

Beginning teacher internships, telementoring and ICT – newfangled or new ways?

Journeys of discovery.

Pamela. N. Matters

Abstract : *In 2001, James Cook University commenced its pre-service teacher internship program. This paper describes current research which shows that ICT, telementoring and uninterrupted periods of teaching in a preferred area of interest heightens motivation and expertise of beginning teacher interns as they enter the profession. It includes examination of the effects of new pedagogies, diverse ways of thinking, unusual classroom arrangements, including those with no walls, use of innovative ICT programs and mentor support within the University. Issues of distance, rurality, isolation, low socio economic, indigenous and multi-cultural environments which impinge on new teacher effectiveness are contextualised.*

Change, turbulence and severe economic pruning within diverse organisations has forced employers and employees to seek cost effective, speedy and successful ways to marry theory with relevant professional experiences. Internships continue to increase in popularity as a proven method of exposing best workplace practices to neophytes, innovative methods to mid-career practitioners and providing opportunities for those who have achieved eminence within a profession and/or career to share their knowledge and expertise with those who have less experience within the same domain. Education's relentless pursuit of reform, restructure and renewal of its institutional infrastructures obviates Beare's (2001 : 191) claim that the " the search for more effective models of schooling in the flux and uncertainty of worldwide change forces us to admit that we are attracted to the turbulence of change, to the beauty and excitement of the transience of new growth, while at the same time profoundly respecting and being committed to what is wise and universal, profound and eternal". His explication of the tensions that exist between the legacies of the past and the challenges of the future is timely.

Beginning teachers (pre-service and first year post-graduate) are keen to commence work in schools, to make a positive difference to the students they teach, irrespective of the level of schooling K-12 where they are required to operate. Acknowledging that every job has a break-in period where one learns the ropes and matches theory to practice, and remaining cognisant of the fact that "...adjustment and adaptation are the watchwords of life in the new workplace" (Ryan & Cooper, 2000 : 58), James Cook University, School Of Education, introduced an internship program in 2001 (JCUEIP), designed to cater to the needs of neophyte teachers in the diverse educational workplaces of the twenty first century. In particular, its format was devised to suit the requirements of teachers who will begin and pursue their careers in the rural, remote and isolated settings of Far North Queensland endorsing Wideen et al's (1998 :144) assertion "Programs of pre-service teacher education, including campus and field experiences, can provide the ideal setting in which individuals learn to teach. It is the one time when they concentrate on examining their own beliefs about teaching and acquire skills and knowledge to be competent beginning teachers...[they create] a wedge of innovative practice..." within progressive traditional teacher education programs. Similar to internship programs conducted in university Schools Of Education throughout the world, the JCUEIP included clearly defined stages of preparation, planning, teaching and evaluation. Its differences illuminated possible pathways to the future.

JCU interns self nominated and were interviewed, schools offered specific projects detailing areas of special interest in teaching such as innovative curricula, middle years of schooling and special education (see Table 1). School projects and interns were matched and interns

were required to teach continuously in each setting for one month in collaboration with a designated mentor teacher, a colleague. Twenty four hour access to the intern program coordinator and each other was maintained by using webboard. The overarching focus of each internship was directed towards the maturing development of self identity of each participant intern. They were required to introspect their own lives and preconceptions, develop enhanced teaching and managing strategies and recognise the manner in which previous experiences had affected current behaviours, perceptions and notions of self (Feiman-Nemser, 1986; Quicke,1988; Moore & Atkinson, 1998) supporting Edwards & Collison's, (1996 : 51) contention that beginning teachers must move "from talking about teaching to learning how to see classrooms...to respond to what one sees within them are essential elements of learning as pre-service teachers move towards expert participation in the community of practice".

Distinctive phases - placement, initiation seminar, teaching, termination and evaluation- were established to ensure that tracking, monitoring and documentation of each internship was maintained with discretion and rigor (Matters, 2001). After placement, interns commenced their 'cognitive apprenticeships'(Burn,1997) where thinking skills have parity of importance with physical capacities to complete workplace tasks. They contacted their mentor teacher colleagues and visited their school locations in order to note their contexts, cultures, students and communities. These initial meetings provided opportunities for interns to network with other colleagues and to observe informal and formal organizational structures in action. Elements given specific attention included school values and philosophies, rules, roles, communication strategies, decision making and evaluation processes and resources available to support teaching and learning.

