

"I'll be a different sort of a teacher because of this": Creating the Next Generation

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The University of Western Sydney requires Secondary pre-service teachers to complete a practicum in a non-traditional educational context. Our partnership with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum enables pre-service teachers to work with "students at risk" in innovative and non-traditional projects. This paper explores the impact of this experience on pre-service teachers' perceptions of their own developing subjectivities as teachers and of young people who are more often seen in schools as "difficult". It positions the partnership as providing a model of community service learning and describes how this differs from the more usual classroom practicums. Finally, the paper suggests that it is the transformative potential of the DSF projects – realized via the disruption of teaching as usual - that makes them most powerful for pre-service teachers.

For most of our pre-service secondary students, the practicum experience that we call PE3 sits somewhere between their two conventional classroom-based practicums which usually take place in May and October. PE3 usually entails approximately 60 hours of unpaid work in an approved alternative educational setting. Sites vary widely as pre-service teachers have been encouraged to evaluate their own skills and experiences, needs and interests and to use the community and educational networks that they already have or that they have made during their study, or previous school experience. Students are encouraged to see PE3 as an opportunity that enhances and extends their study in core units in, for example, literacy across the curriculum, or social justice, and in their particular Method disciplinary areas. Students have worked in diverse locations out of schools including homework centres, Intensive Language Centres, Migrant resource

centres, sport and recreation and music camps and in-school alternative sites such as Learning Support and Special Education units and a dedicated Koori school. There have also been several programs negotiated with external organizations nested inside PE3.

The first of them was Plan-It Youth. For students at the Bankstown campus, from 2003 the Plan-It Youth partnership with Campbelltown TAFE and the DET has provided mentor training and placements for UWS students to work one-on-one with young people at risk in schools in South Western Sydney. Students at risk are defined as those "likely to fail, drop out, or not successfully complete school or its equivalent, and consequently are unlikely to possess sufficient skills or qualifications to acquire well-paid secure employment or become integrated into a successful pattern of social responsibility" (Vickers et al, 2000, p. 9, cited by Vickers et al., 2004, p. 134). In Plan-It Youth, which also began as a DSF project, pre-service teachers were paired with identified "at risk" students inside the schools where they did their second practicum, and the mentoring program ran alongside that prac. Meetings were built in to the timetables for both parties and took place for the most part on school premises. Analysis of the Plan-It Youth pilot project by Vickers, Harris and McCarthy found that it meets the underlying premise of PE3 that "the more informed the Teacher is ... the more effective that teacher can be in their own classroom." (SEECs, 2003). This paper presents a more radical reading of how PE3 might be envisaged. The DSF project, available only to the Penrith cohort, has involved fewer students. The first seventeen students involved with DSF in 2004 volunteered to do their PE3 at the Learning Choices Expo held in June at Olympic Park.

(OHT 1 – Learning choices Expo)¹.

The pre-service teachers became "hoon goons" or group leaders for small groups of students who had come to Sydney to demonstrate alternative learning projects. The dramatic responses given by our students to that experience – summed up in the title of this paper "I'll be a different sort of teacher because of this" - led DSF and UWS to develop a much more ambitious pilot project "Next Generation" for 2005.

¹ All OHTs – except #8 - are from DSF website <www.dsf.org.au>

Rather than being understood as a predominantly intellectual extension of professional knowledge - what we might see as becoming a more informed and hence more effective teacher – the DSF "Next Generation" program emphasizes the affective and transformative possibilities of close encounters with the young people who are clients of agencies outside schools. Approximately 50 community agencies signed up with Next Generation through 2005 though not all of these opportunities were taken up by UWS students

(OHT 2 — list of agencies)

Next Generation projects happen outside schools. Most of the students in them have progressed beyond the "at risk" category. In many cases they have been rejected or excluded by schools, they have often themselves rejected schooling. The sites of learning are dislocated and our pre-service teachers - already well-progressed in the process of becoming-teachers - are themselves dislocated, displaced, and are provoked into examining how the schooling practices into which they are becoming inculcated have failed the young people they meet, and how these might be transformed. PE3 is not intended merely to provide extra hours of practicum for pre-service teachers but it can be a disruption – at least for that moment - of more linear and regulated classroom-based experiences.

