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Meeting the Standards? Exploring Preparedness for Teaching

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Abstract: This research focused on the perceptions of pre-service and beginning health and physical education (HPE) teachers in relation to their preparedness for teaching. A questionnaire was designed to engage with teacher professional standards addressing (i), professional knowledge; (ii), professional relationships and (iii), professional practice. Follow-up interviews with randomly-selected teachers facilitated deeper interrogation of the issues. Findings indicated that both groups felt that their training had prepared them well in relation to most elements of the three aspects of the professional standards. Pre-service teachers had concerns with some elements of professional knowledge: specifically, knowledge and understanding of numeracy, ICT and literacy as they related to the teaching of HPE; and behaviour management. Beginning teachers had similar concerns in relation to professional knowledge and about their ability to plan and use valid and reliable assessment strategies. Data supported previous research that emphasised the ongoing nature of learning as a teacher.

Introduction

Internationally, retention of teachers is well documented as a major issue of concern, with Ewing and Smith (2003) suggesting that in the Western world “between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of all newly-recruited teachers resign or burnout in their first three to five years of teaching” (p. 15). The Australian study reported on here focused on the perceptions of pre-service teachers and recently-graduated beginning teachers in relation to their preparedness for teaching. The study arose amid State, national and international concerns about rising attrition rates in teaching and the ability of teacher education courses to adequately prepare teachers for successful entry into the teaching profession. Notably, the study specifically explored preparedness for teaching in relation to newly-established professional standards. The data reported below point to strengths and weaknesses in teacher preparation and demonstrate the value of employing the standards framework as a reference point in teacher education research.

Attrition and retention of teachers

Brill and McCartney reported that in the United States “...beginning teachers are leaving schools at a startling rate. Thirty-three per cent of teachers leave their schools in the first three years, and 46 percent leave after five years” (p. 750), with attrition identified as arguably the greatest barrier to improving public education. In 2007, it was estimated that up to 25 per cent of beginning teachers in Australia might leave the teaching profession within their first five years of teaching (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007). This estimate (together with the findings of a survey of beginning teachers conducted by the Australian Education Union in 2006 that revealed that 45.6 per cent of respondents did not see themselves teaching in ten years’ time) highlights the significance of attrition and retention in the Australian context. Reducing attrition and improving retention rates are thus key challenges facing Federal, State and Territory governments, education systems and schools in Australia.

We agree that efforts to seriously engage with the issue of attrition need to address both the preparedness of beginning teachers and the provision of ongoing support for them as they transition from student teachers to ‘full’ members of the teaching profession and school communities. Further, we contend that addressing that transition also requires engagement with professional standards for teaching. Both nationally and internationally, statutory professional standards are now firmly established as the key reference points for discussion and action directed toward improvements in teachers’ professional competence, the development of teachers’ professional knowledge and teacher professionalism (Yandell & Turvey, 2007). In 2007, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training identified two aspects of the attrition problem in Australia: the quality of induction programs for beginning teachers and the effectiveness of pre-service teacher education.

While we do not deny that professional standards are still regarded by some professionals as a highly contentious development, our aim in this research was to explore ways in which they can be positioned within a supportive framework that acknowledges the progressive nature of teachers’ learning and that productively ‘bridges’ initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning as a beginning teacher.

Usefully, standards frameworks in Australia formally acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of teacher preparation and the complexities of teaching. This study specifically utilises this feature, adopting the framework developed in Tasmania that encompasses the inter-related aspects of professional knowledge, professional relations and professional practice (Appendix 1, Teacher Registration Board of Tasmania, 2007). In parallel, it locates beginning teachers as participants in the community of practice of teaching, challenged to simultaneously develop and demonstrate the skills, knowledge and relationships that are deemed fundamental for membership of that community.

Beginning teaching and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)

The notion of participation in learning communities and, more specifically, legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is useful in considering

preparedness of teachers and the capacity of beginning teachers to effectively enter and embed themselves within the community of practice of teaching.

As Yandell and Turvey (2007) explained:

In Lave and Wenger's accounts of workplace learning, attention is paid to the importance of learning by doing, of embedded, context-specific knowledge and of narrative as a significant means whereby knowledge is socially distributed. There is a recognition, too, of the fact that communities of practice may be more or less stable, more or less resistant to change, and that the relationship between 'old timers' and newcomers may be more or less dialectical. (p. 535)

Viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation thus means that learning within a community of practice "is not merely a condition for membership but is itself an evolving form of membership" of that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Clearly, in the case of teaching, legitimate peripheral participation in the community of practice begins during teacher education and prior to full employment. It involves learning that spans teacher education institutions and schools and occurs amid partnership-based arrangements for professional placements or 'practicums'. As we discuss below, professional placements play a crucial role in relation to the preparedness of beginning teachers for the teaching profession and the many facets of work in schools.

