Preservice teachers negotiating competing versions of ‘the good intern’ in a virtual professional learning community.

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Abstract

Within higher education, information and communications technologies (ICT) are being used in course delivery. Within teacher education programs, ICT is being increasingly used in the practicum components of the programs. Although there is a large amount of literature in the area, most describe innovative ICT practice or simply advocate for its use. There is a need for more detailed and critical research. Postmodernist perspectives on ICT emphasise the potential of these new technologies to afford new and numerous spaces and roles for interactants. In this paper we explore this postmodernist conceptualisation by analysing how participants (secondary preservice teachers and university advisers) negotiate competing
versions of ‘the good intern’ in their bulletin board postings on a WebCT site. This site was
designed to enable and encourage professional discussion and learning amongst preservice
teachers and university advisers while the preservice teachers were completing a school-
based internship. Our analysis suggests that in this virtual professional learning space,
preservice teachers negotiated between a teacher educator version of ‘good intern’ informed
by issues of critical reflection and social justice and a teacher version based on the
practicalities of teaching. This task of negotiation presented by the virtual professional
learning community was an extremely complex and difficult accomplishment for the
preservice teachers. The virtual space involved preservice teachers managing competing
versions of ‘the good intern’ that in traditional supervision models had been separated and to
a large extent, had remained invisible. These findings highlight the invisible work that
preservice teachers engage in during their practicum, and direct attention to efforts that can
made towards planning ICT learning communities that meet the needs of teacher educators
and preservice teachers.

Introduction

Learning to teach is a social process of negotiation rather than an individual problem of
learned behaviours. Preservice teachers come to their teacher preparation programs with
well-established notions about teachers and teaching. As Britzman points out:

Prospective teachers, then, bring to their teacher education more than their
desire to teach. They bring their implicit institutional biographies – the
cumulative experience of school lives – which in turn, inform their knowledge
of the student's world, of school structure, and of curriculum. All this
contributes to well-worn and commonsense images of the teachers' work and
serves as the frame of reference for prospective teachers' self-images.

(p.443)

These prior conceptions are "tenacious and powerful", relatively inflexible, and also
resistant to change. To a large extent, teacher education programs have little impact on
them.

Preservice teachers’ prior conceptions often conflict with the reality they meet in schools and
the pedagogical knowledge they acquire during preservice teacher education. Their images
are sometimes ‘shattered’ during the practicum as they ‘strive to enact or play out their
personal images of teaching despite contextual realities which are often at odds with them’.
In the practicum preservice teachers are learning about teaching while at the same time
doing it – they are required to be both student and teacher. Learning to teach involves
constructing a provisional teaching identity by negotiating contradictions between prior
conceptions and the realities of the teacher education programs.

In addition, the practicum foregrounds other dilemmas for preservice teachers. During the
practicum they are learning to fulfil the role of a teacher and at the same time are developing
their own personal teaching identities. Preservice teachers’ attempt to fulfil the role of a
teacher by demonstrating behaviours which can be observed and judged competent or not
by supervisors and mentors. At the same time, their developing teaching identities are
challenged, confirmed and strengthened or even temporarily denied, disguised, or silenced.
Teacher educators aim to provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to develop their
own professional identities by getting them to theorize their beliefs and practices; to reflect
on these beliefs and practices. A range of approaches is introduced in on-campus programs
to help preservice teachers develop their professional identities. Such reflective pedagogies
include metaphor analysis, exploration of narrative, action research, critical incidents
analysis, and various approaches to critical reflection. They are introduced in the on-campus
programs, encouraged during the university supervisors visits to the practicum schools, and are also often the focus in supervision and mentoring ‘training’ sessions for school based personnel involved in the practicum.

However strong power relationships are inherent in the practicum supervisory triad of supervising teacher, preservice teacher and university supervisor which also influence the preservice teachers’ learning to teach. Typically, when feeling forced to choose an allegiance, the preservice teacher aligns him/herself with the school based supervising teacher. The university based supervisor is often positioned as the ‘other’ who is out of touch with the ‘real world’ and who has to be endured and placated during his or her infrequent and hurried visits to the practicum school.

