

TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE TEACHING MODEL FOR FIELD EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

Currently Australian universities are facing the harsh realities of fiscal constraints and Faculties of Education across the country are suffering the effects of economic rationalisation and the call to do more for less. Despite these impediments teacher educators remain committed to their responsibility of producing competent practitioners adequately prepared for the challenge of teaching and to the pursuit of quality education. A preoccupation for many teacher educators seems to revolve around looking for ways to improve programmes within the confines of a restricted budget. The value of school-based experience features strongly in discussions on what constitutes critical aspects of teacher education programmes (Zeichner, 1992, 1993; Northfield, 1993; Collins, 1998) yet it is also recognised as one of the most costly components of the programme to implement.

The discussion paper on Early Childhood teacher education presented by the Board of Teacher Registration (Queensland) stipulates that a teacher education programme in early childhood education should incorporate a minimum of 100 days of teaching practice. Edith Cowan University has allocated 21 weeks of professional practice in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Studies). Work is currently being undertaken to explore more efficient, cost effective methods of implementing and supervising the practicum, and in ensuring partnerships with schools are developed and nurtured.

This paper reports the development, implementation and evaluation of a four week block practicum scheduled as a component of the Bachelor of Education (ECS) for third year early childhood students. The challenge we faced was to improve the practicum programme within the confines of economic and political reforms. In planning the practicum it was intended that it be used to explore and develop a range of strategies for student teachers, university supervisors and classroom teachers focused on educating and skilling all parties as a means of preparing them to meet the demands of teacher training in future. At the same time, we were conscious of working within financial constraints and providing a more economically efficient programme.

The overall aims of the project were to:

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plan a new model for field experience in the Bachelor of Education (ECS) course;

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improve the quality of university student learning and teaching;

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improve and streamline university teacher supervision;

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change the way classroom teachers support the development of student learning;

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enhance the quality of teacher education offered by the Faculty.

Rationale

The rationale which underpins this study stems from the Vygotskian notion that effective learning occurs when individuals construct their own understanding through interaction with the environment (McInerney & McInerney 1998). This perspective places emphasis on the active role of the learner in building personal meaning and extending existing knowledge through interaction. Bodrova & Leong (1996) promote the notion of shared activity as a way of providing a meaningful social context for learning. Through shared activity, deep understanding occurs when new information prompts the development of cognitive structures that enable the learner to internalise, rethink and reframe prior ideas (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Working in an environment where student teachers view themselves as learners, ask questions and are able to search for new meaning plays an important role in developing students' dispositions for being active problem solvers and reflective practitioners.

School settings are teaching and learning communities which provide opportunities for interpersonal experiences where student teachers and classroom teachers together can explore what it means to teach. Research suggests that socially shared cognition within the context of field experience can make a significant difference in student teacher learning. Classroom teachers have the potential to act as support systems for preparing student teachers through situated engagement and negotiation (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998). On the intrapersonal level, self assessment and reflection through journal writing, and peer and teacher feedback provide opportunities for the development of theories, ideas and constructs on a more personal level.

In developing a practicum for early childhood students our premise was that student teachers need to feel confident to experiment with the process of teaching through meaningful experiences. Providing possibilities for collaborative inquiry at the school level can be seen as a way for both student teachers and classroom teachers to gain a better idea of each other's work practices. Sachs (1997) describes collaborative inquiry as that which occurs when teacher educators, practising teachers and student teachers engage in processes of collaboration that articulate academic work and practitioner work. For collaborative inquiry to occur, experiences need to be supported and assumptions and practice challenged by significant others within the classroom setting, namely the teacher and peers. By placing student teachers in classrooms in pairs and working with the classroom teacher in a triadic team teaching arrangement, our intention was to build a community of inquiry as described by Lave and Wenger (1991). Thus, through professional partnerships there are greater possibilities for a culture of scholarly learning to be established and for collaborative inquiry to take place.

