SUPERVISOR/S: Olivera Kamenarac

PROJECT TITLE: Title of Research Project: Early childhood education for a socially just and sustainable world: (Re)Awakening of advocate activist teacher voices

FIELD: Education/early childhood education

DIVISION/SCHOOL: DEDU - School of Education

PROJECT LOCATION: Hamilton

PROJECT ABSTRACT:
Social and educational inequality and inequity, coupled with ecological imbalances and climate changes, are among the most critical problems in Aotearoa, New Zealand and many countries worldwide. Addressing complex issues of today's and tomorrow's society calls for education that builds an individual's capacity to be aware of and curious to learn and understand complex demands and issues in the world and how they operate. It calls educators to be actively and critically engaged in local, national, and global civic life and take actions contributing to more socially just, equitable and inclusive education.

In an attempt to address global and local trends in education, this study explores early childhood (ECE) student teachers' worldviews and professional working theories associated with the place of ECE and the role of teachers in contributing to a socially just ECE and a sustainable world. It seeks to understand how student teachers interpret the social justice and sustainability issues and view their place as educators in contributing to solutions. Simultaneously, the research project creates space for the principal researcher to critically reflect on her teaching practice as an educator of advocate-activist teachers and examine the use of critical pedagogies in teaching and learning in initial teacher education (ITE).

The study builds on the researcher’s interest in critical pedagogies (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2020) and supports the goal of understanding how to strengthen advocate-activist teacher identities (Kamenarac, 2019) through initial teacher education (ITE). It is inspired by scholars interested in facilitating students’ learning, motivation and interests in physical education through the lens of an activist approach (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

By applying the activist approach in conducting this study, the researcher supports a Summer Research Scholar to critically engage with questions about the possibilities and challenges of ITE in strengthening capacities of teaching graduates not only to speak on behalf of self and others from within existing political and socio-economic frameworks in ECE (i.e. to act as advocates), but importantly, to challenge and resist power bases underpinning these frameworks (i.e. activism), and envisage a more equitable and just education and the world. The study creates an opportunity for the Summer Research Scholar to develop an understanding of critical posthumanism and new materialist feminism (Braidotti & Regan, 2017) and use these to analyse data gathered through student group discussions on Moodle and student assignments in one of the ITE courses.

STUDENT SKILLS:
- Excellent verbal communication skills and academic writing skills
- Understanding of qualitative research methods and thematic data analysis
- Basic computer skills
- Understanding of Māori values, concepts, philosophies, worldviews underpinning education in New Zealand

PROJECT TASKS:
- Summer Research Scholar learns how to use NVivo to code qualitative data
- Summer Research Scholar conducts an analysis of qualitative data using NVivo
- Summer Research Scholar creates a written summary of the research findings
- Summer Research Scholar writes and publishes paper with the researcher, discussing research findings
- Summer Research Scholar designs a final research poster

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:
- Student’s Research Poster (as per clause 6 of the Scholarship regulations)
- Summer Research Scholar attends sessions offered by the UoW library to learn how to conduct data analysis using NVivo
- Thematic analysis of research data is completed in NVivo
- A written summary of key research findings
- A co-authored paper discussing research findings