

## A Preliminary Report on the Audit of Overseas Practicums.

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As we write this paper, leaders of 18 nations of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum (whose trade is predicted to comprise 55% of the world trade by 2000), meeting in Bogor agreed to the lifting of tariff barriers within the region by 2020. This complements the increasing political consensus that Australian industry must compete and participate in the global economy. In the words of President Suharto, the APEC decision "will have a profound impact on the world economy which is becoming increasingly global and without borders" (The Australian 16/11/94, 5). The world is shrinking and Australia's economic future lies in Asia and the Pacific. As a result, teacher educators are increasingly called upon to prepare their students for this changing global society.

The Council of Australian Governments is committed to has endorsed a long term education strategy to expand the teaching of languages, and particularly Asian languages and most state governments are devoting considerable resources to the establishment and achievement of targets in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teaching. Among the many challenges in implementing the expansion of LOTE, particularly in primary schools, is ensuring the supply of sufficient teachers with linguistic and cultural competence to teach LOTE. In a later paper we propose to review the the way different states have approached the professional development of teachers in LOTE. In this paper we focus upon one aspect of teacher education institutions' strategies to prepare graduates capable of injecting an international perspective into their teaching - the overseas practicum.

A number of universities are assisting in the preparation of teachers to teach in, and about, this global society by providing teacher education students with the opportunity to undertake their teaching practicum overseas. There is little literature about the nature, extent and effectiveness of these programs either in Australia or overseas that might assist universities in preparing such programs. Organising such practicums is a time consuming and complex process and many institutions are investing a great deal of time and resources in the planning the programs in isolation.

In 1994, with support from the Asia Education Foundation, the authors surveyed all Australian faculties of education. This paper outlines some of the preliminary findings of the survey into the nature and extent of overseas practicums conducted by Australian universities

The purposes of this descriptive survey are two fold. Firstly to inform educational policy makers about the scope of such programs and secondly to provide teacher education institutions with the information to enable networking and cooperation.

Specific examples of the benefits which might come from such networking include the following. Lobbying of the Australian and host governments for support of overseas practicums. For example, while a tourist does not require a visa to visit Indonesia, students undertaking a teaching practicum there are required to get a visa costing \$50 for each 5 weeks of their stay. The viability of many practicums may be

precarious because of the difficulty in attracting sufficient numbers of students. However in some cases it may be possible for universities to collaborate in conducting overseas practicums in order to give students the widest possible choice. Co-operating universities might be able to gain greater group concessions from commercial suppliers of airfares, travel insurance and accommodation and may benefit from shared staff expertise. There may be economies to be achieved by sharing resources and facilities in preparing students from different universities embarking upon practicums in the same country.

#### Literature Review

To the best of our knowledge no published survey of overseas practicums conducted by Australian universities exists. The bibliography includes some of the large number of unpublished reports and evaluations of overseas practicums conducted by Australian universities normally written by the responsible lecturer/s, or occasionally by an independent evaluator (Bowering,1988) or participating students (Wheen 1989).

Laws and Horsley(1988) provide a clear description of a practicum in the Cook Islands organised by Sydney University for 21 secondary teacher education students. Like many of the unpublished papers Laws and Horsley provides a rationale for the overseas practicum, outlines the selection and preparation process and evaluates the practicum in terms of its contribution to the students' performance in the classroom domain, the school domain and the community domain. The writers stress the importance of group cohesion, cultural sensitivity and personal/professional characteristics like flexibility and creativity in contributing to a successful outcome of an overseas practicum.

Much of the international literature about overseas practicums comes from the United States where the pattern of studying or student teaching overseas is well entrenched. A major focus of the research is upon evaluation and outcomes. Mahan & Stachowski (1989) interviewed

British and Irish supervising teachers and administrators who had hosted 18 Indiana University student teachers and, on the basis of 32 open-ended interviews, made a series of recommendations concerning the preparation of American students for teaching in an educational environment where primary teachers tended to be generalists and where teaching was less structured and textbook based. Wilson (1983) observed the teaching of two sixth grade teachers who had previously lived overseas and interviewed 50 students in their classes. She concluded that their overseas experiences contributed to more effective teaching particularly in social studies where their greater knowledge and appreciation of cultural differences enabled a clearer attack on ethnocentrism.

