

Teaching Learning Consortium - Rationale and Development

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Introduction

The Teaching Learning Consortium emerged as the fruit of many days of discussion and planning by representatives from school principals, Catholic Education Office staff, university students and staff and union representatives. There was an underlying commitment from all to develop a form of field based learning which responded to the needs of the different stakeholders. The conceptualisation and shaping of the Consortium emerged from the discussions among the stakeholder groups. From this discussion critical issues emerged which were pivotal to the overall structure and implementation of the Consortium. At each of these points the stakeholders needed to look beyond their own particular needs to consider, as a total set, the needs of every group that would be involved in the project. From these discussions the participants gained a deeper appreciation and understanding of this being a truly collaborative project.

This paper presents both the theoretical rationale for key elements of the Teaching Learning Consortium and the history of the development of the final model which was adopted. The commitment of all participants in the planning stage of the Consortium to enhance the learning of all people involved in the project was central to its success.

Rationale

In recent years there have been increases in expectation of the roles

schools and teachers should play in education (Burrow, 1997). As teachers' responsibilities become broader and more diverse, and their accountability increases, there has also been increases in the pressure to appraise and refine the education teachers are given in their pre-service years, and, indeed, their induction into the teaching profession (Williams, 1995; McFadden and Hastings, 1997).

Concurrent with this reappraisal of teacher training have been calls to increase practitioner involvement in pre-service teacher training and developments in learning theory which recognise that the activity in which knowledge is developed and deployed, is an integral part of what is learned (Brown, J.S., Collins, A. & Duguid, S. 1989). From this theoretical framework, one mechanism to enhance the training of pre-service teachers is a collaborative partnership between the university and schools. A range of these partnerships programs have been devised in the area of pre-service teacher education (Campbell-Evans, 1993; Ducharme and Ducharme, 1993; Christenson, Eldredge, Ibom and Thomas, 1996; Hasting, McFadden, Dunshea, Rae and Foley, 1996; Johnston, Duvernoy, McGill and Fressola Will, 1996; Kirschner, Dickinson, and Blosser, 1996). While these partnerships differ in their organisation and implementation they share many common objectives.

Firstly, is the desire to improve pre-service teacher education by more effectively utilising the wealth of experience and expertise available within the community of practising teachers. Learning to teach

involves far more than just acquiring the declarative knowledge of a particular subject area or a sets of classroom management techniques. Classrooms are complex and dynamic social situations, so pre-service teachers need to develop the skills and strategies which work effectively in these environments. Such skills and strategies are evident in the behaviour and insights of communities of practising teachers. Without understanding the culture of classrooms, it is not possible to appropriately use pedagogical techniques.

Secondly, all parties should benefit from their participation in the program. In their discussion of the program at New York's Colgate University, Johnston, et al., (1996) placed particular emphasis on the professional development that must occur for all the participants if the relationship to be successful and to be conducted on a long-term basis. All teachers - pre-service teachers, classroom teachers and university staff - are regarded as part of a mutually beneficial learning community. For the participants in the EPIC program in Columbus, (Kirschner et al., 1996) the transformation of existing cooperative relationships into a formally defined collaborative structure certainly presented new challenges, but it also opened up new opportunities for professional development. The comments by one of the participating classroom teachers highlight the anticipated advantages for the participants in the EPIC program.

"The teachers saw this relationship as mutually beneficial to the university and to themselves. It provided the university with

placements for pre-service teachers where they would see theory being put into practice, and it enhanced our professional development by helping us reflect on our teaching. " (Kirschner et al, 1996, p206)

Reflection by all participants is critical if they are to obtain the maximum benefits from their participation in the consortium. Boud (1993) indicates there are two situations in which participants should engage in these reflective processes. First, "reflection in action" where there is limited opportunity for the participants to step aside from the action so that the person that engaged in learning by observing what is happening within themselves and the milieu. Second, "reflection in action" where after the class, there is time for more considered reflection which is based on observations and recall of the relevant conceptual knowledge. This later reflection allows participants to consolidate and integrate their theoretical knowledge with classroom experiences. Boud (1993) suggests that in preparing the students for this type of experiential learning they need to be made aware of the affective and cognitive processes which may influence their ability to learn in the situation.