Yet, as Yandell and Turvey (2007) acknowledged, expectations dramatically shift at the time of employment:

There is a world of difference between the roles occupied by student teachers—roles that can readily be seen in LPP terms—and what is expected of even the newest of newly qualified teachers, who are expected to participate fully in the practice of the school and the department from the first day of their employment: they have their own timetable, their own classes, their own workload that is, at the least, 90 per cent of that of more experienced colleagues. (p. 547)

Teacher attrition rates point to a need for better understandings of both the extent of this sudden change in expectations and professional identity and the ways in which beginning teachers manage this change, and, furthermore, what can be done by teacher education institutions and schools to better support beginning teachers in managing this transition.

Preparedness of beginning teachers

Through university based units and a series of professional practice experiences, teacher education courses endeavour to provide students with the skills, knowledge and understandings required for successful entry into a school and professional community. As indicated above, professional standards now provide the framework for the articulation of what are deemed by various jurisdictions to be the essential skills, knowledge and understandings for entry to the profession and progression within it. Professional standards thus represent a marker or reference point for judgments about the preparedness of beginning teachers.

The challenges inherent in teacher education courses to ensure preparedness may have been reframed with the introduction of professional standards, but are far from new. Time is a perennial and internationally recognised problem for teacher education courses. The report of the 2005 inquiry into the suitability of pre-service

teacher education in Victoria (Education Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria) made the pointed observation that “It is improbable that any single pre-service teacher education course is able to cover all the skills and knowledge contemporary teachers require, let alone provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to master them all.... Given this, pre-service teacher education must evaluate the skills and knowledge essential for beginning teachers” (2005, p. 217). In its first recommendation (2005, p. 10), the Committee specifically called for studies into the effectiveness of teacher education, both in the pre-service phase and in the early years of teaching. In making this call, the Committee noted (2005) that “... there is simply not a sufficiently rich body of research evidence to enable it to come to any firm conclusions about the overall quality of teacher education in Australia” (p. 5).

In considering the adequacy or effectiveness of teacher education courses, data from a Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (2002) national study of the transition of beginning teachers into professional life provide some useful insights into perceptions of both the beginning teachers and their professional colleagues. Beginning teachers¹ and their supervisors were asked for a general assessment of how well teacher education courses prepared beginning teachers for their first year of teaching. The results indicated that 29.6 per cent of supervisors (n = 380) and 44.6 per cent of beginning teachers (n = 697) felt that teachers were prepared ‘well’ or ‘very well’; 45.2 per cent of supervisors and 36.1 per cent of beginning teachers felt teachers were prepared ‘adequately’; and 25.3 per cent of supervisors and 19.3 per cent of beginning teachers felt teachers were ‘not very well’ or were ‘poorly’ prepared. While these results point to general feelings about preparedness, an understanding of what lies behind the results is lacking.

Frequently, professional experience—the practicum—is identified as a key issue in debates about the adequacy of pre-service teacher education courses to prepare student teachers for the profession. In their critical review of literature on learning to teach, Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998) suggested that research pointed to a need to seriously question the notion that the practicum provides the intended ‘bridge between the theory, knowledge, and skills gained at university and their application in the classroom’ (p.152). Tension between teacher educators and pre-service teachers seeking to bridge school and university cultures was the main theme that they identified as emerging from research on the practicum. Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon’s (1998) review portrayed that tension as continuing into the first year of teaching, with six case studies of the first year experience pointing to ‘an incongruity’ between that year and the pre-service year. Support for beginning teachers to enable them to successfully navigate their transition and establish themselves as legitimate members of a professional community then becomes critical.

Support for beginning teachers

Brock and Grady (1997) remind us that in contrast to most other professions, where there is gradual progression in the amount and difficulty of the work assigned, beginning teachers often start out with more responsibilities than veterans and often with the same expectations of expertise. Graham and Roberts’ (2007) recent work in the United Kingdom has usefully highlighted that an important aspect of those

¹ Defined in the DEST study as encompassing teachers in either their first or second year of teaching.

expectations relates to teachers' work within schools and amid school communities and cultures, as distinct from the pedagogical act of teaching. They explain that:

In recent years, the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status in England have placed new emphasis on student-teachers' ability to become integrated into the 'corporate life of the school' and to work with other professionals. Little research, however, has been carried out into how student-teachers perceive the social processes and interactions that are central to such integration during their initial teacher education school placements. (Graham & Roberts, 2007, p. 399)

While Graham and Roberts (2007, p. 400) emphasise that student teachers and schools are active in the processes of negotiating, building and sustaining positive relations (commenting that "the notion of a socially skilled school is as appropriate as that of a socially skilled student-teacher" p. 400) there is clearly a need to also acknowledge and further explore ways in which experiences during pre-service teacher education impact upon and can best support the effective integration and socialisation of student and beginning teachers into departments and schools.

