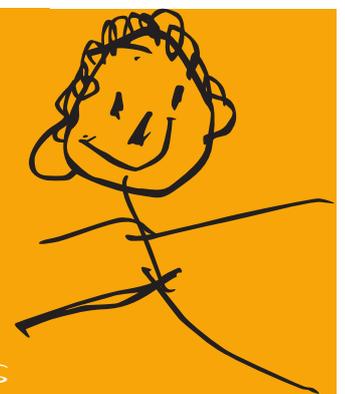


# Early Education



*Volume 67 Spring / Summer 2021*

- TLIF Round 5: The use of tools for reviewing shifts in practice and learning outcomes
- Reflections on the role of teachers in contemporary ECE: Pedagogy, leadership and engagement with fathers
- The past, present and future of rural playcentres
- ECE and COVID-emotional factors for teachers and leaders
- Supporting Associate Teachers across the years





Volume 67 Spring / Summer 2021

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## Contributions

Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community.

*Early Education* welcomes:

- Innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words and up to five keywords.
- Research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords.
- Think pieces with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Commentaries on management matters with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

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# The Tāmaki Makaurau Associate Teacher Network

## A reflection on a decade+ of AT support

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**Karyn Aspden, Mary-Liz Broadley,  
Monica Cameron, Lee Anne Turton,  
Jenny McClew, and Rebecca Hopkins**

*He pai te tirohanga ki ngā mahara mō  
ngā rā pahemo engari ka puta te  
māramatanga i runga i te titiro  
whakamua*

It's fine to have recollections of the past, but wisdom comes from being able to prepare opportunities for the future.

### **Associate teachers are so important**

Practicum experiences are critical to the professional journey of every student teacher as they attain their teaching qualification. It is the site of induction and mentoring, intended to support the student teacher in their move from neophyte to graduating teacher. Practicum is considered by many to be the most powerful influence in shaping student teachers' practice. Practicum is also a key point of assessment within initial teacher education programmes, determining the student's professional development and readiness to teach. On practicum, student teachers have the opportunity to experience the everyday reality of teaching life, and to translate their learning from course work into applied practice with tamariki and whānau, with the support of

mentors who can guide and encourage them. The message is clear, it is on practicum that some of the most significant professional growth and learning occur. Successful practicum experiences rely on early childhood services opening their doors to student teachers, and the contribution of associate teachers (ATs) who are willing to mentor, support and guide the taonga that are our future teachers. Initial teacher education relies on the goodwill and professional leadership of teachers in the sector to support this learning and induction process, providing the space and opportunity for students to engage in meaningful learning and professional growth.

### **The Associate Teacher Network: A brief history**

With the importance of associate teachers in mind, in 2008 the Tāmaki Makaurau Associate Teacher Providers Network was formed with a vision to support associate teachers across the Auckland region. Over the years the ITE providers have included Open Polytechnic, Te Rito Maioha, UNITEC, AUT, Manukau Institute of Technology, Massey University, University of Auckland, and New Zealand Tertiary College. The Network was grounded on a commitment to the principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), and to honouring the partnership of Te Tiriti o Waitangi through

holistic, accessible, partnership-led and community-based professional development. There are many student teachers in the Tāmaki Makaurau region, and ITE providers draw on the same limited pool of potential practicum settings and associate teachers. It is therefore not unusual for associate teachers to support student teachers from multiple providers across a year. Each of these providers is also charged with providing information, training and support for associate teachers, though challenges in finding the time for ATs to engage with PLD were commonly noted within the Network. Drawing together the multiple initial teacher education providers that support students in Auckland, the Network put aside traditional institutional competition to focus instead on collective support and shared expertise that would provide a valuable space for ATs and providers to come together. A committee of passionate ITE lecturers recognised a demand for low priced professional learning and networking opportunities that acknowledged and honoured our local ATs. Thus, the annual AT Symposium was born, whereby associate teachers in the region were invited to come to a low-cost professional development day, hosted by the collective team. Since 2008, twelve Symposium events have been hosted across the provider sites to support the hundreds of ATs who have attended.

In the spirit of reciprocity and fun, the day includes spot prizes and networking lunches alongside inspiring keynote and guest speakers, and practitioner led workshops. These draw on the expertise and specialist areas of the ITE lecturers and ECE teachers. Each symposium day was an experience of partnership in action, with opportunities for interactive conversations in which ATs, ITE providers, and even students could come together to share knowledge and experiences about practicum and teaching. Each ITE provider offered a financial contribution to subsidise the cost to ATs and took turns at hosting the event, kindly donating the spaces to be used, while ITE lecturers volunteered their time. We also made sure to look outside our

typical ECE ITE network, inviting speakers from spaces such as leadership and mentoring, dispute resolution, health and well-being advisors, educational researchers, philosophers and theorists, child advocates and even politicians! We wanted to offer ATs new dispositions of thinking, inspiration, and encouragement, as well as working theories and practical tools to support them in their career, as well as within their AT roles and responsibilities.