Service learning has had a longer tradition in the US than here. Hill, Pickeral and Duckerfield (2003, p. 11) describe service learning as an "instigator of empowerment and transformation" for pre-service teachers. In a different context, King describes service learning as a pedagogy of defamiliarisation through which: "what was once strange becomes familiar and what was familiar is made strange again....doubt and hesitancy are introduced into situations with which we are comfortable and secure, while those previously considered alien or incomprehensible are rendered more readily recognizable" (King, 2004, p. 125). In similar language, Gallego describes how parallel practicum experiences with young people inside and outside schools enabled prospective teachers to compare, contrast and critique what she calls the "naturalized" practices of schooling (Gallego, 2001, p. 315). Although UWS students are not required to make comparisons between PE3 and their other practicums, many of their reflections do draw upon this

comparison and they stress that this disorientation enriches their more conventional classroom based experience.

Pre-service teachers come in to their training with long and deeply entrenched histories of schooling. They have each undergone their particular version of what Sinclair, Munns and Woodward (2005, p. 102) call the "universal apprenticeship". What they experience on practicum "is strongly influenced by the assumptions, conceptions, beliefs, dispositions, and capabilities that they bring with them" (Gallego, citing Zeichner and Gore, 1990). It is influenced by beliefs about social categories and capabilities that relate to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith and social and geographic location. The practicum itself is the key strand of their professionalisation as teachers. Practicum experiences are usually perceived as rewarding by pre-service teachers and are often valued highly by them as more "practical" - or more "real" in the terms that Sinclair et al (2005) use - than the university based elements of their training. Supervising teachers often develop collegial relationships with students who bring fresh blood and new ideas into staff rooms, classrooms and faculties. Practicum experiences can be experienced as epiphanies where the desire and disposition to teach are not only confirmed but become embodied and passionate. But not all experiences are positive. All of the figures involved- the preservice and supervising teachers, Principals, Deputies, Head Teachers, Counsellors and of course the students themselves - are embedded in hierarchies of power and disciplinary regimes that are difficult to challenge, or even to see, from inside (Foucault, 1977). Later in this conference, Doreen Rorrison will talk about the classroom based practicum as "a time to endure and acquiesce" (AARE, 2005). Pre-service teachers on practicum can be understood as hybrid creatures, Gallego suggests, operating within hierarchies that keep them subordinated and silent. Practicums are conducive, she says, to a concentration "on survival rather than on professional development" and may - in the worst placements - "amount to an apprenticeship of oppression" (Gallego, 2001, p. 314). But the very hybridity and instability of the pre-service teacher positioned as he/ she is midway to becoming the professional but not yet sedimented into its practices, having experienced one school and its culture but not yet affiliated or affixed to a particular school, makes him/her open to transformation and to dislocation.

Service-learning is a rapidly expanding element of teacher education in Australia. A 2003 DEST commissioned report describes it as a "relational idea that is used to blur the boundaries between subjects in the teacher education curriculum" (Butcher et al., 2003, p.9). Although the authors are talking here about subjects as courses of study, the subjects are also the people involved. The DSF "Next Generation" project is itself a type of "relational idea" – that blurs boundaries between people. It inverts hierarchies of teachers and learners, schools and communities, learning and life. It puts relationships at the centre of learning.

(OHT 3 – Lynne, Rani and Owen)

Lynne Wezgryn, one of the students at the 2004 Learning Choice Expo that provoked the Next Generation project, drew these elements together in her reflection on the experience:

...I have learned things no textbook or placement in a regular school could have taught me. As a practice teacher with 30 students, much of my focus and energy went to using the planning techniques I studied to control my classes and control students with "behaviour problems". The Expo allowed me to meet amazing students with amazing talents on a level I probably wouldn't have found in the classroom. It opened my eyes to the fact that many of the students who felt they don't "fit" in class are just the type of student that I want: ones who see things differently, are creative, energetic, passionate and challenge me to give their learning purpose, and this illustrated to me just how important it is that my students feel they belong.