The task of supporting the development of social and cultural skills, knowledge and professionalism requires a partnership approach that acknowledges that the process of learning to be a teacher does not end on day one of paid employment as a qualified teacher. Brill and McCartney (2008) noted that "when implemented properly, mentoring and induction programs can be crucial to improving teacher retention" but that, equally, "poorly implemented programs can do more harm than good" (p. 760).

Romano (2008) emphasised that enhanced understanding of the issues faced by beginning teachers in their first year is a pre-requisite to better supporting these teachers. Classroom management, external policy, personal issues and content and pedagogy were the four categories identified as being of greatest concern to the nine beginning teachers involved in the most recent of the studies conducted by Romano. The study reaffirmed that beginning teachers "need assistance in motivating students and managing student misbehaviour" (Romano, 2008, p. 75).

However, it is important to acknowledge that classroom management, personal issues and content and pedagogy were also frequently associated with successes reported by the beginning teachers. Romano (2008) deemed the extent to which beginning teachers cited content and pedagogy in relation to successes as an indicator that they were both well prepared through initial teacher education and also "supported in their instructional efforts" as beginning teachers (p. 75). Beginning teachers identified other teachers at their schools as "the most frequently used resource for success" (p. 73). Across three studies undertaken by Romano five categories of resources needed to address the struggles that beginning teachers face were identified:

- More training in classroom management;
- More teaching experience;
- Increased communication or support from parents;
- Increased communication of school expectations and due dates; and
- Additional time to plan lessons.

(Romano, 2008, p.74).

Beginning teaching in health and physical education (HPE)

Internationally, HPE is acknowledged as having many similarities to other teaching contexts but as also presenting beginning teachers with some distinct challenges. A recent study by Shoval, Erlich and Fejgin (2010) involving 62 beginning physical education teachers in Israel pursued preparedness in relation to the three levels of professional development employed by Vonk (1995):

- the *personal* level (focusing on the self and the development of the teacher as a person);
- the *professional-theoretical* level (incorporating knowledge of pedagogical content, class management skills and teaching skills); and
- the *environmental* level, relating to the teacher's connection and integration with the school, wider education system and professional and social arena.

Shoval et al. (2010) found that, personally, the beginning teachers were highly motivated and hard working, but also struggling with workload, feeling isolated, “striving to be flexible and hiding their true feelings [about difficulties] in order to attain the desired professional status” (p. 92).

A key issue arising in relation to the professional-theoretical level was the teachers' lack of practical pedagogical knowledge, so that they were struggling to apply their content knowledge in practice (and in unfamiliar teaching environments). In relation to Vonk's (1995) third level (the *environmental*), the beginning teachers were struggling to make meaningful connections beyond their immediate teaching context and their daily encounters in the school. In the light of their findings, Shoval et al. (2010) advocated the embedding of professional guidance and support in both pre-service teacher training and in the induction phase of teaching for beginning physical education teachers.

This recommendation echoed Hardy's (1999) research involving 33 physical education teachers in their first year of teaching in the United Kingdom. Notably, Hardy pointed to the potentially significant role that professional support might have in countering other problems encountered by the beginning teachers, including behaviour management and knowledge and understanding of day-to-day procedures within schools.

Other research in the UK that has addressed physical education trainee teacher experiences has further emphasised that, particularly in the context initial teacher education programs that are typically confined to one year, mentor teachers in schools need to be acknowledged as having “shared responsibility of the professional development of trainees” (Stidder & Hayes, 2002, p.48). Furthermore, it is clear that mentors “are and continue to be extremely influential in shaping attitudes of potential recruits to the profession” (p. 48).

Professional guidance and support are arguably all the more critical given that HPE is recognised as a context in which professional relations within departments and acceptance into the culture of the department can be critical to student and beginning teachers' feelings of belonging, their development of teacher identity and their security and confidence in the role of HPE teacher (Brown, 1999; Macdonald & Kirk, 1996; Tinning et al., 2001).

Furthermore, integration into the community of practice of HPE teaching and attainment of legitimate peripheral participation is reaffirmed by these and other authors (Brown & Rich, 2002; Penney, 2002) as presenting pre-service and beginning teachers with significant professional dilemmas. Specifically, they may well face situations in which they have to engage with and/or feel pressured to adopt practices

that can be deemed to actively legitimate and reproduce longstanding inequities in HPE, particularly with regard to gender.

Against this backdrop, Sirna, Tinning and Rossi (2008) explicitly explored the HPE department as a site of workplace learning and, specifically, “how ITE [Initial Teacher Education] students negotiate tacit and contradictory expectations as well as social tasks during teaching practicums and the ways in which their understandings are mediated through participation in the workspace” (p. 286). Notably, they conceptualised learning as “a social task within communities of practice” (p. 286), and revealed that the professional placement (or practicum) sees student teachers engaging with “dilemmas and decisions faced in the processes of learning to be an HPE teacher while concurrently practicing as one” (p. 295).