Thus, it is an understatement to say that the "lived experience [of learning to teach] is fraught with ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction". The contradictions, tensions and dilemmas preservice teachers experience often ‘play out’ in a ‘theory-practice divide’ discourse. They highlight a disjuncture between what is deemed by them to be ‘prac’ (associated with classroom practice) and what is considered ‘uni’ (associated with theory, reflective teaching). Teacher educators have tried various approaches to attempt to bridge this theory-practice divide and bridge the on-campus and school-based components of the program. One way is to use ICT to create a virtual learning space where these two worlds can ‘come together’. This paper explores the ways preservice teachers present themselves and negotiate their professional personas in such a virtual learning environment while learning to teach in an school based internship towards the end of their university awarded teacher preparation program.

While the preservice teachers were completing their internship they had access to an electronic discussion group which they used to keep in contact with their preservice teacher colleagues placed in other schools, as well as with their university lecturers and advisors. We examined the bulletin board postings for ways in which the preservice teachers were presenting themselves, for evidence of their projected professional identities. The data showed the presentation of two versions of ‘the good intern’. The preservice teachers negotiated teacher educator/university versions of ‘the good intern’ and practising teacher/school versions of ‘the good intern’ for the duration of their internship. The bulletin board postings showed how the preservice teachers negotiated these sometimes competing versions. Two conflicting and competing discourses were presented and highlighted: the ‘prac’ (classroom practice) and ‘uni’ (theory/reflective teaching). The online environment made this negotiation visible. In traditional supervision models this ‘negotiation’ is usually only evident to the university teacher educators during their visits to the school, and then probably only during individual discussions with the preservice teacher.

The context

The participants in the study were secondary preservice teachers and their university lecturers and advisers. The preservice teachers were completing a 10-week practicum/internship experience towards the end of their teacher preparation program. After 4 weeks of supervised practicum and dependent upon their supervisors’ assessment of their teaching competence, the preservice teachers were eligible to become interns. As interns they carried a 50% teaching load, during which time the usual classroom teacher was released from her/his classroom responsibilities and became the intern’s mentor. The majority of the preservice teachers completed their internships within one or two hours drive of the university, however a number completed it in rural and remote areas. Each intern was assigned a university adviser who provided the school-university link, visited schools within driving distance, and was responsible for ensuring the smooth progression of the internship in each site and the learning to teach of the interns at that site.
A WebCT site (see www.webct.com) was established in an attempt to create a virtual community of learners who would share experiences, thoughts, issues and concerns with each other and with their university lecturers throughout the internship experience. Access to the password-protected site was restricted to interns and university staff. On the site, email and bulletin board discussion group facilities were available. Within the bulletin board environment a number of forums (discussion areas) were established with each preservice teacher having access to four forums:

- A main forum for general messages and discussions;
- A university adviser forum where all preservice teachers of the one adviser could interact with each other and the adviser; and,
- Two teaching subject area forums (to which the relevant curriculum lecturers or teaching subject area ‘methods’ lecturers also had access)

In addition, as coordinator of the Internship, the second author had access to all forums and was the moderator of the site. A Preservice Teacher Education Administrator also had access to the main forum to provide information of an administrative nature like passing on details of employment application procedures from prospective employers.

The goal of the teacher educator program is to develop, educate and sustain teachers who can contribute innovatively and creatively to addressing the educational challenges of social, community and technological change. Three major themes run across the courses:

- Understanding difference: critically engaging with the various forms of student, community, cultural, linguistic, and gender difference, including special needs clientele.
- Understanding educational contexts: critically engaging with the dynamic community, economic, global, national, and virtual contexts which influence and mediate the practices of education.
- Understanding teaching as a dynamic and changing form of professional and intellectual work: critically engaging with the increasing technological, industrial and intellectual complexity of teaching as work.

In the on-campus program, various pedagogical approaches are used which were thought to support the program’s aims and underlying philosophies about learning to teach aligning with a constructivist approach.

**Virtual professional learning communities for learning to teach**

Despite evidence that learning to teach is a social process of negotiation facilitated by preservice teacher colleagues and others who act as supervisors or mentors, practicum experiences are often characterised by disconnection. Preservice teachers are often isolated from any type of continuous communication with university lecturers and other preservice teachers, and construct their professional selves in relative isolation of the on-campus components of their programs. Increasingly, ICT is being used to help preservice teachers maintain contact with their university tutors and with each other during practicum experiences, and to promote critical reflection during the practicum. The potential of ICT in learning to teach lies in broadening the dialogue from the traditional practicum supervision triad of one supervising teacher, one preservice teacher and one university supervisor, to include wider and richer sources of influences, and the professional learning communities established with ICT provide unique opportunities for learning to teach and challenge traditional roles and relationships in the practicum. The electronic learning space enables ongoing negotiation as preservice teachers grapple with their emerging teaching identities.
As mentioned above, part of the rationale for the introduction of the virtual professional learning community was to address the disjuncture between ‘prac’ and ‘uni’, locating ‘teacher reflection’ centrally as an over-riding platform across these separated physical places of school and university.

