucial issue for the group of teachers. In a personal communication (3.10.2000) with Jan Jipson, one of the authors of *Daredevil Research*, she talks about the way in which ‘voices connect and collide to construct new understandings’ in such a theatre-d, academic presentation.

Scene One: Passion “I was about to embark on a new journey with a sense of pride and passion”

Scene Two: Disappointment “I began to feel a huge doubt as to whether I was *doing it right*”

Scene Three: Survival “I learnt that I am a stronger teacher, that I will not be pushed down to fit a mould”

Scene Four: Anticipation “How can student teachers engage in non-threatening discussion and debate and build on existing theory and ideas in early childhood education as part of their study?”

The words and phrases spill out like fractured bones —brittle, shattering and fragile. “We were selected, recruited and dished!... Discarded, ignored, failed, and dismissed!... Brought to our knees in tears!... ‘Kick the dog’ syndrome!... We felt like guinea pigs!... We carried the fear of failure and unmet expectations... What about those people who are not so strong?”

As the presentation ends, the six woman teachers move to the front of the auditorium and face the expected challenge, indeed, barrage of

questions from the audience. For a moment, there is an audible silence before the questions from the audience slowly emerge. A man from the United States of America and a woman from Australia are the first to ask questions. The woman asks “What could those listening do to ensure that the students feel they have a voice or are safe enough to say what they need to say?” And the man says “We have the same problem in the States but we are charged with doing research and other work, which diverts us from really paying attention to these types of student issues.” His comment is an acknowledgement of at least one reason why this is happening and hopefully other institutions will begin to address the fact that additional administrative requirements asked of academic staff can detract from the actual practice of teaching in a tertiary environment. Following the post-presentation questions and responses from the presenters, the six women re-enter the audience and take their seats. While this was a daunting and somewhat risky undertaking, it was important to pursue because it focused on voices that needed to be heard but had, to this point in time, not been heard.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

We have commenced this paper with the scenario of a specific event that occurred eighteen years ago. Upon graduating from a three semester graduate diploma teacher education programme in June of 2000, a group of thirteen teachers approached the authors to guide them in researching the emotions, frustrations and unfulfilled hopes they were left with upon completion of the program. The teachers all held either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees as a prerequisite to being enrolled in the shortened programme. Most struggled with the knowledge that the lecturers in the program held qualifications that were the same as or less than the qualifications held by the student teachers. The student teachers were wanting to engage in collegial discussion about topics they were familiar with through their study, as well as field experiences from previous employment. They felt that their contributions to class discussion were not welcome, even rejected, by the class lecturers and hence the tendency to remain silent prevailed over much of the course of the program.

The authors agreed to meet with the now-graduated teachers on Saturday mornings over a period of about three months to discuss

ways of addressing the feelings and concerns that arose from their participation, or lack of it, in the graduate diploma program. Since the key issue was that of feeling silenced by the institution, we suggested that they give voice to their concerns by taping themselves in discussion as part of a wider research project on their experience. The authors were not always able to be present at the discussion meetings but maintained contact with the group, offering advice and support where requested. Topics of discussion ranged from course content delivered in didactic ways and inappropriate and dismissive lecturer comments to institutional ‘gatekeeping’ and inconsistent assessment practices. The teachers felt that their unique contributions and their identities as student teachers were unacknowledged. As the three months went by, the teachers, having read Jipson and Paley’s *Daredevil Research* (1997), were drawn to presenting their research as a voiced performance at the conference taking place in November 2000. Permission was sought from the Chief Executive Officer of the institution where the student teachers had studied over three semesters and where the authors were still on staff. Permission was also sought from the conference organiser for a theatre-d and ‘different’ presentation that involved more than one person. Permission was granted on both counts.

The overview of the conference presentation, outlined above, illustrates poignant moments drawn from the research project by the former student teachers who felt that their collective voices had been silenced during their study to become qualified early childhood teachers. The opportunity to present their perspectives [about being silenced] in a forum where their voices could be heard within a considered, theoretical context, gave rise to an airing of grievances and views to an entrapped audience who were forced, perhaps against their volition, to listen. The presentation was a choreographed performance inspired by Jipson and Paley’s (1997) *Daredevil Research*. As elucidated by Chelsea Bailey; “(t)hrough the performative body one attempts to signify the coherency of identity” (1997, p. 146). It was an opportunity to do something different, to take risks, to stand up and be noticed, and to challenge the status quo and the institutional academic hierarchy. The latter was well represented at the conference in 2000.

