Preservice Intern Teaching: A P-12 Approach in the University of Melbourne Bachelor of Teaching Degree for Graduates

Jocelyn Grant
University of Melbourne

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The report of the consultancy on future directions of the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne (September 1992) recommended the replacement of concurrent undergraduate courses with a two year course in education for graduates in which the student spends an extensive period in schools. In overcoming the problems of school based teacher education had been practised for twenty years. This commitment to the role of schools in teacher education in the Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education (Secondary) and Bachelor of Education (Primary) courses was a major factor in the development of the Bachelor of Teaching degree which will be offered to a small intake in 1994.

School based programs in all existing courses had involved semester length or longer periods of supervised school experience in one school. Although the student was required to attend classes at the University on several days each week, the extended period in the school enabled the student teachers to become a school-related context which was school-related. Their enthusiasm and prolonged debate about the value of interdisciplinary studies and teaching was not uncommon. Resources were not plentiful and as the effects of the Razor Gang cuts were felt in the late 70s and early 80s the teams were difficult to sustain. Nevertheless the impact of the programs and the influence of the lecturers created a bond between participating schools and faculty staff generally.

In 1992 an intake into the B Ed (Primary) fourth year was offered a new set of subjects which built on the completed 100 days of supervised school experience and related studies by requiring the students to undertake induction teaching and reflective studies in a selected school. The model of selection of study sites and schools and the integration of school and University studies was extended to become the internship second year in the development of the new Bachelor of Teaching degree. The imperative underlying the model is that the student has been prepared to be competent to teach without supervision and is capable of independent study in applications of education theory in the school and the classroom.

Neither the recommendations of the consultancy nor the criticisms of the weakness of discipline studies in reports leading up to the Ministerial statement Teaching Counts (1993) required the University to rethink its commitment to school based preservice education. Rather they provided the impetus to move to the next phase. During the development of Internship subjects in the Bachelor of Teaching course the major questions about school based teacher education were revisited.

The Bachelor of Teaching Degree

The Bachelor of Teaching is a two year degree for which the prerequisite is an approved undergraduate degree with studies appropriate for secondary teaching. Because of the P-12 approach of the course this prerequisite applies to all entrants although not mandatory for the employment conditions of prospective teachers. The studies are equivalent to the first degree. However experience indicates that the students who cannot complete essential studies before the second semester of year two and for other students or schools who prefer the alternative. This strand delays the internship until the second semester and includes an additional 30 days of advanced supervised practice teaching in semester one.

The course is uncompromising in intention. The year one studies are inter-related and sequential. They must be completed before the year long internship program of the second year is attempted. Class hours have been reduced to increase the time for independent study. The 50 days of supervised practice teaching in year one and 120 days of internship provide a significant school based component. At the same time it is the intention of the course to provide relevant and stimulating experience of researching and learning to reinforce the value of reflective practice and independent learning.

The P-12 Concept

In 1994 the Bachelor of Teaching course will be offered to a small intake of intending secondary teachers. In 1995 a small cohort of intending primary teachers will be added and at a later date the course will provide for those who wish to graduate qualified to teach P-12.

The experience of school based teacher education has demonstrated to University staff that there are fundamental similarities in the principles and practice of preparation of primary and secondary teachers. In Victoria there are designated P-12 schools and the University has close associations with a number of primary and secondary schools working across the sectoral boundaries. Differences are acknowledged but broad understandings of schooling, curriculum and the development of children and young people as a continuum were identified as core studies in a P-12 approach.

The subject Language and Literacy in the Classroom examines theories of language and literacy acquisition and the application of language and literacy teaching to all subject areas of the curriculum. This subject is compulsory for all students and they will not be segregated into groups by teaching area specialisation. Since the subject must contribute to mandatory requirements in literacy studies for primary teachers some intending secondary teachers may find the subject challenging. The University believes that the approach could provide a solution to the problem of implementing literacy teaching across the curriculum in the secondary school.

The decision to move quickly to a four year qualification for primary teachers reflected a commitment to parity in qualifications status for all teachers. Further, the NQFQ1 Project has confirmed the long held assumption that all teachers need demanding personal and professional development studies at tertiary level. The Bachelor of Teaching degree will therefore admit graduates selected on merit who will initially share learning experiences before specialising in a preferred teaching area or school sector. As noted earlier requirements for employment as a teacher in a secondary school in Victoria include major and submajor studies in relevant curriculum teaching areas and it is not intended to make a distinction for intending primary teachers.

At the beginning of the course all students will observe and teach for ten days in each of a primary and a secondary school before they finalise their decision about a teaching area specialisation. They will study together in three subjects: Language and Literacy in the Classroom; Developmental Perspectives and Education; Teachers, Inquiry and Learning. In the second semester they will be placed for specialised practice teaching supported by appropriate methodological studies. The subject Social Perspectives and Education and the continuation of Teachers, Inquiry and Learning will again bring all students together.

In year two of the course specialisation is absolute because the internship program is embedded in this year. Nevertheless the schools which participated in the course validation and 1994
The demands on preservice teacher education planning exercise include some which indicated that the school based components and the ability of graduates to synthesise and apply information and theoretical knowledge at an advanced level. Planning for 1995 has demonstrated that as long as principal staff are provided with the opportunity to be involved in the planning process the schools will accept responsibility for selecting and offering the internship to their students. The letter of offer to the student from the school staff shifts from in classroom supervision and advice on assessment role for the mentor although it was scheduled after 4pm to give greater flexibility to extra curricular activities, research and study. The approach work and study with a time adjustment throughout the year. These activities are easy to effect within existing staff appointment procedures for appointment to a school. The time outside of class is spent in private study and at the University in classes, workshops or colloquia for 2-4 hours a week intermittently throughout the year. These activities are scheduled after 4pm to give greater flexibility to the intern teacher and in order to have time to prepare classes effectively, to reflect on their teaching and not to be subjected to work overload and stress. The intern teacher is therefore given a reduced teaching commitment. The teaching allotment is 80% of an 80% load. Effectively 60% of the normal weekly commitment of a full-time teacher.