The Data

The data analysed in this paper consist of three ‘interaction threads’ posted on the bulletin board: ‘On a wing and a prayer’; ‘Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school’; and, ‘Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful’. In this paper a ‘thread’ is defined as a posting that receives two or more replies from different interactants. Threads were chosen for analysis rather than selecting individual messages because they maintain the integrity of the bulletin board as an interactional accomplishment. It also allows for analysis to be focused on the interactional aspects of the messages, as well as the content. The first thread used in the analysis, ‘On a wing and a prayer’ consists of seven posted messages which are included in the analysis. The other thread ‘Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school’ consists of six posted messages, and the third thread ‘Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful’ includes six postings in the analysis. These three threads or thread sections were selected for analysis from a total of fifty-one, consisting of 717 messages in total.

Theoretical Position

Our analysis is informed by a poststructuralist approach and utilises analytic tools drawn from Membership Categorisation Analysis (henceforth MCA) and Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA). MCA and CA provide rich resources to understand in detail how these bulletin board postings are co-constructed. Also, the focus that MCA and CA accord to participants, i.e. that members through their talk and actions are seen to be competently and artfully constructing social orders, is a particularly useful position to adopt because it provides a different lens to analyse our own actions, as well as the actions of other participants. In addition, Baker highlights how the two analytic methods of MCA and poststructuralist analysis complement each other by explaining that “categories and categorisation work lock discourses into place, and are therefore ready for opening to critical examination” (p.99).

Data analysis

All names are pseudonyms. Analysis of the data revealed two versions of ‘the good intern’:

1. A teacher educator version of ‘the good intern’ – linked to the goals and philosophies of the teacher educator program; utilizes pedagogies associated with critical reflection/ development of one’s professional identity/ articulate of personal professional theories
2. A practising secondary teacher version of ‘the good intern’ – linked to the professional practice of secondary teachers, particularly effective classroom practices

There is evidence in the data of interns negotiating both versions of the good intern’. This is made visible in the electronically mediated learning community. We argue that such negotiation is not visible in such a public way in usual supervisory arrangements or in one-to-one peer discussions. The discussion which follows draws on an examination of the data for illumination of how these versions are negotiated (as evidenced in the postings).
1. Analysis of Thread: ‘On a wing and a prayer’

The first thread ‘On a wing and a prayer’ is initiated by Kevin and posted to the Science teaching subject area forum.

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Article No. 10: posted by Kevin on Mon, Feb. 14, 2000, 18:30

Subject: On a wing and a prayer

Dear fellow physics pedagogues,

I am having a great time at Yellowbank high school. The physics people have heaps of resources for labs and demonstrations. My supervisor is great and gives the kids a lab once a week as well as demonstrations where appropriate. The only problem is that he is from the behaviourist school and sets the kids homework every night. If they don't do it they have an automatic lunch time detention. This applies to any student not matter what grade they are in. My view is that if a kid is in grade 11 or 12 he or she should not be made to do homework because it is their choice to be at school.

My question is this: When I takeover the class, should I maintain the same homework regime as my supervisor, in spite of the fact that it goes against my personal theory of teaching? Comments please.

Regards Kevin

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In this posting, Kevin is trying to reconcile a conflict he feels about whether to replicate his supervising teacher’s practices when he becomes an intern or develop his own practices more in line with his own professional beliefs: ‘When I take over the class, should I maintain the same homework regime as my supervisor, in spite of the fact that it goes against my personal theory of teaching?’ He asks his colleagues for help.
In the posting Kevin considers a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’. This is one who:

- is reflective and aware of his own professional beliefs, ‘it goes against my personal theory of teaching’;
- draws on relevant education language – ‘personal theory of teaching’, ‘the behaviourist school’;
- is friendly and courteous to his peers and who seeks out his peers for their opinions ‘Dear fellow physics pedagogues’, ‘Comments please’;
- is seen to be enjoying practicum and getting on well with the supervisor ‘having a great time at the school’, ‘My supervisor is great’.

Another preservice teacher, Craig, responds to Kevin.