A place was created to “hear what has been hidden” (Bailey, 1997, p. 138) not through choice but through coercion.

It was because of this experience, and a subsequent interview with one of the teachers, that we considered revisiting the above scenario and questions raised to see what, if anything, had changed. Our curiosity led to this special issue of the journal and an examination of the larger concept of time and place into which we invited many and varied voices. How do time and place influence the context in which one finds oneself? Do things change with the passing of time or do they stay the same? Are any changes that might occur only imperceptibly different from the status quo? Or more pertinently, are they changes at all? How might place (and those who occupy that place) influence what has been and what will be?

This writing, all these years later, is an attempt to reveal, remember, and rediscover something that occurred eighteen years ago and yet, at the same time, to re-visit “yet again” (Lather, 2003, p. 184) the continued institutional silencing of student teachers’ (women’s) voices. As we (the authors) recall the events of those years, we can remember the challenges faced, the harpoons of derision from those in positions of power, the reprimands, the ominous and foreboding looks, and perhaps most of all, the potential threat of losing our jobs. The uneasiness we felt when called up in front of the head of school to be confronted, indeed chastised, for our part in seemingly inciting the teachers to air their perspectives on their experience as student teachers, is still present within our bodies to this day. As it was, justice for these teachers, and all student teachers, was a higher priority at the time than being requested to work within a climate of compliance that essentially privileged the teaching staff. Some sort of justice for the teachers compelled us to listen to them and hear their version of the events, stories, and lived experiences during their time as students in a teacher education program. We are acutely aware that “there is a long history of resistance to the silence surrounding women’s experience” (Bailey, 1997, p. 138). This resistance and the silencing can often be found in the stories that women tell. As we recall and retell these events we do so to shift and transform the mindsets and hidden agendas of those in similar positions within [hierarchical] institutional

settings. This is, in part, an effort to confront those in academia with the complexity of teaching students and to help them see the holistic nature of institutional academic experience from both staff and student points of view. We do this with humility and a vulnerability quintessential to such a delicate situation. We are also acutely aware that there are other stories not told or voiced in this rendition of events.

We undertook to listen to the students' lived experiences and stories because, as Bailey explains, "Research is and always has been a way to tell stories of experience" (1997, p. 138). Research by way of a conference presentation offered a legitimate entry point or invitation for these women teachers to speak of their experiences within an ethical [and moral] realm of trust; trust that those listening to their stories would [genuinely] maintain their confidentiality and validate each person's experience through honoring their courage to step up and reveal or disclose. Narratives have the power to "move one from silence to speech" (Bailey, 1997, p. 139), to expose oppression and exploitation and, concomitantly, to share the struggle to be heard alongside one another with the promise of making it possible to create new avenues for being listened to and to effect change to existing and oppressive regimes.

Giving prominence to the student teachers'/ women's voices was key to the research because without their stories the reality of the situation would be half-truths and thus interpretations of their experiences, albeit that stories are, in essence, interpretations of our experiences. As Bailey (1997) illuminates, "One may never fully 'remember' the events of a moment" (p. 142). The women teachers' perceived voicelessness in relation to their student teacher experiences continued because there was a perception that students were not able or, perhaps more pertinently, allowed to speak. As listeners to the stories, we sought to understand how we could open up "spaces for the language of independent thought and individual imagination" (Jipson & Paley, 1997, p. 17). This leads us now, eighteen years later, to ask the questions, "Did institutional power completely devour these languages" (Jipson & Paley, 1997, p. 17); "How is silence defined and from whose point of view?"