Many of those dilemmas and decisions are associated with social tasks and relationships within HPE departments, such that Sirna, Tinning and Rossi (2008) specifically recommended that “PETE [Physical Education Teacher Education] increase opportunities for student teachers to examine social dynamics of HPE and potential implications for their understandings and participation in social tasks” (p. 297) and called into question the ethics “in sending student teachers into contexts that might even be described as toxic for some” (p. 297).

In the British context, Keay (2009) has employed figurational analysis to examine the position and influence of newly-qualified physical education teachers within the subject community. Her research has reaffirmed the strength of dominant, long-established discourses, which beginning teachers encounter but also invariably recognise from their own experiences of PE as students in schools. Beginning PE teachers, then, “knowingly and unknowingly” adopt the familiar, dominant discourses “to be accepted” into the community as teachers (Keay, 2009, p. 245). Acceptance and adoption of established practices and discourses may be central in beginning teachers establishing positive professional relations.

For Keay (2009) this raises questions for teacher educators to consider, most notably the extent to which pre-service teacher education courses are “preparing teachers to meet the needs of what is already in place in schools or equipping them to challenge practice” (p. 245). The irony that Keay’s (2009) work reveals is that traditional rather than innovative discourses are likely to inform both beginning teachers’ and their new colleagues’ judgments about preparedness for entry into the community of practice of physical education teaching.

A Tasmanian study

In our study, a professional standards framework was utilised to obtain further insights into those aspects of teaching and professional life in schools that teacher education is perceived by pre-service HPE teachers (in their final year of a four-year teacher education course) and beginning HPE teachers (in their first year of teaching after graduation) as addressing well or otherwise. The professional standards that inform our pre-service teacher education course and that were employed in this research are those developed by the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) of Tasmania in 2007 (see Appendix 1). The professional standards introduced by the TRB include Graduate Standards, defined as “what graduate teachers are expected to know, value and be able to do upon completion of their pre-service course” (p. 10).

The TRB explains that:

Graduate teachers are about to begin their careers and will be expected to have gained theoretical understandings about teaching and learning through study and be able to demonstrate application of this knowledge and practice through their supervised teaching experiences. These standards apply to teachers in all teaching contexts, in any content area and at any grade level. The standards are written broadly so that they apply to all teachers but also allow for variations according to particular teaching context. (p. 10)

The Graduate Standards incorporate four aspects, each of which articulates specific skills, knowledge and understandings that within the context of an approved pre-service teacher education course and supervised internship, beginning teachers will demonstrate.

Skills, knowledge and understandings are described in terms of *elements* within each aspect, and each element has accompanying **Indicators of Practice**. For example, the first aspect, **Professional Knowledge (Aspect A)**, addresses “current professional knowledge and understanding in teaching practice” (2007, p. 12). This aspect has six elements (A 1-6). The following are indicators of practice for element A3, which requires graduates to “demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the literacy, numeracy and ICT demands of the specific teaching area”:

- demonstrate a knowledge of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) theory;
- understand students’ literacy, numeracy and ICT development;
- understand and interpret literacy, numeracy and ICT assessment data;
- demonstrate a repertoire of strategies to support literacy, numeracy and ICT development and be able to articulate the connection to theory; and
- support literacy, numeracy and ICT learning in specific teaching contexts.

(TRB of Tasmania, 2007, p. 12)

The second aspect, **Professional Relationships (Aspect B)**, relates to beginning teachers’ understanding and capacity to develop effective professional relationships within the school and pre-service communities (2007, p. 13). It comprises four elements (B1-4), which again have accompanying Indicators of Practice.

The third aspect, **Professional Practice (Aspect C)**, addresses assessment, planning and teaching for the learning needs of a range of students (2007, p. 14). It contains five elements (C1-5).

The final aspect, also called **Professional Practice (Aspect 4)**, notes that within the context of an approved pre-service teacher education course and supervised internship, beginning teachers will ‘demonstrate the ability to plan for, and maintain a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment’ (2007, p. 15). This aspect has six elements (D1-6).

Details of all of the elements incorporated in the Graduate Standards are provided in Appendix 1.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative methodology to enable in-depth exploration of the issues central to the inquiry, i.e. (1), to identify professional knowledge, professional relationships and professional practice issues framing pre-service and beginning teachers’ experiences as newcomers to the community of practice of teaching; and (2), to establish the extent of pre-service and beginning

teachers' preparedness for entry into the community of practice of teaching as a result of their pre-service teacher education.

In addressing these issues, the project sought to identify the social, cultural and professional dimensions of preparedness that featured in pre-service and beginning teachers' reflections on their experiences of teaching and of professional life within departments and schools.

