



**SERVICE LEARNING:
A new pedagogy for Australian teacher education?**

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a complex practice that is at once a personal, technical, social, cultural, economic and political endeavour, and which engages the teacher in interactions and relationships that extend well beyond the classroom. Teaching practice cannot be divorced from the contexts of family and community as well as politics and society. This paper reviews recent trends and perspectives in relation to teaching education and practice. A pilot course in teacher education commencing in 2003 at the University of Newcastle is presented to demonstrate an approach to teacher education that seeks to enhance the capacity of graduating teachers to appreciate the impact of personal biography, context and experience on teaching practice and to engage positively with families and communities.

SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND COMPETENCIES

During the 1990s in Australia, attempts were made, at both State and Federal levels, to define teachers' work as a series of competencies and teachers' working knowledge as a series of desirable (and definable) qualities that are acquired through the process of teacher education to provide a standard of entry to the profession.

Teacher competencies have developed as an outcome of concerns with productivity, quality control and efficiency that have been the hallmarks of economic rationalism. Their phrasing owes much to the corporate language of market reform with its emphasis on standards, measurement of outcomes and public accountability. Links between student learning outcomes, the quality of teacher education and the quality of teaching has been clearly articulated (MACTEQT, 1994:fwd).

The increasing perception of schooling as a public enterprise and of the teacher as the "frontline operator" of a "customer service-oriented institution" (Scott, 1990:67) has meant that the practice of the teacher is necessarily extended beyond the classroom and this extended work base is also identified in competency frameworks. *The Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers* outlines expectations of "interaction with families and the community" (MACTEQT, 1994:3-6), the *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching* includes "communicating, interacting and working with others" (NPQTL, 1996:23) as an area of competence and the *National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education* includes expectations of graduate attributes in the areas of: students and their communities; working with others; and working in schools and systems (ACDE, 1998). Included within these attributes are expectations that the beginning teacher will have "an understanding of the roles of parents in schooling ... of models of partnership with parents ... of the structures of parent participation and ... developed an ability to work with parents (ACDE, 1998:17).

Expectations of school community interactions and parent teacher partnerships, arise from three distinct rationales: a "socio-political rationale" (Beagley, 1997:4) based on the perception of education as a social construct where school outcomes related to the rights and responsibilities inherent in a democratic society's institutions would be achieved by greater parent participation in schools; a "pragmatic rationale" (Beagley, 1997:5) focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of school operation and arguing that involving parents in schools would enable those schools to deliver their services more smoothly, at less cost and with a more direct focus on declared aims; and an "educational rationale" (Beagley, 1997:4)

which maintains that the capacity for academic success of children is increased by the active participation of their parents in their schooling.

The educational rationale derives from a well-established body of research that developed from the publication of the Plowden Report (1967) in Britain, Coleman's *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) in the United States and the Karmel Report (1973) in Australia. These reports utilised research that indicated a causative link between the academic success of students and the situation, interest and contribution of parents at home to the activities of schooling. Further research has been based on the premise that a parent is a child's first and most influential teacher who establishes a framework for the child's learning that includes intellectual, moral, social and behavioural contexts (Wolfendale, 1992).

Specifically, the contributions of parent interaction to positive educational outcomes for their children have been shown to result in: higher academic achievement (Henderson and Berla, 1995; Berger, 1991; Greenwood and Hickman, 1991; Carrick, 1989; Epstein, 1989; Comer, 1988; Henderson, 1988; Levin, 1987; Plowden, 1967); an improvement of self-esteem, behaviour and motivation of students (Henderson and Berla, 1995; Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee 1989; Cochran, 1987; Becher, 1986); increased student attendance (Berger, 1991; Greenwood and Hickman, 1991; Henderson, 1988); positive attitudes towards school by both parents and students (Henderson, Marburger and Ooms 1986); and, improved teacher morale and parent satisfaction with teachers (Henderson and Berla, 1995; Rich, 1988). The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement at school is not income, ethnicity, or parents' educational background, but the extent to which the student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning; communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (National PTA, 1997).