In hindsight, we wonder if the university lecturers at the time (1999) were antagonistic toward those studying in a three-semester intensive program, a program that was very new to the field of early childhood education. In the 1990's, field experience still prevailed as the primary means of gaining a position as lecturer in an early childhood teaching program. The students accepted into the program had a range of qualifications, creating a diverse group with a wide variety of backgrounds but with little experience of working with young children. As stated by one of the students:

We were quite a disparate group, we had different cultures, different ages, and different criteria for entering the program, so we were quite protective of one another. We all really cared about one another, which was lovely. It was a fun time in that we were all open to one another—but we got closed down. It brought us to our knees and some people suffered. The older women helped the younger ones who were struggling with language and other things. But that was meant to be part of the criteria by which they were accepted [into the course] so they should have been supported. Instead, we found people sitting behind the buildings crying because of all the red marks on their papers. We were getting really fired up about the amount of money we had paid, the kind of promises that had been made and the lack of delivery on those promises. (personal communication, 19.12.2013)

Given the above comments we are left with even more questions. Whose responsibility was it to acknowledge and cater for diverse backgrounds within an approved program? Was there an overall perception of having to maintain a certain level or standard, which overrode the differences each person brought? Did individual lecturers create their own expectations of the early childhood teacher graduate? How were such expectations validated and shared with student teachers?

RECOLLECTIONS AND RETROSPECTIONS

How did this situation come about? What was the initiating factor that brought forth these grievances? In an interview conducted some

years later, one student shared a recollection with one of the authors who taught a course to the group towards the end of their program:

I remember coming to your class and you were giving us information about the first assignment. You were quite shocked because nobody was talking or had anything to say or ask about the assignment even though you were inviting people to give their opinions, but there was just silence. I don't know who said it, but we started to say 'Look, just tell us what you want'. (personal communication, 19.12.2013)

It was clear that the group of students had felt suppressed and even oppressed by the institution and that, by the time they were nine months into their course, they had been well and truly silenced. When the student teachers were asked [by the authors/lecturers] 'what's going on?', it became an open invitation to express what had been pent up inside for over half a year. There was an overwhelming deluge of grievances, injustices, and tribulations that the student teachers believed they had experienced. The overall feeling, at the time of confrontation by the authors/lecturers, was that the student teachers just wanted to get through the eighteen month course and qualify with their graduate diplomas in teaching (ECE).

TAKING A DAREDEVIL APPROACH

We, the authors/ lecturers and now mentors, were confronted with a dilemma. How, in good conscience could we ignore the student teachers' situation that was threatening to undermine their teacher education experience? With the potential to attend and present at a forthcoming research conference following their graduation from the course, we suggested that the teachers meet on a regular basis to share and research their stories and then voice their perspectives in a public forum. The data would be the teachers' own narratives about their student teacher experience. However, while we felt that their points of view should be respected and taken seriously as legitimate research, we also felt that their viewpoints should be disseminated in a way that was less conventional, in a way that resonated with the reconceptualising of early childhood education. Reconceptualising early childhood education (now the focus of an annual conference) and critical pedagogy were emerging globally at that time. For this

reason, we turned to Jipson and Paley's *Daredevil Research*. Jipson and Paley (1997, p. 2) ask: "What counts as research? What matters as data?" While these appear to be very ordinary questions, how they are answered can provoke different ways of thinking about and presenting research from the more traditional notion of what constitutes research. The student teachers graduated from the course in July and proceeded to meet as a group of teachers, on a regular basis, to shape their thinking for the presentation in November. The authors/lecturers mentored and guided the teachers, looking at alternative and innovative ways of presenting the research and suggested a performative approach incorporating the teachers' personal narratives and conversations and giving voice to concerns that had been considered silenced or voiceless. Although the setting for the conference was of a conventional nature, we suggested that the teachers push the boundaries of what might be expected in an everyday lecture theatre-auditorium and thus situate the overall experience into something that represented a theatrical space, so as to jolt conference participants out of their complacency and passive mode as an audience. The women were willing, excited even, to try this approach. As mentioned earlier, a less conventional, reconceptualising, critical pedagogy approach to presenting research aligned well with those researchers and educational and cultural theorists who were seeking, at the time, to challenge the status quo from a post-formal and post-structural position (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999; Villaverde & Pinar, 1999). This seemed apt for the purpose of the teachers' research, which, ultimately, was about deconstructing, reconstructing and reconceptualising the inner workings of an institutional hierarchy, their place within that hierarchy as student teachers and their strong feelings that curriculum for children is also curriculum for adults in terms of the underpinning values, principles and strands; they believed that the New Zealand curriculum *Te Whāriki* is a curriculum for all, a curriculum for life. The research and presentation approach was suggested to and accepted by the teachers. We, the authors, stayed in touch with the women and offered feedback, but the presentation itself was scripted and organised by them; their attendance at the conference was also arranged by them.