Thorpe (1992) evaluated Asian educational tours by practising teachers rather than overseas practicums. He surveyed the participants following their return and they claimed to have broadened their understanding about the countries visited, to be less liable to think in terms of national stereotypes and, since returning, to have taught lessons drawing upon information gathered on their tour .

Vall and Tennison(91/92) interviewed students from a number of Minnesota institutions who had completed seven weeks in a teaching practicum in Britain and read journals written by the students and organised group seminars with them. They argued that the goal of teacher education should be to 'empower students to function competently in situations for which there are no simple and correct answers' (92:35). They observed three major outcomes which they

considered contributed to this goal. The participants became more reflective in their thinking about education, they were able to apply this reflectivity in problem solving and in the process they discovered a lot about their own personalities.

Yarrow and Millwater (1992) analysed interview data gathered from students at Queensland University of Technology both before and after they undertook an overseas practicum in either New Zealand, the USA or Indonesia. The students also kept a journal of 'critical incidents' during the practicum and completed questionnaires before and after the practicum. Their findings confirmed those of Vall and Tennison. 'By experiencing practice of the profession in an overseas school, broader understandings of a pluralistic and multicultural nature were undoubtedly of major impact but more importantly the students tested their own inner resources. Students were forced to reflect on their own personal beliefs, values and habits through the lens of the overseas trends and practices'.

This paper sets out the preliminary findings from this national survey. The Asia Education Foundation funded two other parts of the project which will be discussed in later publications . One involved the

development and trialling of an instrument to evaluate the perceived long term effects of the overseas teaching practicum upon the participants' subsequent personal and professional career. The other component involves the preparation of a number of case studies of overseas practicums undertaken by universities in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria to provide a more detailed picture on the variety of models of practicums undertaken.

### Methodology

An eight page survey (attached) using both short answer and selection items was developed seeking information about overseas practicums conducted between 1989 and 1993. Questions investigated the Australian institution and participants, the host institution, the program, the nature of the preparation, funding, the context of the practicum within the teacher education programs and the participants' evaluation of the effectiveness of the program. Programs commenced since 1993 are not included in the data.

In November 1993 the Deans of Education in every Australian university with a Faculty of Education were contacted to determine firstly whether their university had conducted any overseas practicums in the previous 5 years and, if so, they were asked to nominate a member of staff who could serve as a contact person. Non-responding Deans were phoned in early 1994 until each university which had undertaken an overseas practicum had supplied a contact name and address. In February 1994 these contact people, listed in the data summary sheet in Appendix B were sent a copy of the survey (Appendix A) and a request that they include any illustrative information including in-house reports or evaluations of the practicum, examples of selection criteria, information packages to students etc. More detailed information of this type was obtained from eleven programs.

Contact persons not responding were phoned at least twice and sent second copies of the survey. Those three who as at 18/11/94 had still not replied are listed in the table with the prefix X and are not included in any of the numerical analysis, though where information has been obtained about them from other sources this may be referred to where relevant.

In July 1994 a preliminary printout of the data base summary ( Appendix B ) was sent to the Dean of Education at each university which had a Faculty of Education and to all the contact people (irrespective of whether they had responded). The Deans and contact persons were invited to correct any errors or omissions in the draft data base and to up-date data like the names of contact persons .

As at the middle of November, seventeen universities replied that they

had no overseas teaching practicums and fourteen universities provided data on 31 overseas practicums.

It is possible that there still remain a number of omissions since, for example, it is apparent that in multi campus institutions some Deans may not have been aware of programs on more distant campuses. In a number of cases surveys were sent to contact persons known to the researchers but not mentioned by the Deans.

Because of the varied nature of the programs involved it is also possible that some responses to the same question may not be directly comparable for various reasons. For example Question 25 asked, 'Approximately what was the cost of the program to each student? (All inclusive except spending money. In some cases the university may charge this amount to the students. In other cases this will be the figure that the university advises students enquiring that the program will probably cost.) In practice some respondents included a range of costs including visas, all accommodation costs, teaching uniforms, whereas in other cases costs like food, air travel may not have been included.'