In addition to these politically determined, performance based rationales is the long established focus, particularly in primary education on the holistic development of the child. Bronfenbrenner's (1995) bioecological systems model sees the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the environment. In this model, the microsystem represents the activities and interaction patterns within the child's immediate surroundings, usually the family; the mesosystem represents connections between children's immediate settings such as the home and school; the exosystem represents relationships and conditions that indirectly affect children eg parents' social networks; and the macrosystem represents the values, laws, and customs that shape a culture (in Berk, 1997). Brofenbrenner's model highlights the bi-directional relationship between children and their immediate and more distant contexts, and points to the need for teachers to have an understanding of the ways in which children both reflect and contribute to the contexts of which they are a part (Bowes and Hayes, 1999:12). Constructive relationships between school, home and the broader community allow teachers to plan and promote a child's learning through knowledge of biography and environment, and by drawing on resources, capacities and opportunities within particular contexts.

TEACHERS' WORKING KNOWLEDGE

Teachers' work is complex (ACDE, 1998) and rarely predictive. It is a social act where knowledge is "constructed and reconstructed by individuals and groups in particular times, places and cultures" (Cornbleth, 1990:33). A teacher's practice is situated in a unique

physical, social and temporal environment which represents the intersection of multiple, interacting, interdependent contexts - structural context, which represents an "education system's established roles and relationships, including operating procedures, shared beliefs and norms (1990:35); sociocultural context which refers to the "demographic, social, political and economic conditions, traditions and ideologies, and events" which constitute the environment beyond the education system (1990:35); biographical context which represents an individual's "personhood formed in social circumstances that include ... their experiences, their interactions with other individuals, groups, institutions, and environments both physical and human, natural and created (Cornbleth, 1998:1) and historical context, the "past events and experiences that are potential context for subsequent ones" (Cornbleth, 1991:269). Teachers must call upon multiple ways of knowing to enact the roles of their profession within the school and its community.

Habermas (1974) offers a structure for considering the multiple ways of knowing that are necessary for teaching. He argued that knowledge, like teaching, is a social act which is grounded in human needs and their cognitive responses and proposed three different kinds of knowledge constitutive interests: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory which, together, create a unified whole. Each knowledge interest spawns a certain 'way of knowing'. Knowledge of the technical supports the mastery of skill; communicative knowledge is the knowledge of the practical, developed through the hermeneutic interpretations that make possible the orientation of action; and emancipatory knowledge supports a critical 'way of knowing' where analysis and reflection enable empowerment and autonomy.

These knowledge interests inform social organisation through "work, language, and power" (Habermas, 1972:313). Each teaching situation involves all ways of knowing because each moment in the social act of teaching, the teacher's practice, involves work, language and power. Frameworks of competencies become the accredited, technical knowledge (Habermas, 1972) of the profession. However, the 'work knowledge' of teaching must be not only a knowledge of theory and of skills but also a knowledge of social constructions because teaching is always contextualised and, like its knowledge, grounded in human interaction. The technical knowledge of the competencies must be supplemented, and mediated (Schwab, 1969) in context with the communicative and critical knowledge whose source is "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990) to together inform the teacher's work, language and power.

As the work of the teacher is defined beyond the classroom to the community, the supplementation of the technical knowledge of the profession becomes ever more important. The beginning teacher is expected "to develop close partnerships between home and school ... and an ability to work with parents" (ACDE, 1998:17). The notion of 'partnership' assumes equity, mutual respect and acknowledgement of strengths. This, however, is contrary to the long established reliance on the delegation model in public education where schools have adopted the role of the societally delegated custodians of children's education while the family is delegated the responsibility for the physical nurture of the child (Seeley 1989). The ideological foundation for this model remains a perception of the school as an institution of social and cultural reproduction (Fitzclarence & Giroux, 1984) whose role is the transmission of societally endorsed knowledge and culture. Here, school knowledge becomes a form of cultural capital (Giroux, 1984), embracing certain ways of talking, acting, moving, dressing and socialising that are institutionalised by schools (Apple, 1990) determined independently of the school community's social and cultural context. 'School knowledge' also represents one element of the theoretical 'work' knowledge of the profession. In a delegation model, assumptions of teacher expertise derive from this knowledge with an inherent and complementary assumption of parental deficit. In school communities where parents have not experienced success within, or as a consequence of, the educational system teachers more frequently report parents' apparent apathy or animosity towards their children's school.