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Article No. 22: [Branch from no. 10]
posted by Craig on Tue, Feb. 15, 2000, 15:33
Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer
Do as you are told Kevin Doll

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Article No. 25: [Branch from no. 10]
posted by Craig on Tue, Feb. 15, 2000, 16:41
Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer
On a more serious note Kevin Doll homework is set to reinforce the day’s lesson and aids the learning process. The topic should be reviewed the night after the lesson and then revisited a week later to obtain the maximum benefit for learning.

That’s what the remedial teacher at … State High told me. So there.

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In the first instance Craig uses humour to remind Kevin that he’s ‘just’ a preservice teacher and therefore should do what he’s told. However, a short time later he posts another message with a brief argument as to why Kevin should continue the supervising teacher’s practice citing one of the teachers in his practicum school as reference. Craig draws on a
Article No. 47: [Branch from no. 25] 
posted by Kevin on Wed, Feb. 16, 2000, 18:37

Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer

Dear Craggy Craig,

While I understand the behaviourist approach of modifying student behaviour through the use of homework, I would argue that from a cognitive perspective the homework does little to develop higher order cognitive skills like complex reasoning. From what I have seen of the Science discipline, it appears to be very much focused on developing the students' ability to regurgitate information, rather than developing students understanding. The reason could be found in the fact that when most of the current science teachers studied to be a teacher, the educational theorists were based in the behaviourist school of thought.

Moreover, students can copy the homework that others do and consequently their academic behaviour is not modified by being forced to do homework every night. I would argue that the focus should not be on forcing students to do homework. It should be on teaching concepts and helping students understand these scientific concepts. I realise that for older teachers this requires more effort in lesson preparation than telling the students to do certain exercises from a text book. However, I would argue that
the effort is worth it.

Regards Kevin

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Kevin draws on his knowledge of theories and approaches in the on-campus component of his teacher preparation program to argue why he doesn’t agree with the supervising teacher’s practices. He demonstrates a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’, one who is able to justify his professional practice. He implies that because he is a ‘new’ teacher, he has some good ideas which are very valid but which might not be accepted by ‘older teachers’ because they would need to do more planning and vary their teaching approach. He seems to be making the assumption that all teachers who have been teaching for a while, rely on direct teaching from a textbook.

Craig continues the discussion, drawing on a ‘practising secondary teacher version of the good intern’ – good teaching strategies include practice (‘Practice makes perfect’) and checking for understanding.

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Article No. 64: [Branch from no. 47]
posted by Craig on Thu, Feb. 17, 2000, 15:45
Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer

I don’t think it is behaviour management, homework is giving students practice at doing problems including complex reasoning problems. Practice makes perfect. It is also a way of checking if students understand what you have been telling them.

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Gary then joins the discussion drawing on a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’, one who can negotiate with his/her supervising teacher in a professional way - ‘go and talk to your supervising teacher and explain’, ‘There may be a compromise’.

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Article No. 65: [Branch from no. 47]
posted by Gary on Thu, Feb. 17, 2000, 15:55
Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer

Dearest Kevin,
My advice would be to go and talk to your supervising teacher and explain to him/her just what you have said here. If your supervisor is great as you say and as you seem to be getting along with them well then I think you need to have a chat!! There may be a compromise in there somewhere.

Gary

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Finally, Ann joins the discussion providing advice that aligns with a ‘practicing secondary teacher version of the good intern’. She argues that students make choices and therefore must be aware of the responsibilities associated with these choices - they must be aware of the consequences of their actions.

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Article No. 112: [Branch from no. 10]
posted by Ann on Mon, Feb. 21, 2000, 07:06
Subject: re: On a wing and a prayer

Kevin,

For what it is worth, I believe that giving senior students detention for not doing their homework is nonsense because as you say they choose to be at school. One of the responsibilities that goes with that choice is to attempt all homework assignments set. I would not simply hand out detentions in the senior school but I would have a chat to the student to ask them what the problem is and remind them of the responsibilities in the senior school. Just a thought.

Miss Anny

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Kevin does not reply to this message on the bulletin board.

This thread shows how the interns are negotiating competing versions of ‘the good intern’. A ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ seems to be one who:

1. reflects on professional practice;
2. is aware of own personal beliefs and how these inform professional practice;
3. uses relevant educational language to support argument;
4. justifies own professional practice;
5. seeks out collegial professional discussion and the opinions of peers;
6. negotiates in a professional way with teacher colleagues.