Definition of 'overseas practicum program'.

To keep the data manageable we restricted the survey to overseas practicums although a number of institutions offer cross-cultural practicums within Australia. For example, Wollongong and Charles Sturt universities have organised practicums in remote Aboriginal communities and UWA has arranged for students to undertake practicums in the Cocos/Keeling Islands.

For a similar reason, overseas educational study tours which again might serve similar educational objectives like that to Hong Kong by RMIT in 1992 were not included. To be considered a practicum the students had to actually teach in the host country.

There were some programs where students who had already completed the relevant qualification had an opportunity to teach overseas on a paid or unpaid basis for example CSU's Malaysian program for secondary Dip Ed graduates. These were not practicums as such and were not included.

Defining an overseas practicum program was, nevertheless, difficult. Many universities assist in facilitating individual students who wish to undertake an overseas practicum by formalising arrangements made by the students concerned or by using personal contacts usually of staff of the university teaching practicum offices. For example, UWA has facilitated individual students teaching in Japan. University of SA has enabled individual students to teach in England and Hong Kong and believes that this increases the students' opportunities for subsequent employment in countries where there is a teacher shortage. However

unless the practicum was organised and promoted by the university for a group of students under an agreement with a corresponding university or school it was not considered an overseas practicum for the purposes of this research. As the contact person from UWA put it, "There is no 'program' as such, placement depends on whether the students can afford

the expense and whether the schools are able to place them". To assist networking, Appendix B indicates a number of universities with the prefix Y which have facilitated individual students to teach in overseas schools but data from those arrangements are not included in the analysis.

Nor is it clear whether, as a result of changes over time, a 'program' should be classified as being replaced by a different 'program' For example Deakin University changed the venue for its program for primary LOTE students. In 1991 the group went to IKIP Rawamangun, Jakarta and Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, then in 1992 they were hosted by IKIP Bandung. Since the program served students from the same course, for the same duration in the same country it has been classified as a single program.

## Findings.

### 1. Destination of Overseas Practicums.

As already mentioned, fifteen universities conducted thirty two programs over the last 5 years. Nineteen of these operated in 1993. The majority of practicums (20) were in Asia with six in other Pacific destinations. Twenty one were in countries where the national language was one of the priority languages designated for funding by the Federal government under the White paper, Australia's Language - The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Clyne 1991, 19).

Geographical proximity of the university to Asia did not seem to be a causal factor. Neither the Northern Territory University or James Cook University reported having overseas practicums.

Surprisingly universities with strong Asia Studies programs do not necessarily have Asian teaching practicums. Monash's main campus while offering in-country Indonesian Language through Gajah Mada University in Central Java, does not offer an Asian teaching practicum, nor does Murdoch or Flinders. Griffith University currently offers a practicum in Thailand and has offered practicums in China. Often the institutions with the most established teaching practicums are the former Colleges of Advanced Education with 3 year undergraduate courses like Deakin (Warrnambool), Gippsland CAE (Churchill campus of Monash) & QUT (Kelvin Grove).

Some of these institutions have long term links with specific overseas institutions. For example, the former Kuring-gai CAE, now the Kuring-gai campus of UTS, has since 1978 been sending large groups of final year primary teacher education students to Pranakorn Teachers College in Bangkok. UWS - Macarthur has been taking students to Universitas Keristen Saca Wacana since 1983.

The inclusion of some smaller rural campuses is not surprising when the nature of practicum organisation is considered. Unlike urban teacher training institutions which increasingly offer integrated practicums where students spend something like one day a week over a semester in schools, rural campuses are normally forced to offer practicum in blocks of 2-6 weeks. This provides the optimal time slot for overseas practicums. When Sydney University's primary program moved from block practicums to integrated practicums they had great difficulty finding a place in the calendar for the Thai practicum and its future is not assured.