The Project

It was intended that the practicum should be more process oriented and address some of the well documented concerns in the area of field experience (Goninan, 1995). Firstly, we

attempted to match the university goals for field experience more closely with school based employment criteria. Presently in Western Australia the call from prospective employers is for staff to have skills in team planning and team teaching and the ability to communicate effectively for purposes of collaboration across school sectors. Thus, the practicum had as its central focus the development of collaborative skills. Secondly, we specified increased time and opportunities for reflection-in-action. That is, whilst student teachers were on location at the school site specific strategies were put in place to encourage personal and group reflection. Thirdly, guidelines for the practicum were prepared in consultation with a small working party comprising classroom teachers and university teachers. Over a period of six months regular meetings were held to develop guidelines, expectations and assessment criteria. Fourthly, with the placement of students in schools in pairs, fewer schools were needed and therefore there was a greater degree of choice in the final selection of participating schools, thus raising the chances of using exemplary sites. Finally, the above concerns were addressed within an overall framework of more efficient use of resources and a reduced budget.

Procedure

The project was evaluated through pre and post practice questionnaires administered to student teachers. Classroom teachers and university supervisors completed a survey and focus group meetings were held with student teachers and university teachers on the completion of the practicum.

The cohort of 75 third year early childhood students completed the practicum. Pairs were formed on a friendship basis and were allocated to schools on a preference basis. Schools traditionally associated with the University were canvassed for expressions of interest to participate in the programme. Thirty eight classrooms were used, and 46 students were placed in pre-primary centres, with 29 students selecting junior primary classrooms. In addition, 13 university supervisors were involved in the practicum.

Sixty seven pre and post practice questionnaires were returned and formed the student sample in this project. In addition, 22 classroom teachers and 10 university teachers returned surveys.

The Practicum

Development

The framework for this practicum developed out of discussions held at the university Faculty level. The School of Education structure includes a Professional Practice Advisory Committee which draws its membership from the university sector, various school sectors, and professional associations. In 1997 discussions regarding the upcoming third year practicum in the new Bachelor of Education programme indicated a need to address budget constraints together with the desire to provide a meaningful practicum experience. A preliminary proposal for developing a collaborative model was proposed and supported by the committee for trialling in 1998.

The specific outcomes of the practicum were to develop:

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Team planning and team teaching skills. The emphasis was on developing collegial partnerships in order to facilitate the sharing of expertise about teaching and on fostering

collaborative practices. The placement of students in pairs aimed to enhance peer interaction and cooperation and to enable joint planning and sharing of tasks;

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A model for planning, implementing and evaluating a unit of work. Through collaborative planning strategies, students were required to plan, implement and evaluate a unit of work based on knowledge of the children's developmental needs, abilities and interests, and at the same time to consider the teacher's ongoing programming needs;

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Enhance students' learning through providing opportunities for reflection, interaction and scaffolding. It was envisaged that pairing students in classrooms would provide a context for collaborative inquiry and reflection through a more reciprocal approach to discussions of issues about teaching;

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Change the way university teachers and classroom teachers support and guide the development of student teachers' classroom experience. Traditionally supervision has entailed one-way feedback with attempts to offer advice as solutions to problems (Campbell-Evans & Maloney, 1997). Our aim was to establish three-way conversations between student teachers, classroom teacher and university supervisor, whereby lines of communication were based on shared expertise, rather than expert-novice relationships. The emphasis here was encouraging classroom teachers to take on an interactive role involving supporting, assisting and guiding students through issues of teaching and learning, rather than seeing their role solely as one of assessor.

The project team developed a set of guidelines for student teachers, classroom teachers and university supervisors involved in the practicum. The guidelines directed students to work in pairs in order to provide experience in developing collaborative teaching skills and to ensure greater opportunities for critical and self analysis, including assisting peers with constructive feedback. A range of strategies for planning, teaching and problem solving were introduced to student teachers during intensive workshop sessions before the practicum. Strategies included: joint preparation and planning of a unit of work, working as part of a triad (students, teacher, supervisor), alternating lead teacher and co-teacher roles, team teaching, joint conferencing, giving peer feedback, and journal writing.

Student teachers volunteered to attend four, two hour workshop sessions (outside of their normal semester programme) for the purpose of familiarisation of the requirements, exploring skills and strategies and the commencement of the planning process.

University supervisors were briefed on the aims and purposes of the practicum to ensure the development of a shared understanding of the processes and strategies to be used. Classroom teachers were given the opportunity to call on the practice coordinator for clarification and elaboration of the guidelines and this occurred in schools on a needs basis.

Implementation

The Professional Practice Guidelines stipulated expectations for each of the participating groups; student teachers, classroom teachers and university teachers.