A ‘practising secondary teacher version of the good intern’ seems to be one who:

1. highlights/names effective teaching strategies (eg reinforcement and review, practice and checking for understanding, linking consequences to actions);
2. gives practical suggestions, ‘this is what you should do’, and justifies the suggestions by referring to ‘what’s worked for me’, ‘what my supervising teacher has told me’.

This thread presents the conflicting discourses of ‘prac’ and ‘uni’ as demonstrated in the postings and highlights them. On a different level altogether the postings in this thread work virtually as a ‘lesson on the lived prac experiences of preservice teachers’. They provide a demonstration of the conflicting discourses of ‘prac’ and ‘uni’ to their audience of teacher educators. This work constructs the prac/uni divide in addition to explaining it. Without ICT, preservice teachers have access to a teacher educator audience of usually one person - their university supervisor - to present and construct this divide. With ICT and the electronic discussion groups, preservice teachers have access to a relatively large forum to present and construct the divide.

2. Analysis of Thread: ‘Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school’

Kevin also begins the second thread analysed in this paper. This time he posted to the Business teaching subject area forum, and again his message is related to a dilemma for him. This dilemma is associated with the fact that even though he admires his supervisor’s teaching style and it is one he hopes to ultimately develop, he is feeling restricted/untrusted by her suggestion that she team teach with him. He seems to be seeing this as a threat and barrier to him teaching the class ‘his way’. He feels that she must not trust him, that she does not consider him competent. He searches for reasons why he thinks she wants to do this, and invites comment from his colleagues.

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Article No. 11: posted by Kevin on Mon, Feb. 14, 2000, 18:41

Subject: Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school

Dear fellow business pedagogues,

I am having a great time at Yellowbank. For some reason, I am only teaching Year 12 Economics. The other classes are Year 11 Maths A and Year 11 Physics. However, this could
change depending on my physics supervisor.

My Economics supervisor is fantastic and has the teaching style that I love and wish to develop. She has indicated that she wants to run the class as a team teaching method. I don't feel too comfortable with this method because it means that I can't teach the class my way. My feeling is that my supervisor loves the subject and the students and does not wish to let go. Does anyone else have any ideas why my supervisor wants to team teach, beside the fact that she might think I am brain dead.

Regards Kevin

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Like the first thread, Kevin is presenting as ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’. He is wanting to develop own personal teaching style – ‘I don't feel too comfortable with this method because it means that I can't teach the class my way.’ Leanne uses humour to help lighten the discussion.

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Article No. 17: [Branch from no. 11]
posted by Leanne on Tue, Feb. 15, 2000, 08:27
Subject: re: Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school

Can understand the brain dead theory, as I myself (as having had work in groups with you) have had the same thought!!!!HA!HA! I think maybe your teacher just doesn't want to let go of having contact with the class. I have found with my BOM supervisor that she was, during my class, going around and checking on students work etc, which I believe to be my job as the teacher. At first I found it a bit annoying as it made me feel like she may have been
thinking I was 'braindead' and didn't think I was doing my
job to well. But it turns out, she explained to me that she
was just trying to have some contact with the students, let
them see her face and talk with her as once I leave she
would be teaching them and they needed to have some
familiarity with her. So possible the teacher is just
trying to keep the contact while it is a supervision as you
will have the class for a full 6 weeks come internship.
Just a thought. Hope life is treating you kind.
Leanne

Leanne empathises with Kevin by saying she was in a similar situation and that at first she
felt the same way. She tries to give the supervisor's perspective on the situation which might help him understand why she wants to team teach and keep in eye on the class. She draws a 'practising teacher version of the good intern', highlighting the importance of the classroom teacher being ultimately responsible for the students in the class - 'she explained to me that she was just trying to have some contact with the students, let them see her face and talk with her as once I leave she would be teaching them and they needed to have some familiarity with her'. In this statement, there is an implicit reminder that they are only interns after all and the class will return to the teacher when they leave.

Article No. 19: [Branch from no. 17]
posted by Kevin on Tue, Feb. 15, 2000, 13:44
Subject: re: Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school
Dear Princess Leanne,

Thankyou for your comment. After 'critical reflection'
(power-word)I think you are right. The teacher wants to
maintain contact with the class. Of course, this is quite
understandable. However, it does mean that one sometimes
feels like a 'shag on a rock'.
Regards Kevin

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Kevin agrees with her assessment of the situation and this seems to be a resolution for him, or at least that we can determine from the data. He doesn’t comment again about his dilemma and he seems to accept that this is the way it has to be.