The participants for the study were drawn from two groups, pre-service teachers (Group 1) and beginning teachers (Group 2). For the purposes of the study, 'beginning teachers' were defined as teacher education graduates in their first year of employment as teachers. Group 1 comprised 43 pre-service teachers in the final year of their Bachelor of Human Movement course at the University of Tasmania during 2008. Group 2 comprised 38 beginning teachers who graduated from the Bachelor of Human Movement course at the University of Tasmania at the end of 2007.

The study employed questionnaire and interview protocols to gather data. The questionnaire was designed to obtain descriptive data from the two participant groups. Interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of each group (see below) to facilitate deeper interrogation of the issues raised in the questionnaire and enable the research to generate highly-contextualised illustrative accounts of beginning teachers' experiences as newcomers to departments and schools.

Pre-service teachers were contacted directly (during university lectures) and asked if they wished to participate in the research, while the questionnaire and accompanying invitation to participate were mailed to all of the beginning teachers. Completion of the questionnaire was deemed to indicate consent from participants.

The questionnaire comprised 28 questions based on the four aspects incorporated in the TRB Graduate Standards framework (see Appendix 1). Blocks of questions directly related to the aspects **Professional Knowledge** (Aspect 1); **Professional Relationships** (Aspect 2); and **Professional Practice** (Aspects 3 and 4). All questions were posed in the following manner and required students to respond using a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree –SA; agree - A; disagree - D; strongly disagree - SD):

The BHM course at the University of Tasmania effectively developed:

1. ***My understanding of the importance of establishing professional teacher-student relationships.***

Strongly agree [] Agree [] Disagree [] Strongly disagree []

2. ***My understanding of the demonstrating knowledge of how students learn.***

Strongly agree [] Agree [] Disagree [] Strongly disagree []

Thirty-four responses (15 female and 19 male) were received from the pre-service teacher education group (n = 43). Thirteen (8 female and 5 male) were received from the beginning teacher group (n = 38). This represented response rates of 85 per cent and 32 per cent respectively. From the responses a sub-sample of six pre-service teachers and four beginning teachers was randomly selected for the interview phase of the study. The sub-sample incorporated both male and female participants². The interviews were conducted at a location deemed easiest for access by participants and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The interview schedule was forwarded to all interviewees prior to their interviews. The schedule addressed each of the four aspects in the TRB Graduate

² The pre-service sub-sample comprised three female and three male student teachers; the beginning teacher sub-sample comprised three female teachers and one male teacher. The number and gender balance was influenced by the willingness of teachers to participate in this phase of the study.

Standards and allowed interviewees to raise other issues relevant to joining the profession. Interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire survey were computer analysed to generate descriptive statistics using SPSS. Qualitative data arising from the open-ended questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed through a process of progressive categorisation and data coding designed to identify and refine data themes. The computer software program NVivo was utilised in this process and data were specifically identified with the four aspects in the TRB Graduate Standards.

Findings

Questionnaire data collected from **pre-service teachers** strongly indicated that they believed the course had effectively addressed many elements across the four aspects of the Graduate Standards. There was strongest agreement around preparedness in relation to Professional Practice, and specifically relating to the following elements:

C3: be familiar with and use a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, materials and resources (45 per cent SA and 55 per cent A)

D3: intentionally develop positive relationships with students and colleagues (55 per cent SA and 45 per cent A)

D4: plan for and maintain a safe, positive and supportive physical environment (56 per cent SA and 44 per cent A)

One element of the Professional Knowledge aspect (*A6: know, understand and adhere to legal and ethical obligations and be aware of the nature of professional behaviour*) was highlighted as a strength by 94 per cent (SA and A combined) of pre-service teachers. Professional Knowledge remained, however, the area of greatest concern for this group. The element that was of most concern related to knowledge and understanding of literacy, numeracy and ICT demands of HPE teaching (*A3*). When D and SD were combined, results showed 35 per cent of the pre-service teachers identified numeracy, 27 per cent ICT and 24 per cent literacy as an area of concern.

The only other element within the Graduate Standards that attracted considerable concern (from 18 per cent of pre-service teachers when D and SD results were combined), pertained to the Professional Practice aspect, addressing teachers' ability to apply a range of strategies to support positive behaviour management (*D5: demonstrate the ability to apply a range of strategies used to support positive behaviour management*).

With regard to the aspect of Professional Relationships, the pre-service teachers highlighted the strength of the course in elements B1 (*understand the importance of and make deliberate efforts to strengthen professional teacher-student relationships - 71 per cent SA and 29 per cent A*) and B2 (*understand the importance of and demonstrate a capacity to explicitly teach the skills for developing social competence to promote positive relationships - 53 per cent SA and 47 per cent A*).