Rani Fisher, who went with a group of kids to an international Learning Choices Expo in London last December said:

I experienced an opportunity to be with a bunch of young people that changed my perception to not see these as the 'dropouts' or the 'special needs' and other negatively categorizing terms. / The talented, quick-witted, bright, articulate, friendly, determined, warm, polite, artistic, giving and motivated young people I met took away my fears about being a teacher in a 'tough' school. They replaced

fear with aspiration, the desire to be a teacher good enough to be able to successfully work with any group of students, regardless of their perceived limits.

Owen Laffin, reflecting on the work of the profession he has since entered, said:

Teachers work within an overburdening system. The drive to cover syllabi, prepare for exams and little preparation time leaves teachers unable to critically reflect on the status quo in education...As student teachers, we step into a pre-existing dynamic in schools and learn to interact with the students in this way. The Expo, however, gave us the opportunity to interact with the very students whom we would find difficult in the classroom...[w]e can only learn so much about student learning and what prevents it in an academic setting. The same may be said of within schools, within that preexisting social dynamic... As student teachers we need to incorporate into our own education opportunities to re-enter the world of students. Only by doing this and genuinely seeking to understand where students are coming from, can we go out to meet them.

Owen's metaphor of "going out to meet them" is useful. In the DSF projects pre-service teachers go out of their comfort zones, out of their own experience and histories, as well as out of the school setting, when they go out to meet students who are learning in community settings. "Meet" implies mutuality, and respect for the particular individual students that they meet, regardless of whatever stigma or horrible history may mark each of them.

Nevertheless, the pilot project has not been easy, expanded from a three day expo in one site to a multitude of different sites and times and places in the Next Generation. It has relied on goodwill and a great deal of resourcing, almost all of it provided by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum rather than the university. This is not isolated to this project but is characteristic of other service learning partnerships between community agencies and universities in diverse disciplines (Butcher et al, 2003; Billig and Waterman, 2003). Research on service learning in education suggests that it must be "deeply embedded in the course design, such that it is apprehended by all who are involved as an appropriate

and enriching experience which will enhance teaching as a socially committed profession" (Butcher et al. 2003, p. 40). For the handful of UWS students who have taken up this option in 2005, and for the handful of academics who have been involved in setting up the partnership, it appears to meet this purpose but in terms of course design, making a unit compulsory does not equal deep embedding. Like students everywhere, pre-service teachers are apt to resent requirements that they see as excessive or as purposeless or as undervalued. The success of service learning relies on clear ties being evident to all involved between any particular project and the expectations and goals of the course (Hutchinson, 2005, p. 430)

Gallego identifies three essential elements of powerful service learning in education which provide a useful heuristic for reviewing our pilot program. Firstly it must take place in a location that is away from regular schools and classrooms. The Next Generation projects clearly meet this requirement. Secondly, Gallego says, it must entail "genuine learning activit[ies] related to academic content". Otherwise, such experiences remain "service rich and learning poor" (2001, p. 322). Students enrolling in Next Generation projects are required to design and offer their own project based learning modules, or to respond to requests from client agencies by designing modules tailored to their requirements. Their progress from making a proposal through to completion of the project is staged through a process of online and face to face negotiation of project details and delivery.

(OHT 4 Diagram of process)

A project does not begin until pre-service teachers have been through 5 steps in the planning including the design of session by session lesson plans and evaluation of OH&S requirements. In these projects learning activities are "genuine", to use Gallego's term, when they meet the learning outcomes identified and desired by the young people involved. The DSF Vision statement identifies "greater individual student autonomy and responsibility for learning, with authentic learning relationships between students and educators" as central to the learning choices that they are promoting for young people (2005). Identifying what they WANT to learn and then having someone design and deliver a program to enable that learning takes what students say seriously and trusts that they all have the

capacity to achieve that learning. These were amongst the projects that UWS students undertook within Next Generation during 2005.