Kristen enters the discussion not to answer Kevin’s query but to present her own dilemma and ask for suggestions in dealing with it.

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Article No. 20: [Branch from no. 19]
posted by Kristen on Tue, Feb. 15, 2000, 14:57
Subject: re: Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school

Hello Kevin, Check your email - message there for you. This time around I don't have your problem of the supervising teacher checking on work or interfering in my classes. I have two and get on really well with both of them. The hardest thing I have found is for them to do the evaluation forms. I don't think I have stressed enough that I need their evaluations so that I may develop as a pedagogue. Any suggestions on how to get them to do these? I keep asking and they just tell me I'm doing fine and that they are very happy with my teaching. Which is encouraging but doesn't really tell me where I need to improve to be the best teacher that I can be. Any suggestions?

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Kristen is concerned with how to get the supervisors to complete evaluation forms providing feedback on her teaching. This is a complaint and request for advice. She’s implying that ‘I need feedback to improve and to be the best teacher I can’. However it’s interesting that early in the message she refers to supervising teachers checking on the intern’s work as ‘interfering’. Obviously there is a ‘correct way’ to provide feedback and this is by completing the university issued teaching feedback forms, which uses the same headings/criteria included in the final evaluation form used at the end of the experience to judge teaching
performance as competent or incompetent. This posting shows a dilemma between a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ (learning to teach is ongoing, always aim to improve and be a better teacher) and a ‘practicing secondary teacher version of the good intern’ (if everything is working just keep doing whatever it is that you’re doing - no need to work on your teaching unless there’s a problem).... Or is this just a teacher educator’s reading of it??

Kevin replies suggesting a proactive strategy for Kristen which reflects a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ involving taking control of one’s own professional learning and the supervision process.

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Article No. 34: [Branch from no. 20]
posted by Kevin on Wed, Feb. 16, 2000, 14:37
Subject: re: Feeling bright at Yellowbank high school

Dear Kristen,

I suggest that instead of giving your supervisors the evaluation forms, you verbally question them at the end of each lesson and use the criteria on the forms to develop your questions. For example, concerning the criteria about the use of electronic resources you could verbally develop a question along the lines of: So coach, what did you think of my use of the overhead projector? Could everyone see the overheads I had prepared for the lesson?

...

If they are still reluctant, then I suggest you talk to the School Internship Liaison person and your UQ advisor.

Regards Kevin

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This thread also shows how the interns are negotiating competing versions of ‘the good intern’. From the postings in this thread, a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ seems to be one who:
1. Aims to develop own personal teaching style
2. Seeks feedback in order to improve own professional practice
3. Takes some control of own professional learning and the supervision process

A 'practising secondary teacher version of the good intern' is one who:

1. Needs to know the students well in order to teach them
2. Assumes control of the class and takes responsibility for all that happens in the classroom.

3. Analysis of Thread: ‘Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful’

In this thread preservice teachers again present examples that demonstrate the conflicting and competing discourses of ‘uni’ and ‘prac’ as evident in the two versions of ‘the good intern’ presented in the postings.

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Article No. 106: posted by Kevin on Sun, Feb. 20, 2000, 21:11

Subject: Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful.

Dear Fellow Pedagogues,

I noticed on the bulletin board that some of you are having trouble with some junior classes. I came across something on an American Teachers bulletin board that may be helpful in managing such classes.

The technique is called the Team Discipline System and was developed by a bloke called Jim Farley who has been teaching junior school in the USA for about 20 years or so.

The technique involves taking the focus off the teacher in terms of behaviour management. Briefly, what happens is that the teacher sets up two teams of students and gives them names (eg. the door team and the window team). When you set up the teams you have to make sure that both have an even spread of behaviour characteristics (eg. you can't
have all the badly behaved students in one group).

The next step is to offer rewards at the end of each day or week for the team with the best behaviour. This means the students in each team monitor one another’s behaviour and you become the neutral referee.

If you are interested in finding out more about the system the web address is: http://www.teamdiscipline.com This approach may be of more practical use than the stupid ‘warm and fuzzy’ educational psychology they have been ramming down our throats in this course.

However, if the discipline system does not work ‘slap them down’ with a couple of lunch-time and afternoon detentions.

Regards Kevin

Kevin posts information on the ‘Team Discipline System’ adding the detail that the creator was ‘Jim Farley who has been teaching junior school in the USA for about 20 years or so’, an experienced practicing secondary teacher. It is also a ‘practical’ approach (‘practicing secondary teacher version of good intern’), an approach he then contrasts with what has been learned at university (a ‘teacher educator version of good intern’) – ‘the warm and fuzzy educational psychology’ approaches to behaviour management. This posting highlights the conflicting and competing discourses of ‘uni’ and ‘prac’.