Though the representatives from each provider changed across the passing years, each provider has maintained an ongoing commitment to the cause of the Network, and a willingness to offer their spaces and staff to present a great day for our shared associate teachers. The Network affirms just how much we value our associate teachers and embraces the opportunities that are created by breaking down institutional boundaries and working with a shared purpose to support ATs in their critical role.

As a side note, the symposium was (unintentionally, but powerfully) just as valuable for the ITE team members involved. Coming together affirmed that we were not alone in the challenges we were experiencing as ITE lecturers and it provided a space where we could brainstorm and share strategies that helped us to enhance our own role. For over a decade we have supported each other through many professional and personal changes, offered a listening ear, celebratory words, and comforting hugs. We have grown alongside our ATs and students through our own engagement with the Network.

We originally shared our experiences from the first AT Symposium hosted by the Network in Volume 44 of *Early Education* (Broadley & Roberts, 2008) where we highlighted the importance of hearing the voices of student teachers and associate teachers. Our findings at this time highlighted the importance of the professional learning relationship between AT and student, the need for clearly expressed expectations and the value of ongoing learning where both the AT and student are positioned

as adult learners. There was also a strong message about the expression of professionalism, both for associate teachers as mentors, and for student teachers as emerging kaiako. We found that ATs were dedicated, committed and hard-working professionals who were willing to give quality time to support the growth of future teachers, but who were equally looking for student teachers to engage professionally and with openness, demonstrating key learning dispositions and a passion for their work with tamariki. Building from this platform, at each Symposium we have offered discussion panels of experienced ATs and student teachers, supporting tuakana-teina relationships between our experienced and emerging kaiako. These panels also offered great insight into the needs and expectations of both students and ATs and helped to build shared understandings and expectations.

As we reflect on the first article, and the past decade of providing support through the Network, there is much that the team is proud of. Most importantly we are grateful to the ATs who have supported students and those that have given their time to join us for the symposium. We appreciate ATs' professional commitment and pedagogical leadership. We thank our employing institutions who have provided funding and spaces that allowed us to offer the Symposium at little cost to ATs. We also thank each ITE lecturer who has supported the Symposium over the years, providing their time on a Saturday when they didn't have to, but who valued the opportunity to give back to ATs and to support their growth as the mentors of our future kaiako. The Network has truly been a lived expression of *Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ora ai te iwi. With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive.*

## **2020: A time for reflection and review**

As for so many, the realities of COVID-19 in 2019/2020 brought us to a place of reflection and evaluation. Coming together for the Symposium at the start of 2020 was no longer appropriate, leaving an empty space for us all,

but we did not want to let go of the Network or our continued work to support ATs. So, we took the time to instead reach out to our associate teachers to get a sense of their experiences and expectations, in a way that would allow us to make informed decisions moving forward, as well as the chance to reflect on any changes that might have taken place since our original 2008 article. We are very grateful for the 46 associate teachers who took the time to respond to our online survey, and who offered such valuable insight into the role of the AT, their motivation in supporting student teachers, and their hopes for future support, as we will explore in the following sections.

A quick overview of those who responded: 94% were female; 46% were teaching in public Kindergartens, while 50% were in privately owned education and care services. These were very experienced ATs overall, with 26% having supported more than 20 student teachers already, while 50% has supported between 2–10 student teachers. Of these, 54% identified as NZ European, while 10% identified as Māori, and 14% from the Pacific Islands. Twenty three percent had previously attended an AT Network Symposium.

## **The AT experiences**

Through our survey we wanted to touch base with ATs about how they viewed their experiences as an AT. We began by asking ATs about their reasons for taking on the role. It was clear that our respondents were motivated most strongly by their sense of professional responsibility to support the next generation of student teachers (65%), while also recognising that mentoring others supported their own professional learning (14%). ATs saw the practicum space as an opportunity to engage in ako relationships with student teachers in which both were teacher and learner; “the role is a two-way street. Students learn from the teachers around them, and we learn new ideas from them”. ATs also noted that they value the new ideas, knowledge, and materials that student teachers bring to the practicum; “I

enjoy the new ideas that training teachers bring into the centre, new stories and songs”, whilst also seeing the value of sharing their own knowledge and experience. The mutuality of this learning experience was identified as key to successful practicum and challenges tradition hierarchical views where the AT holds all the power. As one AT commented “it is very rewarding both for the AT and the student but as an AT you get to reflect a lot on your practices.” ATs noted that it was especially rewarding to be able to see the professional growth that takes place and the ‘aha’ moments when student teachers really begin to integrate what they have been learning in meaningful ways. It is amazing to see just how much these messages still resonate from those in 2008, clearly the same drivers still determine the motivation of associate teachers, though we must always be wary of relying so heavily on goodwill and professional responsibility without other forms of recognition.