Questionnaire data from the beginning teachers showed that there was a high level of agreement about preparedness across a greater number of the elements within the Graduate Standards. The beginning teachers echoed pre-service teachers in identifying the following elements: *A6 (know, understand and adhere to legal and ethical obligations and be aware of the nature of professional behaviour - 62 per cent SA and 38 per cent A)*; *B1 (understand the importance of and make deliberate efforts*

to strengthen professional teacher-student relationships - 58 per cent SA and 42 per cent A); C3 (be familiar with and use a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, materials and resources - 46 per cent SA and 54 per cent A) and D3 (intentionally develop positive relationships with students and colleagues - 61 per cent SA and 30 per cent A) as strengths in relation to the preparedness their training had provided.

In addition, beginning teachers indicated that they felt prepared in relation to elements A4 (*know how to design engaging learning sequences and appropriate processes and skills required to teach them - 38 per cent SA and 62 per cent A) and A5 (demonstrate an ability to reflect on and evaluate their teaching practice to seek and value continual improvement - 54 per cent SA and 46 per cent A); B3 (communicate effectively in a range of ways with stakeholders in the school and pre-service communities - 31 per cent SA and 69 per cent A); D2 (plan for and work towards the establishment of a collaborative and cooperative learning culture - 62 per cent SA and 38 per cent A); and D5 (demonstrate the ability to apply a range of strategies used to support positive behaviour management - 38 per cent SA and 62 per cent A).*

Beginning teachers similarly highlighted knowledge and understanding of literacy (31 per cent), numeracy (23 per cent) and ICT (23 per cent) as areas of outstanding concern when results for D and SD were combined. In addition, they had reservations about their ability to plan and use fair, valid and reliable assessment strategies to inform teaching and learning (C1 - *plan and use fair, valid and reliable assessment strategies to inform teaching and learning - 15 per cent D).*

Insights from interviews

Interview data is presented below in relation to each of the aspects of the TRB Graduate Standards. Interviews were designed to be flexible and responsive in relation to the issues discussed with the pre-service and beginning teachers. The presentation of data below shows that not all aspects of the Graduate Standards nor all elements within aspects featured as issues of note from participants' perspectives.

Professional knowledge: pre-service teachers

In relation to the first aspect, Professional Knowledge, interview data from pre-service teachers reaffirmed the survey findings, showing pre-service teachers had concerns about their ability to understand literacy, numeracy and ICT (element A3) as they related to HPE teaching. For example, in talking about ICT, one pre-service teacher noted that their course had addressed skills to enable them to use ICT in preparing assignments and presentations, but had not addressed how it could be embedded in HPE teaching. A fellow pre-service teacher expanded on this point, saying; "well the same with numeracy, like I guess its brushed over, like it's said you can interrelate it but it's never really been discussed properly how to...or some really good methods of doing that". Another commented that "I can see how I can use [IT(sic)] because in the curriculum it basically tells you how you can use it but I don't think the course let us use different technologies".

In talking about the element of critical content knowledge and key concepts and understandings of the subject area (element A2), a pre-service teacher was

confident in the ability to apply knowledge in teaching HPE, commenting that “through our pedagogy subjects that talked about how students learn and different ways to go about it, so that was, I found that pretty interesting and helpful”.

With regard to element A4, which relates to knowledge about how to design engaging learning sequences and appropriate processes and skills to teach them, one pre-service teacher commented: “learning sequences... we spent a lot of time designing activities and ways to progress it [sic] for different age groups, so that is pretty well covered”.

Teacher reflective practice is an element also addressed in this aspect (A5). Pre-service teachers agreed this area was well covered in their course, and one beginning teacher commented “we have done that [reflection and evaluation] really well and as much as I hated it to start with, I thought ‘why are we writing these reflections? What a waste of my time’. But obviously over the four years I’ve really come to value the fact that I now know how to do that”.

The final element in this aspect relates to knowledge and understanding associated with legal and ethical obligations, and awareness of professional behaviour (A6). One pre-service teacher indicated a clear appreciation of the significance of this element for teachers and teacher education, commenting “legal and ethical... I think that more these days wouldn’t hurt and I think that its something a lot of people would be interested in actually learning more about”.

Professional knowledge: beginning teachers

When beginning teachers were asked in interview about their confidence in teaching HPE, there was general agreement that the course prepared them well, with one beginning teacher stating “...for the HPE content knowledge, key concepts and essential understandings, I think we were well prepared for that sort of thing and probably know more than some of the people that are here teaching today”.

The interview data showed that as with the pre-service teachers, many of the beginning teachers expressed concern about their capacity to address the element that requires teachers to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology demands of specific teaching areas (A3). When speaking about literacy in particular, one beginning teacher noted “...I guess it’s the Human Movement degree not the Literacy degree, but I think it would be kind of good to have some sort of understanding of how kids actually go about learning how to read, so the decoding and strategy type stuff ... I think it helps if you can actually help kids learn to read”. With regard to numeracy, similar comments were made that the course enhanced their personal numeracy skills but did not necessarily extend their knowledge of how to teach numeracy. In commenting on their preparedness to teach literacy and numeracy, one beginning teacher stated “I don’t think they were greatly covered. But I think I’ve probably learnt more about them on the job”.