For student teachers, the primary goal was that they should work collaboratively with a partner to plan, implement and evaluate a programme of work. It was envisaged that team planning would enable students to share strengths and weaknesses and at the same time reduce the overall workload. The objective of team teaching was to provide opportunities for one student to assume the role of lead teacher by taking responsibility for the teaching and management of the programme for a specified time, while the partner assumed the role of co-teacher by assisting the lead teacher in classroom preparation, implementing learning experiences and guiding children's behaviour. These roles were reversed to enable equal teaching time for each student.

Another key requirement of the practicum was that students were to provide their partner with constructive feedback about their teaching and work with children. This was to take place either as an entry in a professional journal or on a more informal basis as part of the post-lesson discussion. Thus, the professional journal was an important element of the practicum for purposes of feedback and reflection. We wanted the journal to be a tool for ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders in the practicum and so we encouraged all parties to contribute to the conversation about teaching and learning. In addition, students were encouraged to diagnose personal strengths and weaknesses and to formulate goals for improvement. One particular requirement identified for all students was that of developing and maintaining appropriate assessment strategies through conducting case studies on three children selected by the classroom teacher. Finally students were to demonstrate a high level of professionalism in their conduct, attitude and behaviour.

For classroom teachers, the requirements stipulated that they should provide details of the first week's lessons and timetable prior to the commencement of the practice. Specific details relating to the context, including children's background, development, strengths and weaknesses were also provided in order to assist student teachers in developing a contextual analysis of the centre or classroom. Classroom teachers were asked to model a range of teaching strategies and to conduct regular discussions with student teachers on various aspects of the teacher's role and on their progress, as a way of providing feedback to student teachers. Feedback was also provided through oral and written comments and through making regular contributions to the student's journal. An important role for the classroom teacher was to provide guidance in the development of a unit of work, and to assist with preparation of learning experiences to ensure appropriate content and methodology. In order for student teachers to plan collaboratively, classroom teachers were requested to provide sufficient DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time to enable student teachers to meet and jointly discuss issues related to their preparation.

For university teachers' requirements included assisting student teachers in refining processes for planning and assessing pupils learning, encouraging student teachers to carry out self assessment and reflection through use of the journal and peer feedback, and to make a contribution to the discussion in the journal. A key component of the university teachers' role was to support the classroom teacher in their day to day work with student teachers. It was suggested that university teachers should form discussion groups with student teachers and classroom teachers to establish a forum for analysing experiences, encourage group problem solving, and for setting common goals and reviewing development.

During the four week practicum, university supervisors made one phone contact and two school visits to each student allocated for supervision. The phone contact was made in the first week to overcome early problems and ensure a smooth start. In particular, classroom teachers were contacted to alleviate any concerns with the requirements and guidelines and to communicate a level of support from the university.

Reporting the Data

Student teachers

The pre-practice questionnaire was aimed at exploring student teachers' perceptions of collaborative planning and teaching, including their understanding of the skills needed for successfully working as a team. Students were also asked to articulate their personal goals for the practicum and to give their views of the advantages and disadvantages of being placed in schools in pairs. Student teachers' perceptions of the role of the classroom teacher and university teacher were also canvassed. It was intended that responses would be compared with post-practice perceptions to ascertain if changes had occurred over the duration of the practicum.

Students nominated the following goals as important for the coming practicum:

Personal Goals

Learn about programming (27)

Learn new ways of teaching (22)

Learn more about management (20)

Learn to work collaboratively with a partner (13)

To develop confidence and knowledge and experience (12)

A significant proportion of the lead up workshops addressed programming and planning requirements. Students were expected to plan a unit of work for the last two weeks of the practicum and to this end were introduced to a framework for preparing an integrated programme. With the recent introduction of the Curriculum Framework Document, (1998) workshops included familiarisation of the document and the underlying theoretical framework. The planning requirement for this practicum was also seen as a forerunner to the preparation required in Assistant Teacher Programme (ATP) in the fourth year of the course (the outcome of the ATP experience is that which is recorded on the final transcript and used as a criteria for employment). Also high on students' agenda was the need to learn more about different ways of teaching and of managing children's behaviour. These types of concerns are not surprising during the formative process of learning to teach. Learning to work collaboratively with a partner was nominated thirteen times as a goal for this practicum.