Although the data do not provide a definitive picture, it seems that

the creation of a unified national system in the 90s has not dramatically rationalised overseas practicum offerings. Often different campuses of the same university offer different programs, with practicums at different times and little opportunity for cross campus co-operation in the offering of the overseas practicums. Deakin university may be an exception here.

Not surprisingly, given relative airfares, the most popular destinations were Indonesia (7 practicums) followed by Thailand (6). The USA comes next with five practicums. More surprising is the omissions. There are no practicums to Korea or India, countries of potential economic and strategic significance to Australia. Given the popularity of the teaching of Japanese language, the amount of travel and trade between Australia and Japan and the demand for Japan as a host country in secondary school exchanges (Marriott, 1993) it is also surprising that there is only one established practicum in Japan. One might have thought that there would be potential commercial support for such a practicum. Only three practicums are to China, the largest country in our region.

## History

Respondents were asked to report on practicums conducted since 1989. The wording of the questions used does not allow us to identify practicums which operated in the past but were terminated prior to 1989. Nor does the form of the survey enable us to describe the pattern of overseas practicums operating before 1989. We can, however, draw some conclusions about the year of origins of programs which were still operating in the post 1988 period. The longest established practicum,

that of Monash (Frankston) with the Goleta Union School District USA commenced in 1975. The longest established Asian practicum is UTS with Pranakorn Teachers' College which has been in operation since 1978.

Fourteen of the programs were established before 1989 and sixteen from 1989. The data do not provide any insight into the origins of the overseas practicums. However, in a number of cases the contact person is the practicum office co-ordinator and has responsibility for a number of different overseas practicums ( RMIT, QUT, UWA). In others the initial contacts came through individual staff members from a variety of different disciplines who have had relevant experience overseas and used these contacts to initiate the overseas practicum ( Sydney University -Cook Islands and Western Samoa, Wollongong University & Fiji.). In some cases, the initiative came from the overseas institution and this was more likely to be the case with affluent English speaking countries like the USA with its tradition of international links. Although in other cases, like UWA's Indonesian practicum, post graduate distance education students of the university working overseas provided the link in the host country or institution. Three universities, UWS, CSU and Deakin, have had Indonesian practicums facilitated by the same person acting in different capacities as either a staff member or a commercial consultant.

Some programs have operated in alternate years e.g. CSU's USA program, others have been more spasmodic depending upon the interest and availability of academic staff. Only five programs have operated annually since 1989 and another six have been continuous except for missing one year. Maintaining continuity has been difficult. Wollongong was not able to operate its Chinese practicum in 1989 due to the Tienamen Square incident or its Fijian practicum in the years following the military coup in that country. More commonly the reason for discontinuities has been more prosaic During the recession

insufficient students could afford the practicum and planned programs were cancelled, for example Deakin to Thailand 1993, QUT to Salatiga in 1993, Deakin to Bandung 1993, Monash to USA in 1991 and Griffith to Thailand 1992. Five programs originated in 1993 possibly suggesting an increasing trend.

#### Cost.

Cost is a major consideration for students considering undertaking an overseas practicum and a major preoccupation for organisers. It is probably the main factor affecting the viability of programs. Indeed there is a vicious cycle about costs. The dearer the program the fewer students can afford to go thus reducing group concessions and the extent that fixed costs can be spread so increasing per student costs

further. Strategies to increase the number of participants can contribute to a lowering of costs for everyone. For this reason a number of contact persons offered to make their practicum available to students from other universities. Commonly the overseas practicum is offered to students from a number of different teacher education courses in order to maximise numbers. However this may make the timing of the practicum and the timetabling and organising of preparatory programs more difficult.

Reported costs to students varied between \$6000 for the 9 week Ballarat University program in the US to \$500 for Melbourne University's 4 week program in China. Melbourne's program was subsidised by the university.

These costs are influenced by a range of factors. In some cases student participants are required to contribute to the costs of the accompanying lecturer/s, whereas in others the lecturer/s meet their own costs or are subsidised by their university. Reciprocal arrangements like those between Ballarat University and Uni of Minnesota and between CSU and Mansfield reduce costs by not requiring lecturers to accompany the group as teaching supervision is conducted by the host country. In virtually every other case however the student group has been accompanied by a lecturer from the Australian university.