Professional relationships - pre-service teachers

With regard to the second aspect, Professional Relationships, the dominant topic in the interview data was the relationship between teacher and students, especially in classroom contexts (the focus of element B1). One pre-service teacher noted, for example, that “in developing strong professional student teacher

relationships, that's something... that the course is really really good at". The student highlighted that the course had made them very aware of the need to maintain a clear professional line between teacher and students while developing positive and supportive relationships.

When discussing element B3 (*communicate effectively in a range of ways with stakeholders in the school and pre-service communities*), one pre-service teacher commented that "obviously as teachers you've got to be able to communicate effectively, but I don't think we've had discussion of how you conduct an interview with a parent, say if you had an angry parent... when do you need to bring in someone else, you know your senior staff, that sort of stuff".

With regard to element B4 (*work collaboratively to set and achieve common goals*), one pre-service teacher expressed the view that "there's probably an opportunity to do it better [within the pre-service teacher education course]", suggesting "...when the groups are being organised ... maybe then would be a good time to say, okay guys, you need to set some goals and work out how you are going to do it and actually take the groups through doing those things as well".

Professional relationships - beginning teachers

Beginning teachers echoed some of the views expressed by pre-service teachers in relation to the limited extent to which they felt prepared to address the range of professional relationships required in teaching. In this respect, interview data painted a less positive view of preparedness than questionnaire data. Specifically, there was little evidence from interviews that beginning teachers felt that the course had prepared them to communicate effectively in a range of ways with stakeholders across the school and pre-service communities (elements B1 and B3). For example, one beginning teacher commented: "If we're talking about stakeholders as parents and things like that, I don't think we were really prepared for what we could expect from parents". Another noted that "... we were given a lot of information on how to be professional with students. Perhaps not so much with colleagues".

In relation to element B4 (*work collaboratively to set and achieve common goals*), one of the beginning teachers reflected that "I guess the whole working collaboratively thing to set and achieve common goals may also be something that wasn't addressed all that much".

Professional practice - pre-service teachers

As explained above, there are two aspects relating to Professional Practice. The first (Aspect C) concentrates on beginning teachers' ability to assess plan and teach for the learning needs of a range of students. The second (Aspect D) requires that beginning teachers can demonstrate the ability to plan for and maintain a safe, inclusive and supporting learning environment. In relation to these aspects, the general impression from interviews was that both pre-service and beginning teacher teachers felt the course had prepared them well.

In relation to element C3 that addresses the need for teachers to be familiar with and use a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies materials and resources, one of the pre-service teachers stated "we've done a lot on that... with resources we're always told that getting resources is vital". Providing prompt and constructive feedback to students (element C4) was another element identified as a strength in terms of preparedness, with one of the pre-service teachers reflecting that

“I think uni does prepare you for that. Just whether its quick things about feedback that kids have done well... all through uni you are looking at that, what sort of feedback to give and when to give it”.

Element D3 addressed the need for graduates to intentionally develop positive relationships with students and colleagues. One pre-service teacher commented “that all comes down to being out there and building those relationships while you are out there on prac. That is the best way to do it, I can’t see any other way”. The importance of professional practice was also highlighted in relation to element D5, requiring graduates to *demonstrate the ability to apply a range of strategies used to support positive behaviour management*. There was general recognition that it is difficult to address this area in the context of university-based work, and that the key opportunities to develop skills to deal with situations are provided through professional practice. One pre-service teacher described it in these terms: “we can talk about it all you like but until you get there you’ve got no idea. I stood there once like a stunned mullet... A kid told me to get f***** and it was completely unprovoked.... And I just went ‘eerk (sic) what am I supposed to do here’.

Element D4, requiring graduates to plan for and maintain a safe, positive and supportive physical environment, was an area in which one of the pre-service teachers expressed confidence in the teacher education course, saying, uni has prepared us really well for that. It’s always talked about ... from day one ... its always been about inclusion and safety and stuff like that”.

Professional practice - beginning teachers

With regard to this aspect, the interview data supports the questionnaire data in highlighting concerns among beginning teachers about assessment (C1). The following comment from one beginning teachers captures the concerns felt: “I still feel I could have done a little bit more in depth and maybe had more practice on it, because when you’re not on prac I [sic] didn’t really get to do any assessment. I think maybe next it should become an official part of your prac, like you have to assess the kids on something”.

Interview data pointed to greater confidence in preparedness relating to element C3, which requires graduates to be familiar with and use a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies materials and resources. One beginning teacher commented that “certainly teaching and learning strategies were covered in a great deal of depth. We were taught to cover from as many different angles because students obviously learn in different ways, so it’s a good idea to have a range of teaching styles”.