Article No. 111: [Branch from no. 106]

posted by Aidan on Mon, Feb. 21, 2000, 04:00

Subject: re: Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful.

Dear Kevin, You found there an interesting approach to behavior management in junior class. I am sure it might work as well. Sometimes finding the purpose of the behavior, or the social situation of the perpetrator help setting your
strategy to how to avoid it next time. My personal approach to behavior management is to recall personal experiences from school days about why and what for I behaved that way. It helped me so far even at [school] and [school] where I made entire class to "be with me" during lesson. Thank you for the tricks anyway.

The initial section of Aidan’s reply, ‘Sometimes finding the purpose of the behaviour, or the social situation of the perpetrator to help setting your strategy and avoid it next time’, sounds very much like one of those ‘warm and fuzzy educational psychology approaches to behaviour management’ - a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’. Then Aidan continues by suggesting a technique he uses that involves recalling school experiences and analysing his own responses to behaviour management strategies. Whilst initially this suggestion appears to be in opposition to a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ – that is, ‘to recall personal experiences from school days’ initially looks like ‘I'll do what I saw done when I was at school’ - it isn’t. It is a version of ‘reflective teacher’, recalling school experiences and analysing our responses to behaviour management techniques. However this is not necessarily a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ though, since this would often involve using the results of academic research in the reflection not personal experience alone. ‘Thank you for the tricks anyway’ can be seen perhaps as being polite, but certainly not an acceptance of the ‘practicing secondary teacher’s version of the good intern’ as collecting numerous techniques.
all very well in theory but if I were to follow every
miracle cure for student behaviour, I would never do any
teaching. In just a few more short weeks, this course will
be over. Time to BE the teacher and work out what your
needs are, how to satisfy them and then get the spots to
follow your requirements. By all means seek advice but don’t
expect others' successes to perfectly suit your needs.
Trial and error, not books will get you through.

In this posting Bob contrasts 'practicing secondary teacher version of the good intern' and 'teacher educator version of the good intern'. Initially he highlights the importance of considering the context when dealing with behaviour management issues, of these having to be solved in situ - 'The teacher is the one on the spot and the one that knows how disruptive the behaviour is, why it must be stopped and the time frame for stopping it'. This ‘practical’ suggestion highlights the importance of ‘on the job decision making’. He contrasts this with a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ and the associated reference to theory - ‘The Democratic classroom is all very well in theory’. He then demonstrates a university-practicum divide again with ‘Trial and error, not books will get you through’. This posting presents competing discourses - the practical of trial and error versus the theory of books.

Article No. 150: [Branch from no. 136]

posted by Kevin on Wed, Feb. 23, 2000, 16:56

Subject: re: Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful.

Dear Bob,

The TEAM system is based on 20 years of trial and error experience of the teacher who developed the system. I would have thought that this would have been enough experience and time to develop a workable system

Kevin replies that the proposal he posted was consistent with a 'practicing secondary teacher version'; it was based on trial and error experience of a teacher (it's practical not theory).
Article No. 166: [Branch from no. 136]
posted by Luke on Fri, Feb. 25, 2000, 09:41
Subject: re: Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful.

Well said Bob, I learned something during the course but it is in the classroom that I am becoming a teacher, and there is no theoretical study that can supply that. Ciao Luke

Luke seems to be saying that the teacher educator version is useful, but requires the practicing secondary teacher version too.

Article No. 588: [Branch from no. 136]
posted by Shaun on Thu, Mar. 30, 2000, 12:33
Subject: re: Are you having trouble with feral junior classes? This posting may be helpful.

I must admit that leaving the behaviour control to the young adults is a bit more than challenging. I have one good class of grade 8 's and one acceptable class of year 11s. My Year 9 maths however are quite challenging. Essay writing, moving them so they are not sitting next to their mates and picking up papers have not worked completely on days after lunch towards the end of the week. It now seems that the detention stamp used only once this term is about to become a more frequent use(having skyrocketed in general school use in the last few weeks).

My mentor assures me that he has some more strategies and I look forward to his suggestions.
I also will tell the story of how we decided to leave

behaviour management of the year 11’s and allowed them to

make their own rules. That seems like a great idea until

they decided that rioting was OK and should not evoke any

disciplinary measures. They then proceeded to defend their

argument...... That was soon given short shift and out

went the democratic classroom.

