Constanza Tolosa and Anne Schofield are both determined Faculty of Education students who are good at time management. So it’s no surprise that they were successful applicants for the EdD programme in February 2005. Now at the halfway-point of the qualification, having completed the first two years of study, they are looking to positive futures.

Constanza Tolosa, a Spanish teacher and native of Colombia, had always considered doing doctoral study and her arrival in New Zealand in 2004 seemed like an opportune time to begin. She is now completing a thesis on how Spanish is taught in New Zealand secondary schools with particular focus on how teachers approach their subject matter and how their knowledge of Spanish affects their teaching.

“What’s interesting in language is that the content or the subject matter that you teach also affects the way you teach.”

Constanza’s study involves three steps: what teachers say, what they do and believe, and the reflection of what they do.

“My study has made me a better teacher because my research has made me conscious of the importance of language as a vehicle for the content. You also learn how other teachers approach the same things you teach. It makes you read everything in the curriculum carefully and consider the way it’s taught.”

Constanza says although she thought her research was very individual, the study has become more relevant because of the current changes being implemented in the curriculum for learning languages. She believes her findings might be useful for policymakers because the findings she has made so far in Spanish teaching could be applied to any other language taught at secondary schools in New Zealand.

She says her thesis was helped by the structure of the EdD programme. She says it was great to have someone to talk to about her research in the first two years of cohort study. She describes the course as very practical but in the end it is also more productive for her because it suits the way she learns.

“I learn through other people. I’m not good at learning by myself. So the cohort work was perfect for me. You’re also learning about areas that you would otherwise never have heard of, from the other people in your cohort. You’re always meeting deadlines which is good for me.”

Anne Schofield says she looked at other universities when considering doctoral study but chose the Faculty because it focuses on applied professional research rather than theoretical which she found interesting and professionally relevant.

“The EdD programme cohort arrangement really kept me on track. You are always getting feedback from supervisors and cohort members so you get a better understanding of what you need to do.”

Anne’s thesis is on teaching English as a second language in early childhood education. She is currently studying three-year-olds in early childhood centres who speak a foreign language at home. She has studied children who speak Afrikaans, Chinese, Greek, Cambodian, Thai and Korean.

“It may be the first time these children have spoken English when they come to an early childhood centre, so I’m looking to see how different teachers support these children.”

Anne’s study involves questionnaires for the teachers, interviewing the parents, observing the children every six weeks and testing their English skills every three months. She hopes to use her research findings to write an exemplum for the New Zealand early childhood sector.

“It will question their practice and hopefully I’ll be able to publish something that has some depth to it through a practical and theoretical relationship.”

Both Constanza and Anne expect to graduate within two years and intend to teach and continue researching.