In Victoria the former Teachers’ Registration Board set agreed standards for entry to the teaching profession. The Board no longer exists and in the interim period before the recently established Standards Council of the Teaching Profession (SCTP) determines whether these standards should be varied, the Bachelor of Teaching course embodies subjects and requirements which would previously have allowed a teacher to register.

The University staff provided students with an application kit and advised about written application and interview procedure. Principals of the cooperating schools obtained the permission of the school community or employer to select and offer supernumerary teaching to an intern. At this stage the student has offered a paid position. If this were the case the student would be required to complete an employment contract with normal provisions for legal liability. In 1994 a deed of agreement signed by University and School will ensure that the rights and obligations are understood including the University’s responsibility to indemnify the student.

The letter of offer to the student from the school will set out the details of the teaching and other responsibilities. The Principal of the school becomes a co-examiner of the Internship subject although the University must retain the final responsibility for assessment.

The interns will be allocated to each school at which an intern teacher is teaching. These staff will visit the school periodically. They will advise teachers and interns from time to time and when required. They will be involved in the assessment of the Internship subject. The model suggests the way in which teachers should approach work and study with a time adjustment for the inexperienced of the intern teacher.

The distinguishing difference between the experience in schools in the first and the second years is the way in which the involvement of staff shifts from in classroom teaching and in extra curricular activities, research and study. The model suggests the way in which teachers should approach work and study with a time adjustment for the inexperience of the intern teacher.

The principal should consult with the mentor as with other school personnel and students in order to coordinate the assessment report they provide to the University.

The intern is an enrolled student of the University and the chief examiner must be assured that the school Principal’s report addresses the objectives of the subject as set out in the approved course handbook. In the interim period before the recently established organization there is likely to be a need for moderation of results by University staff. This is an area which will be evaluated and reviewed from time to time. The University would wish colleagues in the schools to be able to assume responsibility for internship assessment but the evidence to date suggests that teachers and Principals are not anxious to accept full responsibility for this academic task.

University staff will be allotted to each school at which an intern teacher is teaching. These staff will visit the school periodically. They will advise teachers and interns from time to time and when required. They will be involved in the assessment of the Internship subject. They will supervise the School-related Project activities of the intern or refer supervision to a more appropriate University staff member if the Project is outside their area of expertise. In 1993 resources have been allocated to all departments for these school contact and project supervision positions. Over a period of years evaluation of the demands on staff will provide information to vary this allocation to recognize trends in the nature of projects.

It is obvious that the most useful distribution of resources and sharing of expert supervision of school based studies would be effected if the contact staff from the University were also engaged in research activities in the school. Logistically this is difficult to arrange. It is evitable that the success of programs of school based studies will increasingly depend on the success and recognition of research activities.

The advantage of developing a course with key schools is that mutual professional respect has been established. Nevertheless the stakes are high for the intern teacher and safeguards have to be built into the internship arrangements which protect the intern. The selection and decision about the offer to the intern teacher is relatively easy to effect within existing staff appointment guidelines. The course implementation process has allowed schools to volunteer to be accepted into the program rather than be imposed on to
accept an intern teacher. The arrangements for discontinuance or transfer are sensitive since the student has the right to guaranteed conditions under which the exchange and innovation. Since University staff and students are part of a team with a broader experience than that of the intern teacher or school community, it would be expected that their continued involvement in year two of the course would challenge any potential conserving influence.

KEY REFERENCES FOR THE BACHELOR OF TEACHING COURSE STATEMENT


CATE (1992). The accreditation of initial teacher training: A note of guidance from the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.


LEARNING TO TEACH AND TEACHING TO LEARN

William Louden
Edith Cowan University


The dangers of conventional teacher education programs are well known: collisions between university-based theory and school-based practice, hit-and-run supervision by university staff who have no other connection with the student’s development as a teacher, and sink-or-swim supervision by cooperating teachers who are unwilling (or unable) to help students bridge the gaps in their knowledge. As this edition of The Australian Journal of Teacher Education shows, there is no shortage of interest in school-based alternatives which attempt to provide a more integrated introduction to the craft of teaching. I was a student in one in the mid-Seventies, and am now teaching in a similar alternative program. Like the alternative program from which I learned so much as a student, most of these experiences in teacher education were made and done on the energy of a few university staff. Few alternative programs seem to have been sustained over the years; even fewer are the subject of serious book-length evaluations. These two books, both called Learning to teach: Teaching to learn, provide detailed accounts of alternative teacher education programs conducted half a world and almost 20 years apart. Considering the gaps of space, time and context, the similarities between the two programs are striking.

The propensity of school based teacher education to replicate practice without critical reflection is well documented. The Bachelor of Teaching degree recognises that intensive induction teaching may be vulnerable to this conservative and constricting influence. The solution in the course lies in the careful choice of schools and mentor teachers, the assessment requirements of the Internship subject which include seminar presentation and written evaluations of school and classroom and the assessment of the school based research project. Research and evaluation can be guided towards change and innovation. Since University staff and students are part of a team with a broader experience than that of the intern teacher or school community, it would be expected that their continued involvement in year two of the course would challenge any potential conserving influence.

REFERENCES


CATE (1992). The accreditation of initial teacher training: A note of guidance from the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.


