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

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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. However, the practice 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 teachers and student-teacher to form a colleague relationship. At the same time, students were expected to engage in observation and learning activities to widen their experience beyond the classroom. Hence at Melbourne the term experience was used deliberately to broaden the concept of practice teaching. For these students the school became the site for reflection on their studies in education and they brought insights and observations from the school into University classes.

At the same time as school based placement of student teachers became popular inter-department team teaching emerged. For the lecturers committed to the programs this was an exciting development which enabled them to see the application of their teaching in a wholistic context which was school related. Their department colleagues did not always share 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 as 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 students in 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 judged 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 primary teachers. The studies are equivalent to the first degree. However experience indicates that the possibility of setting separate conditions for intending primary teachers was considered. An ideal intake of intending primary teachers might include applicants who have completed mathematics and English studies in the first degree. The experience of research and classroom teaching is a major factor in the development of the program. The subject Language and Literacy in the P-12 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.

In year one of the course the students complete the education, method, context and school experience studies which would allow them to be considered for unsupervised teaching and replacement. Students required to but do not replicate a standard one year Diploma in Education course. In year two extensive internship teaching occupies 80% of the course. Advanced method studies are available early in the year to support the internship teaching. In the second semester a school related study provides for assessment of the student’s ability to think about education and to research a significant aspect of teaching or schooling.

An alternative to the year long internship teaching is offered for intending primary teachers 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 the 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 NPTQL 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 extended in this year. Nevertheless the schools which participated in the course validation and 1994
planning exercise include some which indicated that the P-12 concept could be drawn into the second year. Schools would share intern teachers for teaching and curriculum planning experience and certainly for school related research activities.

The demands on preservice teacher education courses for primary teachers are such that the Bachelor of Teaching arrangements must rely heavily on the time and experience of the student teacher and the ability of the students to synthesise and apply information, to reflect and use their experiences.

School based programs at the University have evolved from workshops. This approach was used to validate the plans of key schools who were motivated to be involved in the program and it is likely that the benefits will be especially strong for these teacher educators and for them selection for internship will be more easily managed during the end of the year processes.

However, the 1993 experience has worked well. The University staff provided students with an application kit and advised about written and oral presentation. 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 code of agreement signed by University and School will ensure that the rights and obligations of all parties are protected including the University’s responsibility to indemnify the student.

The letter of offer to the student is sent from the school which 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 schools were also offered a teaching partnership in the School-related Project subject which is integrated with the internship experience in the final semester. In 1994 schools have offered students with the development of educational projects, to offer supervision and advice to students and to disseminate the report of the study within the school community. The option of joint assessment is open to the students in the project.

Government and non-Government schools from both primary and secondary sectors have participated in the planning. It is likely that ten secondary schools will be host to intern teachers in 1994.

INTERNSHIP

In year one of the course the 50 days of supervised practice teaching is governed by the same principles and practices as existing preservice teacher education courses. The assigned assessment tasks integrate the experience in schools with the study of education, teaching methods and the human and social development studies. The subject Teachers, Inquiry and Learning also examines the work of teachers in the school and the classroom. Students enrolling in the Internship subject in the second year should be confident that they are ready to begin unsupervised teaching and to continue the development of their teaching and research processes in education. They and the schools in which they teach should be guaranteed of this ability.

In Victoria the former Teachers’ Registration Board set agreed standards for entry to the teaching profession. The Board no longer exists and 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.

Selection by a school for students enrolled in the Internship subject can therefore follow the normal procedures for appointment to a school. The allocation of duties to the intern in this course however recognises the need for novice teachers to have the necessary experience 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.

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 school timetable 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.

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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 are 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 change is made. 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


REFERENCES


A national professional body for teachers: A discussion paper. Canberra: AGPS.