Mentoring is one of the processes which assist teachers to reflect on and learn from their experiences in these collaborative partnerships. While the support and direction by the teachers will have obvious positive benefits for the professional development of the student teachers, there is evidence that teachers may also benefit from their roles as mentors. The need to discuss their actions in a particular

situation assists classroom teachers to reflect on their actions.

Secondly, in all effective mentorships at times the students will be able to share insights and perspectives with their classroom teacher.

The personal and professional benefits of mentoring for the mentor and mentee have been widely acknowledged but the structuring and resourcing of the mentoring program need to be closely examined for these benefits are to occur (Long, 1997).

Finally a common characteristic is a commitment on the part of the participants to true collaboration among equals. Illustrating this is the significant role practising teachers played in the planning and delivery of the program for students in the Graduate Diploma of Education program at Charles Sturt University (Hastings et al., 1996).

While these researchers recommended that the complementary nature of the roles in the collaboration is recognised and integrated into the planning of the program, Campbell-Evan (1993) emphasised this integration should be instituted at the beginning of the program.

Issues

Examination of the reports of these partnership programs also reveal a number of vital issues which must be addressed if a collaborative pre-service teacher education program is to succeed.

Of primary importance is the need to expend time and effort in the planning stages of a new partnership program. During this planning

period the aims of the program should be clarified, as it cannot be assumed that all participants have the same goals at the outset, and, if the initiative is to prove successful, a clearly stated set of objectives must be negotiated. If the institutions have similar philosophies towards, education and teaching then Kirschner et al (1996) suggest this negotiation may be easier as the participants' shared beliefs and values, which assist them to identify mutual interests and set common goals.

Secondly, distinct and unambiguous statements of the structure, content, methodology and roles of participants in the partnership program should be determined at its inception. While acknowledging the difficulties associated with this process, Campbell-Evans (1993) indicated that the development of some degree of shared meaning and understanding was fundamental to the development of the Teaching Partnership program in Alberta, Canada. Time spent meeting and reconciling the organisational requirements of the faculty, the school district and the professional associations provides the participants feel a sense of ownership and shared responsibility which characterise genuine partnerships (Woodward and Sinclair-Gaffey 1995).

The careful choice of schools, and of practising teachers within those schools, is the third issue which needs to be considered in planning and implementation of a effective consortium. Reports (Field, 1992; Williams, 1995; Baker and Sealey, 1997) suggest the schools and especially the participating teachers are the critical components which

determine the success of the program.

While negotiation may clarify the aims, structure and content of the program it is more difficult to develop a clear conception of the role of the classroom teachers. Unlike their role in the practicum, in partnership programs classroom teachers need to be more pro-active, working with university staff to assist the pre-service teachers integrate theory and practice. Young (1993) emphasises the complexity of this role suggesting that teachers and university advisers need to complement each other as they facilitate the development of the student teachers.

While many collaborative approaches to teacher education initially assume that cooperating classroom teachers would automatically adapt to the changes in their role expectations, Baker et al., (1996) found that this was not the case. As teachers were not clear about their roles there was a need to develop and implement professional development programs aimed at assisting them to adjust. Kirschner et al., (1996) reported that, as well as university staff working with teachers to prepare them for their new roles, the teachers were also invited to provide input to assist the university staff in planning improvements for the program, thereby showing the mutual respect that the participants had for the expertise and experience of each sector. Such interactions can only serve to strengthen partnership programs.

Fourthly, while classroom teachers role is expanded in these new

programs, it is important that the university's contribution to teacher education is maintained. The students still need to develop their pedagogical knowledge. Further to maintain the professional status of teaching it is important that universities continue to maintain their significant role in teacher education. Emphasising this position Field (1992) cited one of England's Directors of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education

"We must be careful not to collaborate in the process of de-professionalising teacher education. We must make sure that the university input continues to be seen as valuable and important. "
(Field, 1992, p37)

Finally, a smoother transition and implementation of the program is more likely when university staff support its introduction. While partnership programs in Canada and Australia have been effectively implemented, there was wide spread criticism accompanying similar changes in teacher education in the United Kingdom. These proposed changes to teacher education were implemented in the wake of vociferous criticisms of the way higher education institutions had been managing teacher education. One issue which underlined the university staff's concern was the complex area of funding. The resources available in any system of teacher education are finite, and the allocation of those resources to universities and schools is a problem requiring lengthy consultation and consideration. If implementation of programs result in the transfer of resources to schools and the accompanying loss of jobs

in the universities, then this is likely to reduced university staff's support for the collaborative partnership. At the same time, "high-quality school-based training cannot be provided cheaply" (Williams 1995, p15). Thus, if such school-based training is perceived to be worthwhile and beneficial to the educational community, then adequate resourcing is essential.