(OHT 5 Bidwell YC – Bike)

(OHT 6 Café Horozons - Barista)

(OHT 7 Shed-Ed – Childrens book/ Mag)

Finally, moving to Gallegos' third prerequisite for effective service learning, consistent opportunities must be provided, she says, for pre-service teachers "to reflect on their experiences and examine the implications for educational reform" (2001, p. 323). At present PE3 requires students to write a 500 word unstructured Self Reflection after their PE3 experience. Students in the DSF Next Generation program are asked to organize their reflection around two questions:

"How has this project changed your perception of teaching and young people?" and "Did your project experience alter the way you will teach in the future?" These are extracts from their responses to these questions, submitted to the DSF, and forwarded to UWS.

(OHT 8 2005 student responses)

Although the questions encourage students to think about the experience in particular ways, and although the reflections are relatively brief there are ample traces in what the students say about the transformative effects of their experience. We need to formalize and make more rigorous the reflective element of PE3 perhaps by building in some of the program supports that King refers to – "journals, short papers, discussion groups" and providing opportunities - which may be face to face, paper-based or online - "for observation, questioning, speculation, & self-awareness" (King, 2004, p. 122). Currently DSF is undertaking a review of the project and the UWS secondary team is considering modifications to improve the effectiveness and boost the profile of PE3. We are committed to the transformative possibilities of PE3 and the Next Generation project in particular on our students as they become teachers. We want it to shake up their thought, to dislocate their certainties, to shift them – for that time at least - from the comfort of familiar ways of thinking about secondary schooling and students.

King is quite critical of many service learning programs. He argues that marketing of such programs can present an "overly idealized picture where many benefits fail to materialize in practice" (King, 2004, p. 122-123). He suggests that service learning can reinforce privilege and can be realized in a "hypocritical and self-serving" fashion where there is minimal "semblance of mutuality" and where "vulnerability, investment and consequence" are absent (King, 2004, p. 123). The Australian DEST Report identifies "mutual benefit and reciprocity between equal partners" as prerequisite for appropriate community service learning (Butcher et al., 2003, p. 47). They go so far as to recommend the term "community engagement" over "community service" as it better reflects the "key principles of mutuality, respect and reciprocity" (Butcher et al., 2003, p. 50). An ethics of service learning must be developed and applied to such projects. King sees service learning as forming a continuum beginning from Charity where sometimes "power differences are widened and prejudice[s] reinforced" moving through to Partnership – where new experiences are mapped onto existing cognitive structures - to Defamiliarisation where "self and society are called into question": it is only the last position on the continuum – that of defamiliarisation - that King equates with transformation (King, 2004, p.136). King perceives service learning as a type of critical pedagogy, even the literature review in the DEST report identifies it as incorporating elements of Freire's *conscientization* (Butcher et al., 2003, p. 10) as the teacher and the students together engage in critique of their social and institutional positionings. King was one of four university advisors who took fourteen students from Washington to Tijuana to build houses for a week. The program was an interdisciplinary unit within his university's undergraduate curriculum. The Next Generation project is in some ways much more modest - just one local strand embedded within one unit in one program in a large School of Education. In other ways it is more ambitious. We want our students – and there may be up to 400 in next year's cohort - provoked into thinking differently about what is most familiar and much closer to home and to their hybrid in-process professional identities. We want the transformations they experience to inform their daily practice and their professional lives. But we don't see this as laying down another layer in a sedimentary process. Teacher professional development is an ongoing process – a to-ing and fro-ing in Sinclair et al's (2005) terms, an iterative process that never ends. A

becoming-teacher never quite settles, or stagnates. This entails a view of the teacher subject as a becoming-subject, in Braidotti's words, a "non-unitary, multilayered and dynamic", as "an affect that flows ... a composition, a location that needs to be constructed together...in the encounter with, others" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 118). The shifts in practice and attitude that pre-service teachers have reported thus far suggest that the Next Generation project does provide openings for transformative practice to begin and that this is likely to increase the possibilities for socially just and inclusive education.

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