The teachers met on Saturday mornings at a neutral venue. With only a few exceptions, the group of eighteen teachers (from a class of twenty students) committed themselves to the research, and participated in each of the five Saturday meetings between June and October 2000. All discussions were taped and dated notes were gathered on an electronic whiteboard as the basis for both the written research report and the framework for the research performance. Key issues were identified, course content was debated, discussed and clarified, relationships with the institution were considered and reframed, and orthodoxies, both institutional and disciplinary, were challenged.

To present research as a performative act requires acute attention. Every action and word is thoughtfully considered, practiced and performed with meaningful intent to achieve the greatest effect possible. The choice of positioning or staging is key. Careful consideration of what artefacts to use and how they should be presented were central factors to deliberate. The teachers presenting the research became performers—actors in a space, embodying and sharing their lives. The live voices of the presenters were juxtaposed, for added effect, with the animated voices of the teachers, recorded at the time of the monthly discussions. As described above, the recorded voices of the women were from the meetings that took place following graduation. It was at these meetings that they discovered the strength of their collective voice. The entire process was a collaborative enterprise by eight out of the eighteen teachers. The presentation required an honest and real commitment from all the players involved. Finding ways to re-present narratives, “or even anti-narratives” (Jipson & Paley, 1997, p. 4) remaps, reterritorializes and decentres knowledge, while enabling the possibility to see things differently, and, as Maxine Greene (1991) describes, to go beyond “already constituted reason” (p. 122). Creating a different space within a commonly accepted space had the possibility to shift or even transform what was, or what is, to what might be—a kind of disequilibrium of experience.

Whether or not this *daredevil* approach was effective, it did at least generate a polyvocal presentation of multiple perspectives and gave the teachers the opportunity to speak out. The voiced sections of the presentation were entitled (as outlined earlier): *passion*, *disappointment*, *survival* and *anticipation*. The spoken word (from the audience) was interspersed and contrasted with value-based extracts from the then-very new New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), the very same value based extracts that are now included in the newly revised version of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). These broad, principled, curricular extracts were projected on to a screen at the front of the auditorium where there was an empty stage. Jipson (personal communication 3.10.2000) commented that audiences generally feel separated from and therefore ‘in control’ of speakers who stand in front of them but when speakers are part of the audience this power relationship is disrupted. This is a little like actors who move from the stage to mingle with the audience in order to invite participation. In this situation, the audience will frequently experience feelings of discomfort and silently will the actors back to their position on the stage.

In the words of Jipson and Paley (1997, p. 11), the research process was intended to be one that:

connect[ed] rather than separate[d] the researcher and the researched; which encourage[d] a plurality of voices and narratives; which affirm[ed] a commitment to interactivity that is egalitarian and non-exploitative; and which promote[d] reflexivity as a strategy shared by all participants in the research process.

As stated in the abstract, while we acknowledge that the role of the educator-expert-researcher is still predominantly one of “transmitter of constructed knowledge within privileged academic venues” (Jipson & Paley, 1997, p. 12) we continue to make the case that people’s narratives have the potential and the power to expose the subtleties of institutional oppression and exploitation while, concurrently, strengthening the individual voice and making it possible to create changes to existing and oppressive regimes within academia.