Students described collaborative planning as:

Understanding of collaborative planning

Working together to plan a unit of work to achieve learning outcomes (46)

Sharing ideas, thoughts, feelings about programmes and lessons taught (32)

Being able to work as a team (08)

Although the two essential elements of teamwork: task performance and group relationships (Rodd, 1998) were alluded to in students description of planning collaboratively, these elements were not strongly supported. Concepts such as sharing a common philosophy,

sharing responsibility, and open and honest communication did not feature in student responses.

Responses to students' perceptions of collaborative teaching included:

Understanding of collaborative teaching

Two or more teachers work together to teach the children (22)

Working together in lead teacher and co-teacher roles (20)

Supporting each other, assisting and offering encouragement (11)

A team effort (11)

Comments made by student teachers about collaborative teaching specifically relate to the notion of support, both physically and psychologically. The following were recorded as important: a supportive environment, moral support, and staff support through observations and assistance.

Skills identified as important for successful collaborative planning and teaching included the following:

Skills important for successful collaborative planning and teaching

Communication (37)

Co-operation (31)

Listening (19)

Constructive criticism (13)

Compromise (13)

Organisation (10)

Accepting help and ideas (10)

Aspects such as conflict resolution, empathy, problem solving, decision making, sensitivity and being open to suggestions were reported only in isolated cases. Students also alluded to the importance of time management and thorough preparation, and the need to avoid becoming defensive in the face of constructive feedback.

Advantages of working in pairs were listed as follows:

Perceived advantage of working in pairs (team approach)

Moral support (38)

Able to share ideas, thoughts and feelings (32)

Share the workload (15)

Learn from one another (15)

Get feedback (11)

Students perceived working in pairs as being less stressful. They thought that peers could act as a motivator when energy and commitment began to lag. Working in pairs provided a means for sharing equipment and resources. An important aspect of this kind of work was that there would be less pressure and less stress because of sharing responsibilities and the moral support which was available.

Students perceived the following as anticipated disadvantages of working in pairs:

Perceived disadvantage of working in pairs

Personal differences such as personality clashes (22)

Conflicting ideas (11)

Being compared to another (08)

Students were generally concerned with competitiveness and peer pressure becoming a negative factors in successful pair negotiations. Another negative element reported was that of possible favouritism of one student over another by the classroom teacher and to a lesser degree, the university supervisor. What was interesting was that six students saw no disadvantages in working in pairs.

The role of the classroom teacher was perceived as:

Perceived role of the classroom teacher

Provide support (28)

Provide feedback (27)

Provide ideas and thoughts about teaching (17)

To guide learning (18)

Role modelling (12)

Students also saw the role of classroom teachers as providing constructive criticism though identifying problems and offering suggestions for alternatives. It was surprising that only one student listed the teacher's role as that of a mentor. In general terms students saw the teacher as a supervisor, advisor, and co-teacher who provided help with resources and programming.

The role of the university teacher was perceived as:

Perceived role of the university teacher

Provide feedback (29)

Provide support (22)

Constructive criticism (14)

Guidance (07)

Students perceived the university teacher as having a helping role. This included talking to the teacher on their behalf, being a source of information about requirements, discussing progress and generally "being nice". Giving advice and being encouraging were also valued attributes of the university teacher.

Post-practice comparisons

Data from the post-practice questionnaire revealed few changes in student teachers' perceptions. Fifty percent of the student sample reported that they felt they had met their personal goals for the practicum. The most significant progress was made in the areas of Confidence (10), Management skills (14) and Planning (12). Seven students reported that they felt they had made significant improvement in the development of collaborative teaching skills.

The practicum confirmed student teachers' understanding of collaborative planning. Comments included:

Understanding of collaborative planning and teaching

It is good to share ideas (10)

Easier to plan together (04)

Can learn from each other (06)

Eases the load (12)

Whilst students recognised the value of collaborative planning they reported that they found the process more difficult than anticipated. They cited time to meet and plan together as an issue, and noted that collaborative planning requires change and compromise for the process to work.

Perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of working in pairs did not alter significantly from pre to post practice. However, what is interesting is that only four respondents were against the notion of working in pairs. Students strongly approved of this structure as a means of support both physically and morally.