This is perceived by teachers as a condemnation of their role and some teachers report that parents come to school only to criticise (Briggs and Potter, 1990). School professionals and parents often find themselves in adversarial positions (Budoff and Ornstein, 1981; 1982) and mistrust often exists between parents and teachers (Robinson and Fine, 1994). Parents may actively avoid teachers because they feel that the school only contacts them when there is bad news (Moles, 1993), and single parents may feel uncomfortable in dealing with teachers because of the cultural 'stigma' of "broken homes" (Morris and Taylor, 1998). Menacker, Hurwitz and Weldon (1988) found that in inner-city schools, where parents had negative school experiences themselves, they did not see the school as a 'place of hope' for their children and most teachers in these schools did not believe in parent involvement. As parents, their only contact with their children's teachers may be when problems arise (Davies, 1997). Even in situations purposefully structured to facilitate parent-teacher interaction, acquired school capital can isolate, in particular teachers' use of the language of the profession can be considered as 'insider terminology' that makes parents feel like 'outsiders' (Thompson, 1993).

Soliman (1995) argues that "partnership is a developmental process for both teachers and parents and involves the acquisition of knowledge of what working together entails (and) a commitment to do so" (p.160). Theories of participation may support knowledge of partnership structures but 'knowledge of what working together entails' can only develop as potential partners come to know, not just each other, but the implications of their social act. It is essentially a knowledge of communication, of hermeneutic understanding (Habermas, 1974) between partners. 'A commitment to work together' is an action of critical knowledge (Habermas, 1974) developed from an understanding of the context and the possibilities of partnership within that context. Partnership that involves commitment and is mutually valued cannot be mandated by a structured agenda, nor can it be imposed from an external source or even by one of the potential partners. It must develop from shared goals and beliefs.

The notion that "the school has traditionally provided a focus for community action and interaction" (Molesworth, 1998:11) is based on the locational sense of a neighbourhood in which people become a 'community of interest' based on shared norms and a sense of identity. However, the increasing specialisation of labour, occupational and geographic mobility, and change in family membership that characterise a modern society counter the notion of community based solely on geographic neighbourhood.

In a post-modern society the 'unifying myths of modern society'- a common sense of history, national identity, shared social norms or sense of rationality- are replaced by a fragmented and rapidly changing set of images, promoted by media and the growth of consumerism (Gilbert and Dewar, 1995). The school, as an image of the community, becomes a defining element, although its meaning may be interpreted differently by its members. This creates challenges for children, teachers and parents in coming to know each other's interpretations of schooling.

Sachs (1996) argues that schools are comprised of several intersecting, competing, and even oppositional communities that operate at a number of levels and that are in states of constant movement, continually forming and being reformed in response to internal and external social and political pressures. The resulting "restlessness" (Sachs, 1996:1) of the school community is a function of the strong temporal dimension of context. The interplay and associated tension that emerges between the social, the political (and at times, the physical) elements of the context of a school community, has implications for how the members of the community experience and make sense of the experience of schooling. Henning (1996) believes that the contemporary school views itself largely as a community of its own, extending to families and caregivers of students and to a lesser degree, the geographical community. Here, "the communities of the school are viewed as those

sociocultural groupings which overlap to constitute a community of learners, where dialogue and respect underlie cognitive apprenticeship and where viable knowledge is inextricably bound to community" (p.3).

Greenberg (1989) found that it was the quality of the relationship and the degree of respect parents felt from school personnel, rather than the amount of time parents spent at school, that determined effective partnerships. In establishing shared goals and beliefs with mutual respect where expectations of parent and community participation mean that the teacher may become "an arbiter between two cultures which may see the world in distinctly different ways ... with different sets of understandings" (Delpit, 1991:541) communicative and critical knowledge cannot be undervalued.

THE Challenge

Teacher education programs have traditionally had as their focus, classroom practice, and the technical, communicative and critical knowledges that support this practice. Competency frameworks and the focus in the primary years on the holistic development of the individual, extend the expectations of professional practice beyond the classroom to embrace the context of the community.

Graduates are expected to see their initial teacher education as the first part of a continuum of professional learning (ACDE, 1998:9). Teaching is not a journey taken in isolation. It is social action where children, parents and other teachers are fellow voyagers who bring to each interaction individual biographies, lived experiences and perspectives. The ability to understand these perspectives, to utilise the knowledges of work, language and power to facilitate teaching in its multiple contexts, is a function of the totality of each teacher's lived experience (Van Manen 1990) that has begun well before the teacher education institution.