THE AFTERMATH

Eight teachers, representing the eighteen teachers in the class, presented their narrative research as performance at the conference, six months after graduating from the eighteen month intensive graduate program. Although permission for the research had been given by the Dean of the teacher education institution, there were repercussions, particularly for those staff who had been directly involved with the student teachers over the eighteen month program. One of the authors writes in an email (dated 16.2.2001) to Jipson “The presentation met with a mixed response, ranging from accolades and invitations to present in Australia, to tears and angry criticism from my own colleagues as well as senior staff at other tertiary institutions. Particularly hard has been finding a way of communicating my deep-seated belief in student voice without creating the perception that I am compromising my integrity as a university lecturer.” One of the presenting teachers confronted the head of the program to express her dismay not only about the treatment the students had received and the repercussions from the presentation, but also about the ramifications for the staff. In an interview some years after her graduation, this teacher states:

I was really cross and I thought I'm going to confront her because I was in that group, and there were a number of us that were actively pushing for, advocating for some change. I went to see her and stood my ground and she stood her ground; it was kind of like a face-off but not unpleasant, we were respectful of one another. But what shocked me in the end was that as I got up to leave she came over and put her arms around me and gave me a hug, and that was the last thing I expected. So I left basically letting her know that I accept and respect her point of view and mine is different, but I went away wondering what happened. Did I touch a chord? Was she feeling that she hadn't delivered on what she should and maybe it made sense but she couldn't do anything within the confines of her job, or the bureaucracy of the institution? (personal communication, 19.12.2013)

In a sense, a confrontation of this nature raises issues and presents the dichotomy of being both powerful and powerless. Those who have been feeling powerless, have now, to some extent, accessed a position of being powerful, while those who held the power were placed in a position of feeling quite powerless. The presentation of the teachers' experiences and grievances as student teachers was seen by several staff from the institution as a form of public humiliation for the person who led the program and, as such, threatened the security of her position because it was a reflection of herself as the leader of that program. In some ways this was ironic, when those lecturers who supported the teachers/ex-student teachers also faced the loss of their jobs at the jurisdiction of the program leader. The teachers themselves did not escape the aftermath of their experiences, both as student teachers in the program and as the teacher presenters of the research. There is a sort of lingering effect or a taint of 'what was' that continues to haunt or shadow what one might be able to do in the future. One teacher still believes that she has been 'punished' ever since for standing up and doing what she considered was 'the right thing to do'. One of the authors writes to Jipson (16.2.2001) "I waver between finding the experience really exciting—on a good day—and wanting to creep back under a shell of conformity—on a bad day."

Although this was one of the first graduate diploma cohorts offered by the institution in January 1999 (then called the intensive diploma course), issues [and some angst] around the graduate diploma since then, have continued precisely because there are groups of intelligent women and men coming into the institution with prior qualifications and the ability and competency to challenge the program and its delivery. Because there is a wide range of prior qualifications, the selection and recruitment process is important as is the institutional responsibility that accompanies the acceptance of students over the course of a program.

Conducting research has become more and more prevalent over the years within the university academic culture and that component of a lecturer's profession is something that is not always shared with the students. Although it is purported that research supports or underpins the practice of teaching, in some circumstances the students still suffer

from a lack of awareness or attention to their issues because of the weighted focus on research and the additional administrative loading this brings to bear on lecturers' time and commitment to their teaching.

At the time when this situation and research took place, however, the climate and culture of research was still in its very early days and the distracting aspect of being a lecturer or teacher educator was administrative rather than one of being involved in research. Ultimately, the point that the teachers made in their presentation in 2000 is, that if student teachers are educated to prepare to work with infants and toddlers and young children it is important to model or demonstrate the type of practice aspired to when teaching adults. The women teachers claimed a strong value-based, philosophical and pedagogical adherence to *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) as a framework for their own practice and research as well as a context for the lives of children/tamariki under five in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We, the authors, believe that modelling what is valued starts with listening to the stories of others, especially when considering a critical perspective and working toward transformation and change. In the words of Sherry Shapiro (1994, p. 65):

I start from the assumption that critical pedagogy is a philosophy of praxis concerned with emancipation and committed to a process which connects self-reflection and understanding to a knowledge which makes transformation of the social conditions we live possible (Shapiro, 1990). It begins by making it possible for the silenced voices of students to speak in the classroom about their own experiences, concerns, desires, and therefore it remakes the curriculum into a dialectic between their particular hermeneutic of the lived world and the explanatory narrative of a critical theoretical framework. Without either the personal narrative or the critical framework the pedagogy is incomplete. Without the personal narrative, one cannot articulate or begin to problematize one's everyday existence needed for conscious decision making. And without a critical framework the personal narrative is privatised, hindering relational understanding of the social forces which structure existence.