Shaun

Shaun relates a story of the failing of the teacher educator version over the practicing secondary teacher version.

This thread shows how the interns are negotiating competing versions of ‘the good intern’. For the preservice teachers, a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’ seems to be one who:

1. draws on relevant theory (eg educational psychology) to inform the behaviour management strategies they use
2. draws on ‘democratic’ classroom management procedures

A ‘practising secondary teacher version of the good intern’ seems to be one who:

1. draws on behaviour management strategies that have been tested and proven effective in the classroom through trial and error by classroom practitioners
2. uses behaviour management strategies that are relevant for the specific context; that ensure the teacher is ‘in control’.

Discussion

In this paper we have examined the bulletin board postings of a group of secondary preservice teachers while they were completing a practicum/internship towards the end of their teacher preparation program. The data show the preservice teachers negotiating two versions of ‘the good intern’ - a ‘teacher educator version’ and a ‘practising secondary teacher version’. Two conflicting and competing discourses are evident, one associated with ‘prac’ and linked to classroom teaching practice, and the other associated with ‘uni’ and linked to theory and reflective teaching. The online environment created a virtual learning space which bridged the physical space of university and that of school, and made the negotiation of these competing versions visible to all in the virtual learning space (preservice teachers and teacher educators). In traditional university supervision approaches involving visits to the practicum school, the negotiation preservice teachers engage in is largely invisible to the teacher educator. The ‘meeting’ of these two versions of ‘the good intern’ are only evident to the university-based teacher educator during to the short and often irregular school visits. In addition, it is probable that even during those short visits, any conflict associated with negotiating competing versions of the good intern is unlikely to
surface because at that time they only need to present a ‘teacher educator version of the good intern’. Once the university visit is over, the influence is largely ‘practicing teacher version’ since surviving and passing the practicum experience is a major aim for many preservice teachers.

The public nature of the bulletin board has emphasised preservice teachers’ negotiation and perhaps even encouraged it by bringing conflicting issues into the public sphere. As we have indicated, it is highly likely that the preservice teachers would discuss the ‘appropriate’ version in the relevant context i.e. the practicing teacher version in the ‘prac’ situation and the teacher educator version in on-campus discussions and during visits by university personnel to the practicum school. Thus any ongoing dilemmas associated with negotiating the two versions might be less prevalent and would certainly be less obvious to the teacher educators. With the use of ICT, teacher educators are privy to this ongoing negotiation. It provides a window into how the preservice teachers are learning to teach.

There is also indication in the data of an urgency to meet the demands of the physical space (i.e. the practicum classroom and school) prior to meeting those of the virtual space (with its teacher educator audience). Relative proximity seems to decide precedence. Preservice teachers seem to need to satisfy their face-to-face experienced existence first. We argue then that if virtual professional learning communities are used for asking preservice teachers to present a version of ‘the good intern’ based on being critically reflective, it would often be preceded by the school-based, practicing teacher version of ‘the good intern’. This has implications for the ways in which teacher educators enter the virtual space, and how they respond to postings and guide the preservice teachers’ professional learning.

This analysis highlights the largely invisible and difficult work that preservice teachers engage in during their practicum experiences. It emphasises the prac/uni divergences and exposes preservice teachers’ management/negotiation. Now that we can see the negotiation, we can draw on the knowledge to better facilitate learning to teach. University based personnel acting as supervisors/mentors in the practicum/internships need an awareness of these processes and of how to help the preservice teachers negotiate their experiences and dilemmas. We need to be able to capitalize on the dilemmas associated with the preservice teachers’ life worlds of learning to teach that we can now be part of in a very obvious and public way. We must acknowledge also that other preservice teachers will play a significant role in facilitating this negotiation, and this has implications for their roles in the virtual learning community.

It may be that to achieve program aims, teacher educators should work more closely with experienced teachers. The analysis in this paper has highlighted the often contradictory messages that preservice teachers take from their teacher preparation, and the strong influence of the ‘practical’. By working with experienced teachers who will be supervisors and mentors in the practicum program, the dilemmas that the preservice teachers experience might be less pronounced. If experienced mentor teachers demand a potentially different focus, one more closely aligned with teacher educators’ version of ‘the good intern’, the contradictions and dilemmas of the preservice teachers’ negotiation as evident in this data, might be more easily traversed.

References