A challenge for teacher education then becomes one of acknowledging the totality of experience within each student's biographical context, and of valuing and using the knowledges of lived experience to supplement the theory of the competency frameworks in practice. It must also be a commitment, within the teacher education program, to cultivate opportunities to extend those lived experiences, to structure opportunities to create perspectives and to develop communicative and critical knowledges that contextualise the technical knowledges of teaching within and beyond the classroom.

Beginning teachers, as an outcome of their graduate training are expected to "have an understanding of models of partnership with parents in the context of their understandings of teacher professionalism, (and) to know the structures of parent participation in the settings for which they are being prepared" (ACDE, 1998:17). Clearly these are 'understandings' and 'knowledges' that can be accommodated within the framework of teacher education theory because they are independent of context. Models that have been proposed for teacher education programs generally aim to cultivate a sharing of theories and research findings to give preservice teachers a broader base of knowledge on which to build parent involvement strategies (Tichenor, 1997). However, there is also the need to develop a knowledge of the contexts in which participation occurs. As well as "understanding models" and "knowing structures" beginning teachers are expected to act to "develop close partnerships between home and school ... and to have developed an ability to work with parents" (ACDE, 1998:17). To achieve this, De Acosta (1996) argues that teachers' knowledge should extend beyond the classroom to include an awareness of the social and political context of teaching and the economic, social and political demands placed on schools. Community placement within the teacher education program to support the development of practical competence,

the ability to meet and hold dialogue with families, formulate choices, and ask questions in choosing courses of action for family action is one way of extending teachers' knowledge beyond the classroom (De Acosta, 1996).

SERVICE LEARNING AS A PEDAGOGY

There is a need for a pedagogy to extend lived experience to provide a context to inform technical knowledge for teachers' work through an understanding of the biographical context of their learners; to develop communicative knowledge to facilitate language interactions that are mutually respectful and productive; and to cultivate critical knowledge to identify the cultural capital and power for learning of communities.

The service-learning components (Donohue, 1999; Wade, Anderson, Yarbrough, Pickeral, Erickson, and Kromer, 1999) of some teacher education programs, designed to integrate community service activities with academic learning, provide a potential vehicle through which to "gain a window on community perspectives" beyond that of the classroom focused teaching practicum (Donohue, 1999:688). Service learning is a "pedagogical model that connects meaningful community service experiences with academic course learning" (Howard 1993) preparing teachers to "teach populations who are culturally and linguistically diverse and different from them" (Alexandrowicz & Kujawa, 1998). It is a way for preservice teachers to reconsider assumptions about family values and practices in cultures unfamiliar to them (Cochrane-Smith, 1995 in Levesque and Prosser, 1996).

Buchanan, Baldwin and Rudisill (2002) consider that service learning provides educational experiences in which:

- Students learn course content as a result of the community service they perform;
- Students apply course content in a community setting;
- Students are provided time and opportunity for reflection on the experience;
- The relationship among participants is collaborative and the benefits are reciprocal
- The service is with, rather than for, the community partner;
- Community partners reap benefits from the program, while student participants gain valuable knowledge and skills; and
- Service learning is done in an area of one's expertise (Root, 1997 in Buchanan, Baldwin and Rudisill (2002:28)

Service learning differs from voluntary community service in its inclusion of the element of reflection and Donohue (1999) argues that this is critical if the learning is to be a "thoughtful, sophisticated and responsible" examination of context and the ethical dilemmas inherent in teaching (p.694). It differs also, in its inclusion of the service component, from the field experiences and internships of teacher education programs that focus on the learning potential of the educational context for the student Buchanan, Baldwin and Rudisill (2002) argue that in service learning "the interaction of service and learning is emphasised in ways that go beyond the independent contributions of each. (p.28)

Sigmon (1979, in LaMaster 2001) defined service learning as 'reciprocal learning' balancing learning goals and service outcomes so students develop "collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving skills" (Myers and Pickeral, 1997 in LaMaster 2001). Participatory community-connected education demands students assume greater responsibility in defining the educational experience; develop and test their skills of critical enquiry in applied settings

through reflection; and are connected to a defined community to achieve a common goal that contributes to their affective, civic, social and cognitive development (Waldstein and Reiher, 2001:8)

McDermott, Rothenberg and Gormley (1998) redesigned their teacher education program because they found preservice elementary education students were unprepared for urban teaching due to life experiences of ethnicity, opportunity and privilege that have fostered unconscious bias and distortions about low-income urban children. Their aim was for teacher education students to recognise that all children bring strengths for learning to school and that children's life experiences are resources for classroom learning. They found that preservice teachers became advocates and agents for change for children and their families; identified the linguistic strengths of bilingual children; experienced conditions under which low income children lived and learnt to value the impact of effective pedagogy and high expectations for urban children.