Costs of visas for different countries vary. Host institutions may provide free accommodation, often family homestays or boarding facilities in the host schools e.g. RMIT in Japan.

Total costs vary according to the length of the program. Some programs are as short as three weeks and one, the Griffith University Chinese immersion program, ran for a full year and participants were paid by the Queensland Department of Education. Frequently students take the opportunity to spend longer as tourists in the host country following the practicum. Some travel packages for students included travel insurance and even teaching uniforms, all meals and laundry. In other cases these sorts of costs were outside of the package.

Few institutions were able to achieve financial support outside of the university. Garuda airlines had freighted teaching resources free of charge for Deakin students. Some individual students have received financial assistance from organisations like Rotary, and some universities had assisted to keep costs low by contributing to the lecturer's costs. CSU received assistance from the Australia-Indonesia Institute in 1990 & 1991 part of which it used to establish a revolving loan fund offering student participants interest free loans to enable

them to participate. Each RMIT student undertaking the Japanese

practicum in 1992 received a \$500 grant from Australia/Japan Foundation. It is difficult to foresee air fares falling and, as the cost of living increases in some countries like Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia the cost of overseas practicums may become even more prohibitive

The assistance which universities or their Faculties of Education provided to students travelling overseas varied. Commonly Faculties of Education met the cost of the accompanying lecturer/s from the money which would otherwise have been expended upon allowances to supervising teachers had the students undertaken their teaching practicum in Australia thus making the overseas practicum effectively cost neutral to the university. A substantial university subsidy enabled the University of Melbourne's 1993 Chinese practicum to be impressively inexpensive for the participants. Other contact persons have found less financial or moral support from their faculties. One respondent answered the question about university support from the program as follows "Pre-1991(amalgamation)-little problem- Post 1992 - Faculty and administration not interested- no financial support- reluctance to release staff even though it didn't conflict with lecture commitments". In other cases participating staff have had their administrative and teaching workload increased to compensate for the faculty meeting their travel expenses. 'Exchange program is very time consuming. It is additional to normal workload- further, thru' lack of funding , staff have had to take on additional teaching and administrative workload to pay their expenses."

Eleven of the universities suggested funding as the most important way in which governments or statutory bodies might assist universities to operate overseas practicums more effectively ranging from subsidies for administrative costs, to grants to enable low income students to attend. It is the most significant area where respondents felt the government could assist with the programs. ( Question 38)

### Participants

The size of the cohort also varied dramatically. At one extreme the well established Thai practicum conducted by UTS had 31 participants in 1993 and Wollongong University's program in Fiji, which has been in operation since 1982, had 28 participants in 1993. Eight programs had more than 10 students in 1993 and ten was the most common number of student participants.

Selection of participants was rarely competitive. As the discussion of finance suggests the participants were normally self -selected on the basis of ability to pay and interest in the program. An interesting exception was the UWA's individual program in Japan where the Japanese host institution paid the airfare and other costs of the successful student applicant. Generally the cheaper the practicum (e.g Melbourne

University - China) or the more affluent the student cohort ( UTS Kuring-gai) or the existence of small host-determined quotas (CSU-USA) the greater the opportunity of the university to introduce competitive selection.' Last year (1993) we tried to choose successful students (both academic and in practicum) but there was pressure to make up numbers'.

Usually the attainment of minimum academic and professional standards was given as a selection requirement. Commonly interview panels with lecturers from the program, co-ordinators of practicum offices and sometimes former student participants were used to evaluate the calibre

of written applications and interviews screened out applicants whose motivation or personality might be judged unsuitable for the sensitive task of cross-cultural teaching or the inter-personally challenging experience of living in the close company of a group of students for an extended period. Health of applicants and even their ability to ride a bicycle ! was a consideration in a number of cases.

The following was a typical example of the criteria and methods used to select participants.

'-Objective criteria-participation in Japan Assoc. activities -ability to pay for fares and expenses.

-Subjective- known to staff as motivated and conscientious & likely to have ability to meet challenges and gain from reflection on experiences.'