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with one being the lowest) students rated keeping a journal as ranging from useful to very useful (27 useful, 12 quite useful, 7 very useful). However with regard to contributing to their partner's journal, 25 students rated this exercise as not useful at all, whilst 22 students rated it as useful.

University Teachers' Survey

Ten out of thirteen university teachers returned the survey and attended the focus group meeting. Issues discussed included the degree to which the outcomes for the practicum

were perceived as being met, the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and areas for further improvement.

Team planning and teaching

University teachers reported that team teaching and collaborative planning skills were being used, albeit to varying degrees, in all classroom situations. The extent of teamwork ranged from barely being galvanised as a team, to being engaged in joint co-ordination in order to achieve common goals. The university teachers reported the following positive and negative experiences regarding the relationship between pairs and the development of a team approach:

Positive

Students working together to clarify objectives and requirements for the practicum

Collaboration increased as practice progressed and work intensified

When personality types matched students worked well together

Students communicated that they appreciated the peer support

Negative

One student taking over

Competition between students

Responsibility falling on the stronger student, so that dependency became a factor

Professional jealousy

The university teachers saw the emphasis on collaboration and teamwork as a strength in the programme. They saw skills such as supporting and helping, compromising and sharing, respecting and valuing each other as important for early childhood practitioners.

Planning, implementing and evaluating a unit of work

The university teachers discerned a wide range in the effectiveness of the documentation prepared by the student teachers. Planning a unit of work required student teachers to draw on a range of professional knowledge. This included knowledge of the context and children, knowledge of what and how to teach and ways to assess the learning. In addition students were expected to integrate these various components to provide a developmentally appropriate programme for the final two weeks of the practicum. Understandably, variations among students were found in the degree to which the process outlined during university workshops was applied. Success in planning depended upon familiarity with the requirements (attendance at the workshop sessions), willingness to work together with peer (share the load) degree of support from the classroom teacher and university teachers, and to a large extent, depth of knowledge of content and learning processes (transference of pedagogical and content knowledge to planning).

Strategies for reflection and interacting with peers

The student teachers were exposed to a number of strategies which had not previously been part of field experience models. Although the strategies were not new to students and had been included in various forms in a number of units studied in the course, this was the first practicum which formally required students to implement specific procedures. The major strategies designed to enhance student learning were, keeping a professional journal, providing peers with constructive feedback both oral and written, self assessment, and carrying out focussed observations of children.

Whilst all students attempted to keep a journal, the level of commitment to maintaining a professional dialogue varied significantly. As is known from the literature, journal writing is a skill which requires substantial development for it to be effective as a means of personal reflection. Even though students were familiar with the activity of journal writing, there were many instances of limited entries, superficial comments, and reluctance to continue, reported by the university teachers.

For many students the journal was merely an optional extra which took up a considerable amount of extra time which they felt could have been spent preparing lessons. Others found it a profound experience and a useful method of communicating with all the stakeholders in the practicum. Some teachers who were reluctant to provide written feedback on lesson plans wrote their comments in the journal. Other teachers however, were reluctant to read, let alone write in the journal. One university teacher reported that a classroom teacher had made the following entry in a student teachers journal, "Help, tell me what to write here!".

The university teachers generally found that the peer feedback was applauded by students as a useful exercise. They reported that the process 'worked well' and that students used the strategy both informally and formally. Informal discussions occurred in the car to and from the school, during lunch and recess, after school, and during planning sessions. Formal feedback occurred through entries in the journal and notes after a student had taken a particular lesson.

University teachers' role

The practicum was designed to provide new ways of supervising students whilst on practice. The university teachers' and classroom teachers' role was intended to be one of support and guidance rather than providing one-way feedback and solutions to problems. The university teachers were united in their comments about the value of this facilitation role, but were also unanimous in their concerns about the amount of time needed to complete these tasks thoroughly. In light of budget constraints, supervision time was restricted to four hours per pair of students per school visit. It was strongly stated that this was not sufficient time in which to establish contact with all parties in the school, to consult with students and teachers and to observe student teachers in action.

Classroom Teachers' Survey

Twenty two teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Team planning and teaching

Classroom teachers described their perceptions of team planning and team teaching in very similar ways. Descriptions included: job sharing, working together to plan and teach lessons with the collaboration of the classroom teacher, working together for a common goal. All the respondents saw collaboration as a valuable experience and reported more positive than negative experiences.