In retrospect, the concept of ‘a pedagogy of listening’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 1999, p. 14) was only just being considered in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1999 and, in 2018, remains a pedagogical challenge. Dahlberg and Moss (1999) mentioned the term initially and the term was later endorsed by Rinaldi (2006) and, most recently, by Moss (2019) as part of an increasing interest in the Reggio Emilia pedagogy with its underpinning ethical and political stance on democracy, rights, social justice, critical thinking and alternative narratives. The concept of understanding what listening really means is still being explored and consequently, a lot of what occurred and is still occurring, was not really about listening but about talking past each other or, even more so, turning ‘a deaf ear’ to the voices and stories of student teachers. William Ayers reminds us: “As teachers tell their stories, their stories also tell them. There is, of course, not a single story to tell, but a crazy quilt of stories: there are tales of humiliation, of failure and success, of cowardliness and courage” (1992, p. 262).

What emerged from this experience in 2000 was advocacy for student teacher voice, the verbal articulation of their perspective, and a collective student teacher vision for teacher education borrowing from the values, guiding principles and strands of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996, 2017) and the Teaching Council of Aotearoa’s *Graduating Teaching Standards* (Education Council Aotearoa New Zealand, [EDUCANZ], 2018). Thus, as articulated by Ayers (1992) “democracy is practiced, not merely ritualized” (p. 264). It is clearly evident from the teachers’/student teachers’ voices that they felt “patronized and infantilized in structures not of their own making, socialized into cultures that run counter to their own best interests” [and to this end] “teachers are silenced in their own world, rendered powerless and thoughtless” (Ayers, 1992, p. 264). Honoring the voices of student teachers involves challenging those who possess the power; who, in the process of holding that power, dominate and become impervious to the voices that need to be heard. Otherwise the question remains: “Whose voices, [and indeed], whose bodies are silenced in this process?” and “What does a curriculum and pedagogy of social justice look like in such a context?” (Swanson, 2007, p. 78); in particular, in an institutionalised context

such as the one described here. In the long run, all repercussions are to the detriment of not only the student teachers' experiences but also the program, the institution, the profession and children. Silencing voices (no matter whose voices they are) immobilizes democratic participation and thus equal access to having a say in those things that matter to all concerned (Fine, 2003; Moss, 2019).

Silencing voices, especially women's voices, perpetuates the view that those silenced (in this case student teachers) do not have anything important to say and this inevitably creates a rift between those who are charged to develop an understanding of the importance of relationships in the field of teaching and the actual reality of establishing meaningful relationships with the students. Silencing creates, according to Fine (2003), "impenetrable barriers between the worlds of [the student teachers and their communities of practice]" and therefore, "to unearth the possibility of reclaiming [student teachers'] voices, the practices of silencing must be unpacked" (Fine, 2003, p. 18). As Miller (2005, p. 3) elucidates; women's stories of their experiences "as a form of political inquiry [can] interrogate both silence and speaking". Autobiography, therefore, as Davies (2000, p. 130) points out, could "be used and extended both to make sense of everyday life and to make sense of questions of gender and of power and powerlessness."

While we were not able to talk to all the teachers involved in this research from over eighteen years ago, the voices that are present in this account provide a glimpse into the possibility of being able to stand up and advocate for justice to be served and continue to let their words ring out into the public sphere, as a declaration of their right to be heard. Inspired by the legacy of Maxine Greene, who never shied away from speaking out, the student teachers in this research exemplified the "sounds of silence breaking" (Miller, 2005, p. 253). As Moss (2013) says; "Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change" (pp. 203-204). The teachers started a crack in the hard veneer of the institution. They challenged the concept of curriculum, sought to blur the boundaries between education for adults and education for young children and emphasized the need to underpin all education with the sorts of values, principles and strands that form the New

Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. We feel that though it is still just a crack twenty years later, the key issues remain open to scrutiny and with continuous questioning may let some light shine in. The question to be explored further is “What can we be hopeful about?”

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