Development of the Teaching Learning Consortium

The Teaching Learning Consortium was an acknowledgement by the university, of the changing needs of the teaching profession and, consequently, the changing needs of pre-service teachers. The Consortium, developed from the stated mission and goals of the Faculty of Education and Catholic Education Office, Parramatta, was conceived as providing a structured arrangement to facilitate learning in a field- based setting.

In its initial conception the main aims of the Teaching Learning Consortium were:

To assist student teachers in their professional development and learning through the formal and informal integration of theory and practice in the field.

To provide a collaborative context which enhances the learning of all involved: pupils, students, and school and university staff.

To assist the university implement the mission and goals of the Faculty of Education which include

- * promote excellence in education and scholarship,
- * advance knowledge and practice in the field of education through teaching and research
- * offer to the educational and general community specialist services, professional consultancy and educational advice.

Reflecting Kirschner et al. (1996) concern, this is an important statement in that it shows the Teaching Learning Consortium as growing naturally from the mission of Australian Catholic University's Faculty of Education.

The fourth and final part of the rationale emphasises the role which the committee envisaged the Teaching Learning Consortium would play in achieving the goals which the Diocese of Parramatta has for its schools. These goals relate to the needs of school students to be challenged to achieve their full potential, for staff to experience an environment which promotes growth, and wherein a true partnership with parents, parishes and the wider community enables each schools to fulfil its mission. The intention, at this stage, was that the Teaching Learning Consortium would play a positive role in the achievement of the goals of the participating schools, adding a new dimension to the curriculum.

It is significant that the Teaching Learning Consortium evolved from a strong and visionary statement of purpose, incorporating a real concern for the benefits for all participants which, the Task Force

anticipated, would emanate from it. It also recognises the potential for professional development to influence directions in education.

Burrow (1997, vii) refers to the wide acceptance of "the concept of professional development as fundamental to educational change." The Task Force was clearly aware of this potential.

From its very inception, the Teaching Learning Consortium Task Force devised a clear set of proposed outcomes, and these have shaped the subsequent evolution of the program. As the nature of the rationale statement would indicate, the anticipated outcomes, as explained in the Discussion Paper, considered the requirements of all participants, and foresaw benefits for all concerned.

For the pre-service teachers, it was proposed that the program would:

- enhance their professional learning and development,
- would increase their understanding and awareness of a range of school and community contexts,
- provide a better structure and sequence for their program of study, by siting their learning in a realistic setting,
- improve the induction of new teachers into the profession,
- assist them in their understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in an educational setting.

For the teachers in the participating schools, the program was expected to:

provide opportunities for professional development and structured

reflection on their approach to teaching practice,
enhance their status as professionals within the teaching and wider
communities,
provide opportunities for them to develop additional skills through
their mentoring roles,
allow them to have direct input into teacher education,
allow them to access credit in degree programs.

For staff of the university it was anticipated that they would:
work directly with their students and the teachers in "real life"
contexts,
reflect upon their own educational practice and test theories against
actual implementation,
maintain or enhance their credibility with other members of the
educational community,
remain in touch with the realities of school life through renewing
contact with school environments,
be involved in the cutting edge of developments in teacher education
through participating in collaborative research projects.

For the students in the participating schools, it was hoped that the
quality of their learning would be enhanced. Classroom time would be
more effectively utilised and individual needs more readily addressed
as a result of the presence of an additional teacher in the classroom.

For all those participating, it was intended that the Teaching Learning

Consortium would deepen the understanding of the roles to be played by the university and the schools in the pre-service education of teachers. Above all, the intention to create a genuine learning community for all participants was a recurrent theme in the early documentation of the program.