Units within the teacher education course that had focused specifically on HPE curriculum and pedagogy were identified by one of the beginning teachers as particularly relevant to elements D3 (*intentionally develop positive relationships with students and colleagues*) and D5 (*demonstrate the ability to apply a range of strategies used to support positive behaviour management*): ‘I think Pedagogy 3 (Health and Physical Education Curriculum, semester 1) and Pedagogy 4 (Health and Physical Education Curriculum, semester 2) and Health ... were probably the three key subjects that really prepared us and built upon all this kind of stuff like building positive relationships and positive behaviour management and all that”. In relation to element D5, one beginning teacher expressed the view that “I think you learn it more when you are actually doing it.” In contrast, another beginning teacher commented

“there are different ways of managing behaviour. I think we were given a lot of those. The practical aspect ... of going on prac was most beneficial I think”.

Discussion

In discussing the data, the extent to which the comments of pre-service and beginning teachers indicated their ability to achieve legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within the community of practice of teaching is of particular interest. In keeping with the presentation of data, our discussion of that ability is focused on the four aspects of teacher professional standards defined by the TRB in Tasmania.

Taking into consideration the scope of professional standards and the demands these make on beginning teachers, the data indicated that both pre-service and beginning teacher generally felt well prepared to enter the community of teaching. The strongest agreement across the cohorts was in relation to the two aspects associated with Professional Practice (C&D) that focus specifically on pedagogy, including assessment, planning and teaching for the learning needs of a range of students and the maintenance of an inclusive, supportive environment.

The pre-service teachers expressed concerns about their capacity to address issues of behaviour management, while for the beginning teachers their concerns shifted to their capacity to plan and use fair, valid and reliable assessment strategies. This shift in concerns can be interpreted as indicative of progress toward achieving LPP and points to the need for this development to be conceived as a continuum. This finding reflects Lave and Wenger's (1991) point that ongoing professional learning is characteristic of a community of practice, in this case teaching.

Similarly, from the perspective of professional knowledge (A), the data indicated confidence in the subject-specific knowledge base of HPE and recognition of the need to extend that knowledge base to effectively address the specific demands of literacy, numeracy and ICT within HPE. The requirement and/or expectation for HPE teachers to be able to contribute to students' knowledge, skills and understanding in these areas is by no means unique to Australia. In 2001 Keay particularly noted beginning physical education teachers' recognition that ICT as “an area they knew they must develop” (p.11).

Finally, in relation to the aspect of Professional Relationships, initial confidence centred on teacher-student and immediate classroom relationships, with wider school and professional community relationships acknowledged as requiring further development. This finding supports Yandell and Turvey's (2007) contention that there is a shift in expectations at the time of employment, with the teachers in this study acknowledging that their professional responsibilities extend beyond their own classrooms.

Data from both groups of students pointed to professional experience provided in their course as being fundamental to acquiring LPP. Beginning teachers also highlighted the way in which it is through teaching that their learning continues to progress. They acknowledged the relevance of their course, but now have a greater understanding that the learning process continues as they take up membership of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This point also highlighted the importance of the provision of appropriate support for beginning teachers, to ensure that ongoing professional learning can happen and, arguably, contribute to arresting attrition of teachers early in their careers (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Wideen, Mayer-

Smith & Moon, 1998). Therefore, we would contend that LPP emerges as something that cannot be expected to be achieved instantly, post-graduation, but rather is reliant upon ongoing learning in the context of taking up a first teaching appointment.

In contrast to some of the emphasis in HPE literature (for example, Brown, 1999; Macdonald & Kirk, 1996; Sirna, Tinning & Rossi, 2008) the study did not generate data indicating beginning teachers being constrained by current practice within their community of practice. Rather, their comments about assessment, for example, indicated a willingness to seek to extend current pedagogical practices.

Conclusion

This study sought to further explore the support that teacher education courses and schools can and need to provide in the preparation of teachers and their transition into the profession. It specifically acknowledged professional knowledge, professional relationships and professional practice as essential for preparedness for teaching and potentially critically for beginning teachers to establish themselves within the professional community.

An important feature of the study was the foregrounding of the professional standards framework (TRB of Tasmania, 2007) in research addressing preparedness and initial teaching experiences. A key issue emerging for teacher education course design and content is the need to address and embed professional, social and cultural dimensions of teaching in the course. The standards framework captures these dimensions and usefully highlights how they are each individually important, but also significant in combination, in enabling teachers to achieve LPP.

The study also demonstrated not only the importance of appropriate support structures for beginning teachers but also the need to involve pre-service teacher education institutions, systems and schools so that they collaboratively provide an effective transition for beginning teachers as they take up membership of their community of practice.

While the study focused on HPE teachers in particular, it provided a foundation for work that could usefully be extended across pre-service teacher education courses more generally, and also pointed to the need for longitudinal studies that track pre-service teacher education students through their courses and beyond into their lives as early career teachers. The study also reaffirmed the potential for standards frameworks to be productively used in ongoing pre-service teacher education courses to develop teacher professional learning.

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