## **Professional Learning (PL) for Associate Teachers**

It is a requirement for all ITE providers to offer learning opportunities and ongoing information to associate teachers as they support student teachers. Each provider in the Network offers other forms of support alongside the work as a collective, working hard to find ways that can reach ATs that are meaningful and accessible considering the many other commitments that ATs carry. Twenty nine percent of our respondents noted that they had engaged in learning opportunities offered by providers, yet it was apparent that most were guided in their role through informal learning, including guidance, support, and role-modelling from colleagues, as well as the influence of their own mentors as a student teacher (both positive and negative). When asked to identify the type of PL that they would like to engage with moving forward, opportunities to share in current research and resources was most frequently noted, followed by information that presented clear, fair, and transparent expectations of student teachers. There was also interest in online courses and

webinars to engage with the knowledge the providers had to share. Moving forward our commitment to work in partnership may need to take on new and creative forms, yet continue to uphold the collective spirit.

## **What ATs want us to know**

We thought it was really important to ask the ATs in our survey to tell us what they most wanted us to know as providers. We want to hold a disposition of listening, and then responding, recognising, and upholding the mana of our associate teachers. For each of the providers involved in the Network, a partnership model between the ECE sector and the ITE provider is critical to our effective ITE delivery. Recent reaccreditation processes with Teaching Council have affirmed again the need for our programmes to be built within a partnership framework in which the sector plays a highly valued role in shaping the content, design, assessment, and delivery of ITE. Teacher Council advocates for assessment processes that seek consensus among stakeholders about judgements of student teachers’ capabilities. Our relationships with ATs could not be more critical in this process.

First and foremost, the survey findings affirmed again just how valuable the role of the AT is, how it is driven by altruistic motivations to give back to the profession through mentoring future kaiako, and the way in which ATs see their role as an expression of their professional responsibility. As one AT commented, “I love being an Associate Teacher it keeps me current with what is happening in the teaching 'world' It also gives me an opportunity to reflect on my own practice with a view for improvement”. In mentoring student teachers, ATs are embodying pedagogical leadership and serving as powerful role models of teaching practice. There is limited financial motivation, but ATs find reward in the mutuality of ako relationships and the contribution of time, knowledge, and resources that the student teacher contributes. As one AT commented “I am happy that I played my part with the heart of doing something good to help

my student grow as a teacher.” ATs see the importance of providing a positive and learning-focused experience for student teachers that allows them to engage in reflection and critical thinking and to explore their skills and goals in a supportive learning space. They see the practicum as supporting the holistic growth of student teachers and allowing the opportunity for the connection of theory and practice in meaningful contexts. ATs also continue to share the message that they want to feel recognised and valued for the contribution of time, effort, knowledge, and skill that they bring to the role, over and above their already significant teaching commitments.

It is also important to acknowledge that practicum relationships are not always smooth sailing. ATs have again told us that challenging practicums can be very difficult to navigate, especially when the student teacher is not meeting expectations or when their dispositions do not reflect Our Code, Our Standards (Teaching Council, 2017); “it can be a challenge when students do not show commitment or competence in their role and understanding of being a teacher”. Such challenges are made more complex when ATs do not feel that there is clear communication or support from the provider. ATs told us that their role has become even more cumbersome, with increasing paperwork and fewer qualified staff and suitable mentors available, compounded by a sector in a state of stress and high teacher turnover; “although I enjoy and feel a responsibility to support future teachers it is an additional workload and is time consuming”. Likewise, ATs can find it challenging to navigate different expectations across the range of providers in Tāmaki Makaurau and remind us again about the importance of clear and regular communication that ensures that there are shared understandings and expectations. As one AT commented “getting into this role, I found that I had no clear direction and the forms needing filling out can be quite overwhelming and somewhat repetitive. Having a consistent direction across providers might be something that needs looking at”.

## So, what next for the Network and the AT Symposium?

Looking to the future the Network is committed to providing ongoing support in ways that are responsive to the changing contexts and needs of associate teachers. The survey suggests that there is an increased desire for moving to an online delivery model, which is not surprising given the changes brought about in the wake of COVID-19. There seems little appetite for providers to offer face-to-face professional development, where groups need to gather physically or to travel. Zoom and other online tools have changed the PD landscape and it seems timely to make use of these changes. There is still a strong desire for a space where providers can share current research and resources, both to enhance the ATs own professional learning, but also to help them better understand the student teacher experience and feel more equipped to engage with them in robust professional conversations to support their learning. We also hear the call for us as providers to ensure that our communication is clear and transparent, especially in relation to assessment expectations, and for students who are at risk of failing. As a collective of ITE providers we will continue to talk with each other, talk about the practicum experience and the ways we assess student teachers as they prepare to enter the profession. As a collective we will also work with the ECE sector in meaningful partnerships to consider the shape of practicum moving forward, as we together consider the nature of initial teacher education in a time of pandemic. So, as we continue in our second decade as a Network, we will take the responses from our associate teachers and partners and look at how we might best offer support and maintain our commitment to associate teachers moving forward. We look forward to our ongoing mahi, to our professional conversations and to presenting an update in Early Education in another ten years.

If you would like to continue the conversation started in this article, please feel free to contact **Mary-Liz Broadley** ([Mary-](#)

[Liz.Broadley@openpolytechnic.ac.nz](mailto:Liz.Broadley@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)) or **Karyn Aspden** ([k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz)). We would love to hear from you.



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