Positive

Students worked well together

Communicated constantly

Consulted each other

Supported one another

Negative

It was difficult when one did not put in as much effort

It was difficult when students were of different abilities (one strong and one weaker)

All classroom teachers commented on the collaborative aspect of the practicum as being a strength of the programme. They witnessed students supporting peers, sorting out issues between themselves, sharing ideas, joint problem solving and learning from each other as advantages of being placed in the classroom in pairs.

Shortcomings of the practicum included the amount of paper work which needed to be completed by the students and the difficulty some teachers had with adult-child ratios, where children had to cope with extra adults in the room. Six teachers specifically mentioned the difficulty arising from the new Curriculum Framework Document, and the amount of support they were able to supply.

Planning, implement and evaluating a unit of work.

The comments made in this area specifically related to the new Curriculum Framework Document mandated in 1998 for use in all schools in Western Australia. Classroom teachers were at varying stages of familiarity with this document and in several cases felt they were not in a position to give students sufficient support in the area of planning a unit of work. The use of Student Outcome Statements as a framework for planning was also problematic for some teachers. It seems therefore that in many cases the students were left to solve problems on their own.

Classroom Teachers' Role

A significant number of classroom teachers described their role as a facilitator. They saw their role as advising and supporting the students and offering suggestions. Most teachers reported that it was their role to model routines, teaching strategies and behaviour management techniques and then to gradually take on a co-teacher role as they handed over responsibility to the student. An important aspect of the teachers' role was to work as part of the team.

It was interesting to note that no direct comments were made regarding the use of journals and about providing feedback to students through the journal.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The four week practicum placed in the third year of the Bachelor of Education (ECS) is preceded by three short practicums of two weeks duration and followed by a final ten week

field experience known as the Assistant Teacher Programme (ATP) in the fourth year of the course. In light of this structure, the third year practicum with its emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning is seen as a positive initiative in the student teachers' overall professional development. It provides opportunities for an extended period of time in a school/centre setting and is regarded as a formative stage in the development of teaching expertise with the possibility of future refinement of skills and knowledge during the ATP in fourth year.

All three stakeholders in the practicum reported that the strength of the programme lay in the collaboration and work in pairs. Where this was most successful a community of inquiry was established. The benefits of engaging in professional dialogue and articulating knowledge about teaching and learning was evident in the feedback from all parties about the virtues of working collaboratively. The pair work ranged from being extremely effective to not being successful at all. Only nine students reported that working collaboratively with a partner was not very successful whilst the remainder of the cohort reported that pair work ranged from successful to highly successful. In the focus group discussion, students referred to the need to maintain professional partnerships even when outside personal factors intruded into the working relationship. Teamwork is recognised as an important component of the teaching profession and skills related to building efficient teams and leadership qualities need to take a higher profile in early childhood teacher education programmes.

The lead teacher, co-teacher roles compelled students to consult with each other and to work with a peer in joint negotiating and decision making. There was in these cases, evidence of scaffolding of learning, as students reported sharing, supporting and helping one another to find solutions and alternatives to dilemmas and concerns. Classroom teachers also became a part of this process and as students assumed more responsibility the teachers perceived that their role moved from one of supervisor to one of facilitator. Students were able to experiment with the comfort of knowing that other adults had input into the planning and organisation and that assistance was close at hand. When working in pairs became strained this was generally attributed to lack of time to plan by students. However, there was evidence in some cases of an inability to resolve conflicts and an acceptance of learned helplessness in the form of what one university teacher termed, 'pooled ignorance'.

The planning component of this practicum was a significant step forward for students in terms of depth of preparation and documentation. Whilst we found a wide range in students' ability to adequately plan a unit of work, a significant number of students who grappled with the process in the initial stages ultimately were able to produce an effective document from which to plan a daily programme. The relatively short briefing period leading up to the practicum was problematic in that sessions did not allow for an approach which enabled in-depth discussion, analysis and workshop activities. In addition, these sessions were voluntary, and although attendance was very high, those students who did not attend all sessions were severely disadvantaged. Thus the students struggled with developing a workable document and were heavily reliant on the university teacher for direction and guidance in this exercise. Despite these problems only six students reported that they did not learn very much about programming by the end of the practicum.