During the internship seminar held at JCU, interns and mentor teachers interacted together in professional development activities for the first time. Interns prepared learning agreements which detailed the pedagogical bases which underpinned their internships, their motivations for engaging in the school based projects as offered, their perceptions concerning the students they would teach and the school contexts in which they would engage and the identification of the multiple roles that they would have to fulfill. Kiser's (2000) Integrative Processing Model provided the framework for focusing thinking and further actions in the formal school settings through emphasizing the importance of gathering objective data from concrete experiences; insightful reflections; identification of relevant pedagogical theories and knowledge; examining dissonance concerning preconceptions; closely supervised and apt articulation of learning and the development of succinct and useful forward planning. In addition, interns prepared their

first Professional Learning Plan which detailed their personal and professional learning goals including knowledge, skills, personal growth, career and professional development to be attained in the short term (one month); mid term (one year) and long term (five years). Interns maintained reflective journals (hard copy or electronically on laptops) to ensure that all elements were recorded succinctly and insightfully. While these were grouped in clusters delineating actions, thoughts and feelings, they did not dismiss seemingly trivial or unrelated issues which were deemed to be of personal importance.

Positive collegial relationships began to develop between mentor teachers and interns from the outset. The rapid formations of these reciprocal friendships were attributed to two factors : 1) mentor teachers were not supervisors of interns, nor were they required to assess or report on their work in any formal manner and 2) interns had completed their final assessable practica prior to commencing their internships and were under no overt pressure to perform perfectly (as is often the case when being closely supervised for assessment and teacher rating purposes) rather than teach. "The mentor teachers were willing to collaborate in the evaluation of their own work and that of their colleagues... They were professional

mentors and colleagues who developed trust and sharing, where they reflected jointly on evidence, discussed situations, developed greater understandings of issues and came to some agreement [with their intern colleagues] on how to proceed" (Maxwell, Laird, Grundy and Warhurst, 1994 : 198).

Mentor teacher roles focused on providing support and reassurance to their intern partners, facilitating different teaching opportunities for them, collaboratively planning, teaching, debriefing and determining future target setting with interns (Loughran et al, 2001) and setting up opportunities for them to work with other teachers in the school. Their key tasks related to induction, coordination, integration, support, monitoring and reciprocal evaluation of a colleague's entry in the profession, different to the induction tutor's role which is based on the deficit model of rigid supervision and repetition of narrowly formulated, revisionary tasks.

Intern roles focused heavily on the cycle of prior theoretical knowledge, continuous teaching practice, insightful reflections, monitoring of student learning outcomes, recognition of new knowledge, the implementation of appropriate change and the re-commencement of the teaching cycle. Their key tasks related to the recognition of diversity within their own culture and the acknowledgement of difference and its effects on formal education in diverse cultures. Aspects of culture introspected concerning the students they were required to teach included socio-economic status, ethnic or multi-ethnic family group formations, minority group cluster arrangements, varied religious and /or personal belief systems, influence of gender, age group and effects of living in inner urban, remote, isolated or rural parts of the Cairns, Cape and Gulf region of Far North Queensland. By combining new with previously internalised understandings of the existing social, physical and epistemological worlds in education, they were laying the foundations for their own cultural transformation and further enhancement of personal learning (Gonzalez, 2001). Interns' major task, however, required them to investigate their own professional identities. This process caused them to examine their inner strengths and weaknesses in concert with those they were willing to share with the external world of colleagues. They had to evaluate their own positions within existing social structures and introspect the "wants and needs that our culture enjoins them to [paradoxically] desire and resist" (Bartlett et al, 1996 : 178). Issues of ethical competence, personal integrity and morality assumed heightened importance as the managing of self became more explicit and expert. Increased self awareness and self understanding led to enhanced self control and the adoption of appropriate, efficacious, stress management techniques.

Acknowledging that an enormous amount of early career teachers leave the profession within the first five years despite the introduction of devices designed to facilitate easy entry, retention and further development of their teaching expertise (Jenlink, Kinnucan-Welsch & Odell, 1996), it was feared that time and money spent on internships prior to this stage may be perceived to have been wasted and/or misspent (Ryan & Cooper, 2000). Fitting an internship period into a tightly packed university timetable proved difficult because the time available (four weeks) was too short to achieve substantive change and encroached on time that would have been devoted to lecture revision. Some lecturers felt that their influence and close relationships with pre-

service interns were diminished because the latter were away from the university at this critical period of their pre-teaching preparation. Impediments to the initiation and implementation of an internship scheme were reviewed and decisions concerning the remaining year of the pilot phase of the JCUEIP were documented . They included

- decisions to conduct internships during November (four weeks) with a view to extending the internships to six or ten weeks in 2003;

- announcement of interns to take place after completion of final practica and ratings so that schools and others would not have unrealistic expectations of pre-service teacher abilities during the assessable and highly competitive final prac;
- types of teaching and learning outcomes expected during school based projects to be made explicit and remain within the parameters of the original proposal;
- all staff in all regional schools to be briefed on purposes, intentions, expectations and desired outcomes of internships;
- varied technologies should be available/made available for intern use such as laptops, video cameras and editing equipment, CD's and CD burners and CUCME computer mounted cameras.