Once the rationale and expected outcomes of the Teaching Learning Consortium had been determined, the most suitable structure for the project had to be decided. The Task Force examined a variety of models including one used at Charles Sturt University and another one used at the University of Technology, Sydney. Based on the agreed rationale and outcomes a number of different aspects of these models were scrutinised. The criteria used in the selection process were; the professional development and learning of the pre-service teachers, the professional development of the school staff, the enhancement of pupil's learning and the opportunities each model provided for research, reflective practice, and the effective integration of theory and practice. The key factor underlining the evaluation of the models was the relative emphasis on the roles, responsibilities and professional development of each of the participants.

Eventually, the structure known as Model Four was selected as the focus of this model was the professional development of school personnel, university staff and pre-service teachers. It would involve inviting carefully selected schools to become centres of professional development for periods of two or three years. The University would

also provide the services of personnel with a high level of relevant expertise to work on the project. Each member of the team from the University would work with a cluster of schools, providing professional development opportunities for both practising teachers and pre-service teachers. The selected schools would provide on-site delivery of units of work for pre-service teachers, and, where possible, a bank of release time within the schools would be provided by the presence of pre-service graduate or internship teachers.

The chosen model was seen to have the advantage of addressing the fundamental nature of the relationship between the schools and Australian Catholic University and capitalising on mutual needs. It was perceived as having the potential to make significant contributions to improvements in classroom practice both now and in the future.

As the Teaching Learning Consortium developed through the planning stage, a statement of roles and responsibilities was devised, setting out the anticipated part to be played by each group of stakeholders.

The academic staff of Australian Catholic University were to be responsible for presenting material in those portions of the course that would continue to be taught on the University campus. In addition, they would work in consultation with school personnel in determining course requirements and the focus of inquiry to be assumed by the schools, and they would liaise with schools on an ongoing basis. The University staff would also assume responsibility for the pastoral care

and support of the pre-service teachers, as well as monitoring and assessing their performance. They would also provide structured opportunities for reflection by pre-service teachers on their experience, and provide opportunities for professional development of teachers within or between schools.

For their part, the school personnel involved in the project would provide the pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage with a range of relevant school activities. It was expected that professional development resources would be allocated, as appropriate, to the support of the Teaching Learning Consortium initiative. The co-ordinator at each school would liaise with the University staff throughout the program, and would provide a point of connection and communication between the participants and the remainder of the school staff. Above all, school personnel would be expected to commit themselves to reflection, inquiry and professional development with an identified focus.

The roles and responsibilities of the pre-service teachers were also defined. It was anticipated that they would complete a set of structured learning activities, while attending both school and University at the required times. The students would be expected to participate in discussions of teaching and learning in the schools and in the University. They would, also, take part in negotiated activities to support the inquiry and professional development of the school personnel.

The final stakeholder, the Catholic Education Office, was to liaise with the staff of the University to monitor the pilot project. It would give advice on the selection of the most appropriate schools. As the program continued, the Catholic Education Office undertook to provide for the involvement of relevant education officers.

The Teaching Learning Consortium would, it was proposed, operate as a pilot project in 1997 in a selection of primary and secondary schools in the Parramatta Diocese. The pre-service teachers who were selected to take part in the Teaching Learning Consortium in 1997 were students in the Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary Education) and the Bachelor of Education (Primary) programs.

An invitation to participate in the project was sent to each school in the Parramatta Diocese. Additional encouragement was needed to involve the required number of schools in the secondary arena, and these were not finally determined until November, 1996. By contrast, there were more primary schools willing to participate than were needed, and the eventual selection was based on geographical proximity to each other, to enable members of the University staff to spend adequate time at each location.

Each school would determine a particular focus of inquiry, determined according to the specific needs of that school. In each case, this focus would be negotiated by school and University personnel. The

selection of the participants for the Consortium was a first step in its implementation for 1997.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that partnership in pre-service teacher education has enormous potential. At present, school-based programs are in the earliest stages of development, and ongoing appraisal and improvement must characterise any such program. Michael Bezzina (1997) believes that the Teaching Learning Consortium pilot project has been a significant learning experience, which can be applied to its improvement in future years.

The words of McIntyre (1992 cited by Young, 1993, p33), accurately reflect the position of the Teaching Learning Consortium : " We have hardly begun to understand, far less develop, the elements of successful school-based teacher education. "

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