The model of the practicum was intended to improve opportunities for student learning and so students were introduced to a number of strategies which had previously not been part of their field experience. The strategies of keeping a journal and giving peer feedback were intended to provide opportunities for reflection on action and to further stimulate the professional dialogue between all parties. The journal was problematic for some students. Sixteen students (N67) experienced difficulties sustaining the effort to write, and reported that journal writing was not a very useful activity for them. Whilst 19 students reported

journal writing as very useful, 32 students rated it at 3 on a 5 point scale. The major difficulty related to time. Time, before the practicum to adequately prepare students and time during the practicum for students to write consistently. With a practicum which required students to complete several key tasks, the journal was placed low on the list of priorities by many students. Indeed this was so for some classroom teachers who advised students to make fewer entries when the pressure of preparation, planning and teaching intensified. This is indicative of students' and classroom teachers' perceptions of the value of journal writing and is an area which needs to be addressed if this activity is to continue to be a requirement of the practicum. Students need to be better prepared for using the journal as an interactive method of communication. Training students in using the various forms of reflective writing as outlined by Campbell-Evans & Maloney (1997) might be beneficial. Another solution is to make the journal a more high profile component of the practicum and to raise its status by placing more emphasis on the value of the journal in reflecting on practice.

The length of the practicum (four week block) held certain advantages for the various stakeholders. For student teachers it provided a substantial amount of time to develop momentum and continuity in their teaching. It allowed students time to work on areas they had identified as personal goals for the practicum. In addition it provided time to develop relationships with the teacher and the children and to sustain a collaborative alliance with their partner. Classroom teachers fully endorsed the four week initiative. They commented that it gave students time to adjust to the context and to plan and teach on a more long term basis and to relate better with children, thus providing a more realistic situation for the student.

For university teachers the longer practicum meant they visited the schools for longer periods of time and spent more time in discussion with students, teachers and school administrators. However, this did not mean that their job was easier. In fact, all stakeholders reported that the university teacher's role needs to be reviewed in terms of the type of work they undertake whilst in schools and the amount of time allocated to supervision. University teachers took on the role of troubleshooter, along with supervising, advising, supporting students and classroom teachers and assessing. A suggestion is that classroom teachers are better placed to take on some of these roles. In particular, that of monitoring the student's development and determining if students have met requirements. This would leave the troubleshooting and supporting role to university teachers who visit the school periodically throughout the practicum.

This raises a related issue which was discussed during the university focus group meeting. Classroom teachers are also at present responding to numerous changes within the education system and are under the pressure of an already expanding role. Assuming the responsibility for a student teacher's growth and development is another call on this expanding role. With the shift in emphasis from supervisor and assessor, to facilitator and mentor comes an array of new and different skills and expertise. Classroom teachers cannot be expected to make this shift without substantial support and professional development. What is obvious from this project, is that if classroom teachers are to be partners in the teacher education process, then more work needs to be done with them in the way of professional development and training to support their work with student teachers.

A way forward is to ask teachers who were involved in the project to commit to the ongoing programme, thus building a team of educators willing to take responsibility for the development of future colleagues and professionals. However, some kind of incentive needs to be built into the acceptance of this responsibility. One idea discussed was that of building professional development for supporting student teachers in the field into units of work which could be credited to teachers as work towards further university study.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the outcomes of the project:

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To review the time allocated to University Teachers to conduct field supervision.

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To review the roles of the University Teacher and Classroom Teacher with the view of shifting responsibility for monitoring development to the Classroom Teacher.

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To structure professional development for classroom teachers to assist in familiarisation of the requirements and to develop skills of supervision and mentoring.

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To streamline the planning process in order to assist student teachers to develop a better understanding of planning and programming.

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To include a component of leadership skills and strategies for effective teamwork in ECS 4110 in preparation for ATP.

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To better prepare students to reflect on their practice through placing greater emphasis on strategies such as journal writing, peer feedback and self evaluation.

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To include journal writing as a component of Classroom Teachers' professional development.

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To advocate for an Education Studies Unit in the sixth semester of the course to ensure adequate pre-practice preparation for students.

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To build partnerships with selected schools and Classroom Teachers for continuing involvement in the 4 week Early Childhood Collaborative Practicum.

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