Interns' interest in electronic communication technologies as useful tools to support effective teaching and learning was unmistakable. Laptops with internet access and the usual range of Microsoft Office options were perceived as basis equipment needed to support the professional work of teachers. By using school and/or university site licences, most interns had access to various pieces of software which extended and enhanced their classroom projects in various ways. Unexpectedly, it was the influence of ICT upon the increased effective communication between teachers which provoked comment. Unnecessary phone calls out of school hours were cut to a minimum. Webboard continued to provide an effective, instant form of communication for exchange of ideas, questions, sharing of problems without intruding upon the personal lives of participants.

Schools, interns, classroom projects, teacher research and ICT

Intern	School and Project	Technologies used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tina Allgood Graduate Bachelor of Education (Primary)	Ocean Park College K-12 Special Education Unit <i>Students with disabilities with highly specialised needs;</i> <i>Inclusion programs – assisting students with disabilities in mainstream classes;</i> <i>Social skills training for students with autism.</i>	Mobile Phone Email Laptop Computer Individualised software packages Webboard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna Smith Graduate Bachelor	Ocean Park College K-12– Middle School <i>Developing the programs of</i>	Mobile Phone Email

<p>of Education (Primary)</p>	<p><i>middle schooling-</i> <i>Investigating teacher relationships</i> <i>with students during early and mid-adolescence;Integrating KLA's into meaningful, coherent, relevant worthwhile units of learning.</i> <i>Use of learning technologies in curricula</i></p>	<p>Laptop Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane March <p>Graduate Bachelor of Education (Primary)</p>	<p>Farout State School <i>Developing literacy across multiage year 4-7 classroom; Incorporating Information Technology into all KLA's</i></p>	<p>Phone Email Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandy Coulter <p>Graduate Bachelor of Education (Primary)</p>	<p>Bestplace State School <i>New basics and rich tasks; Integration of technology across the curriculum;Assessment , reporting and evaluation procedures</i></p>	<p>Phone Email Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celia Jones <p>Undergraduate Bachelor of Education</p>	<p>Smart State School -Trial school NB/RT <i>New Basics (NB) and its effects on innovative programs; Specialised study of NB and</i></p>	<p>Mobile Phone Email Laptop</p>

<p>(Primary)</p>	<p><i>relationship to all KLA's and incorporation of IT across the curricula P-7.</i></p>	<p>Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donna Fairgo <p>Undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Primary)</p>	<p>Smart State School-Trial school NB/RT</p> <p><i>New Basics and Rich Tasks (NBRT) across the curricula including specialised study of on site teacher professional development, specialized study</i></p>	<p>Mobile Phone Email Laptop Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emily Rain <p>Undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)</p>	<p>Cascade State School</p> <p><i>Longitudinal developmental study of Year 1 class, their curricula and specialized focus on their emerging literacy and numeracy skills.</i></p>	<p>Mobile Phone Email Laptop Computer Individualised software packages Webboard</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophie Waterson <p>Graduate Bachelor of Education (Primary)</p>	<p>Reef State School</p> <p><i>Co-planning, implementation, conduct and evaluation of school wide Y1-7 Science Fair</i></p>	<p>Mobile Phone Email Laptop Computer Individualised software packages</p>

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The freedom to live chat or cache replies was much appreciated by very busy interns. Short email messages refining a step in planning, changing a time slot or altering a room allocation were facilitated quickly and succinctly by group e-news in schools. It was clear that where this provision was not available much time was spent waiting for colleagues to answer phone calls or time was wasted walking from school building to building seeking

the appropriate recipient of seemingly trivial messages which had a great impact upon the smooth running of the school if they were not delivered correctly.

Overall, the internships were valued as effective and exciting ways to gain extra insights into a demanding profession. Interns, their mentor teachers and other colleagues, parents and students indicated that they should be essential foundational components of vibrant learning communities and offered to as many competent pre-service teachers as practicable, just prior to their first full year of teaching. Although Eisner (1992 : 611) has bemoaned education's "feckless piecemeal efforts at reform", schools' inability to change quickly to support appropriate amendments in policy and noted that innovative methods designed to improve pre-service teacher education lack stability in schools because experienced teachers are resistant to their adoption and transmit their disapproval to neophytes who then adopt the conservative attitudes of the status quo, like "pouring new wine into old bottles", his emphasis upon the need for educational reform to be intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative and "important for education reform to think big even if one must start small"(ibid, 619) is compelling advice when considered in relation to the introduction and continuation of the JCUEIP.

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