In most of the programs the students were undertaking generalist primary teaching courses. In 9 of the 26 primary instances participants had to be in their final (3rd) year. Four practicums were for LOTE trainees, seven were for TESOL students and included were a number of secondary teacher education students undertaking a post-graduate Diploma of Education.

The type of preparation required by and provided for the participants varied greatly. The secondary students were in many cases undertaking specialist training in ESL or LOTE. For some of the programs like the six to English speaking western countries (USA and New Zealand) there was little need for LOTE or ESL training and cultural preparation was less pressing. In other cases, like the UWA Indonesian practicum, the students would be teaching in institutions where English was the language of instruction. In 8 cases students undertaking the practicum were required to complete formal accredited preparatory courses. For example students participating in the UTS Thai program were required to undertake 'An Asian Study-Thailand' which included an introduction to Thai language and culture. Students participating in QUT's Indonesian practicum undertook 'Indonesian Culture' a one semester 3 hours X14 week course which included host culture and history, and they also

received a brief introduction to the Indonesian educational system and workshops where teaching programs and materials were prepared. This requirement that students undertake a formal semester subject preparation was obviously easier in the 3/4 year generalist primary training than in the shorter, one year, end-on Diploma of Education course undertaken by secondary trainees.

Marriott (1993) has argued that de-briefing following an overseas inter-cultural experience is critical to maximising the reflective understanding of the process. It seems likely that the universities provided less attention to the de-briefing than to the recruitment and preparation. Nevertheless, valuable formal and informal de-briefing was normally carried out. Monash veterans of the USA practicum are required 'to address other students, address staff, write reports on the experiences and perceptions' RMIT's Japanese program included a formal half-day briefing on return. In many cases graduates of the program are actively involved in the recruitment and preparation of subsequent cohorts of students and in practice, this serves a valuable de-briefing for them and evaluative function for the staff concerned.

In the majority of cases (nineteen) the practicum was hosted by a university or teacher education institution who carried out most of the in-country administration. In nine cases the host was the relevant public or private school organisation. There would seem to be advantages of both types of organisation, however in terms of the wider

goal of internationalising Australian education, links with overseas teacher education institutions certainly provide opportunities for further research and educational collaboration.

At this stage of the research we have not received direct data from the host institutions on what they perceive as the benefits that accrue to them from the practicums. The Australian respondents however listed their perceptions of the benefits to the host. These include exposure to 'modern' teaching methods, gifts of English language teaching materials, exposure to native English speakers, presentation of seminars by accompanying academics, opportunities for research collaboration and in a few cases reciprocal staff visits. In some cases there develops a sense of on-going commitment which was illustrated when graduates of the Sydney University Pacific practicum raised money to help rebuild their former host schools after they had been demolished by a cyclone.

The data only give a generalised picture of the involvement of academic staff in the in-country program. The average ration of students to staff was approximately eight and this was influenced by the university requirement for reporting, nature of the formal relationship with the host institution and the costs involved. In most cases it appears that

the practicum was associated with a particular staff member. In a small number of cases there seemed to be a policy of sharing the experience amongst staff in order to maximise the professional development of staff, to broaden the base of faculty support for the program and reduce the demands placed on a single individual who might be required to be "administrator, evaluator, nursemaid and ambassador with little recognition".

## Conclusion

This study set out to provide an overall picture of the extent, destination and nature of overseas practicums in Australian teacher education programs. It is now clear which universities run such programs, how many students participate, the countries and institutions which host the practicums and the way in which they are organised. Only half Australian universities offer overseas practicums and only a small proportion of teacher education students at these universities participate in those programs.

While the study itself did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these practicums there is abundant evidence from Australia and overseas that the participants consider the practicums to have achieved valuable outcomes. However, substantial barriers confront such programs including the cost to participants, the demands on staff expertise and time and institutional constraints.

If Australian governments desire to increase the capacity of schools to prepare students for a global society and, in particular, to teach LOTE, financial assistance for universities individually or collaboratively to develop overseas practicums could be a valuable way of achieving this aim.

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