

FINAL REPORT ON SCHOLARSHIP IN TEACHING GRANT (2003/2004)

Making Research Relevant: Approaches to the Effective Teaching of Research in Early Childhood Education

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Grant Holder: Dr Linda Harrison
School: Teacher Education
Period of Grant: January 2004 to March 2006

2. THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the *Making Research Relevant* project was to identify effective methods of teaching research subjects at undergraduate level. Early Childhood lecturers from three campuses, Bathurst, Dubbo, and Albury, were invited to develop a collaborative piece of research based on three core subjects taught in 2004, EER300 Inquiry in Early Childhood Education (BEd(EC) Bathurst/Dubbo Campus) and EER403 Early Childhood Research (BEd(EC) Albury Campus). Students' views and experiences from the commencement to the end of these subjects were assessed via questionnaires and interviews, as well as through work completed as part of a learning journal assignment. Information about subject goals, design, content, teaching methods, and assessment was gathered from lecturers and subject outlines, to record the different approaches to teaching research content.

3. PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

Planning and Development

Meetings were held by Dr Harrison with Dr Kennece Coombe (Dubbo) and Dr Agnes Macmillan and Dr Sally Knipe (Albury) to develop the research proposal. A series of questionnaire items and interview procedures were developed to address the research questions. Approval from the Ethics in Human Research Committee was granted in March 2004. Dr Myra Dunn was employed as a Senior Research Assistant to recruit the study participants, conduct the interviews, distribute and collect questionnaires. This ensured that lecturers responsible for teaching and assessment in the subject were not directly involved in the implementation of the research.

Data Collection

A total of 70 students agreed to participate in the research. Students at Albury were approached in Week 12 of Autumn session. Questionnaires were completed by 34 students and focus group interviews were held with 2 groups of 3 students. Students at Bathurst and Dubbo were approached in Week 1 of Spring session. Questionnaires were completed in Week 1 by 21 Bathurst and 15 Dubbo students, with the majority of these also completing end-of session questionnaires. Focus group interviews were conducted at three points: beginning, mid-point, and end of teaching with students at both the Bathurst and Dubbo campuses. Students also contributed their written reflections in learning journals collected at the end of the session.

Data Management and Analysis

Questionnaire data was entered into an SPSS file, and hand-written comments were entered into a Word file. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed into Word files for later analysis. Students' journal entries were photocopied. CELT subject evaluations were also recorded and comments noted. Dr Linda Harrison took responsibility for analysing the survey results. Dr Myra Dunn conducted the analysis of the focus group interview transcripts, and for collating the written comments in students' learning journals. Dr Coombe took responsibility for reviewing students' response to the use of a student conference as their major piece of assessment, involving all aspects of planning the conference as well as presenting their research findings to a broad audience.

4. DISSEMINATION

The research has been presented to Charles Sturt University staff at the CELT conference and at three national conferences, to a variety of audiences including teacher educators, early childhood researchers, and women researchers in tertiary education. The relevance of the work for tertiary education was confirmed by our audiences. Two publications have so far been achieved, but these are limited to conference publications (one referred extended abstract). Two papers have been submitted to international peer-reviewed journals and a further article is being written for an Australian audience, to be submitted to a peer-reviewed Australian journal. The writing has been shared across the three members of the research team, making this collaborative research a very productive, as well as enjoyable, project. Dr Myra Dunn contributed to the writing up of the work for publication. She also gathered a bibliographic file of relevant references for use in writing the literature review for the research and selecting appropriate journals for publishing different aspects of the work.

Conference Presentations

Harrison, L., Macmillan, A., Coombe, K., Knipe, S., & Dunn, M. (December, 2004). *Making Research Relevant: Approaches to the Effective Teaching of Research in Early Childhood Education*. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne.

Harrison, L., Coombe, K. & Dunn, M. (September, 2005). *Making research relevant in pre-service early childhood teacher education*. Paper presented at Learning & Teaching @ CSU: Bright Ideas and Evolving Evidence, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst.

Coombe, K., Harrison, L., & Dunn, M. (November, 2005). *Beginning the journey: Women researchers in training as early childhood professionals*. Paper presented at "Women Doing Research" Women in Research Conference, Central Queensland University.

Coombe, K., Harrison, L., & Dunn, M. (January, 2006). *Embedding a research culture in undergraduate early childhood programs*. Paper presented at the 14th annual conference of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, Monash.

Published Conference Proceedings

Coombe, K., Harrison, L., & Dunn, M. (2005). *Beginning the journey: Women researchers in training as early childhood professionals*. Refereed Extended Abstract. Proceedings of "Women Doing Research" Women in Research Conference, Central Queensland University, November 2005.

Harrison, L., Coombe, K. & Dunn, M. (2005). *Making research relevant in pre-service early childhood teacher education*. Proceedings of Charles Sturt University Learning & Teaching Conference, Bathurst.

Refereed Journals

Harrison, L., Dunn, M., & Coombe, K. (submitted, March 13, 2006) Making Research Relevant in Pre-Service Early Childhood Teacher Education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*

Dunn, M., Coombe, K., & Harrison, L., (submitted, May 10, 2006) Empowering undergraduate women in early childhood through research, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*

In progress

Coombe, K., Harrison, L., & Dunn, M. paper to be submitted to the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* or *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*

5. EXPENDITURE

Budget allocation	\$9977.00
Expenses:	
Personnel	9009.20
Myra Dunn (SRA)	
Transcribing (AA)	
Data Entry (AA)	
Travel for meetings	935.07
Consumables	32.73