De Acosta (1996) argues students derive their views from their own life experience, not from coursework about family involvement. She advocates placement in a community agency, rather than a school setting, during foundations course and found that this allowed preservice teachers "to observe and converse with families in situations and contexts not routinely available to teachers. (They) began to learn families' practical interests and strategies for advancing their interests, what social and cultural capital was available to families, and how families activate their assets...(It) offers the opportunity to learn about the moral and expressive dimensions of service provider-client relationships (p.13).

Projects are organised to meet the needs of the community, then integrated into the community (Edwards 2001). "Connecting the school and the community means listening to the community in which the school is situated, so that the individual voices of those students and of that community can be the foundation of the education those students receive (Edwards 2001). "Community-oriented teacher education programs occur when schools and communities recognise shared values, common needs, and local benefits to partnerships" (Levesque and Prosser, 1996:325).

The contextual aspects of a community-based project requires that students deal with unique situations that vary dependent on the setting, enabling them to problem solve and manoeuvre within the specific needs of a context (Buchanan, Baldwin and Rudisill, 2002).

THE VISION

The demands, challenges and opportunities confronting teachers identified in the preceding discussion point to a new vision for primary teacher education. The vision is to graduate teachers who are confident and resourceful in their capacity to effectively engage with individual children, their families, and their broader communities, and who have the ability to critically analyse the political, economic and social structures and processes that impact upon a child's educational experience and opportunities. The vision moves beyond an educational goal relating to the development of technical knowledge and skill, towards goals promoting the development of a capacity for critical self-reflection; the will to embrace the possibilities created through recognition of the capacities, resources, interests and experiences of the learner; the skill to foster empowering relationships with parents and significant others; and the resourcefulness to draw on the strengths, resources, and opportunities arising from community and social contexts. It is envisaged that the

development of these personal and professional capacities will incorporate not only classroom learning, but importantly a service learning experience that allows for interaction beyond the classroom through participation in real projects aimed at fostering school-community interaction and positive school-family relationships. This is the vision that the School of Education at the University Newcastle is seeking to make a reality from 2003.

The INITIATIVE

Education and Social Work Join Forces

To achieve their visionary goals for primary education the School of Education has invited the University's Discipline of Social Work to provide a course for final year education students on schools, families and communities. The invitation to another discipline to run the course recognises the importance of moving the students beyond the familiar culture, environment and organisation of the discipline of teacher education.

Social work is a profession which has always been concerned with the interplay between people and their environments (social, political, economic, cultural community, and personal). As O'Connor, Wilson and Setterlund (1996:9) explain, "the domain of social work practice consists of the interaction between individuals and social arrangements..... The construct of social arrangements refers to the many processes and relationships by which individuals and the social structure are produced and reproduced". Social work practice seeks to enhance the quality of these interactions and is concerned with developing equitable relationships through which people gain power and control over their own lives (ibid:13). Such relationships may be between individuals and family or informal systems, or may be between individuals and the formal institutions and structures of society such as the education, employment, health and judicial systems. As a result, social work intervention may be at the level of individual, family, organisation, community, and/or policy, and can incorporate individual casework/case management, family work, group work, community development, management and/or research.

Regardless of the level or method of intervention, the distinguishing feature of social work practice is "the skilful, disciplined use of self" (O'Connor, Wilson and Setterlund, 1996:53). Whilst social work education and practice has traditionally promoted the importance of self-awareness, the process of critical self-reflection is gaining increasing attention in social work. Fook (1999:200) identifies a number of important features of critical reflection, including the ability to:

- appreciate the influence of personal reactions, perspectives, interpretations;
- recognise unconscious assumptions;
- own a capacity to act (that is, a sense of agency);
- act on analysis,
- broaden understanding as a result.

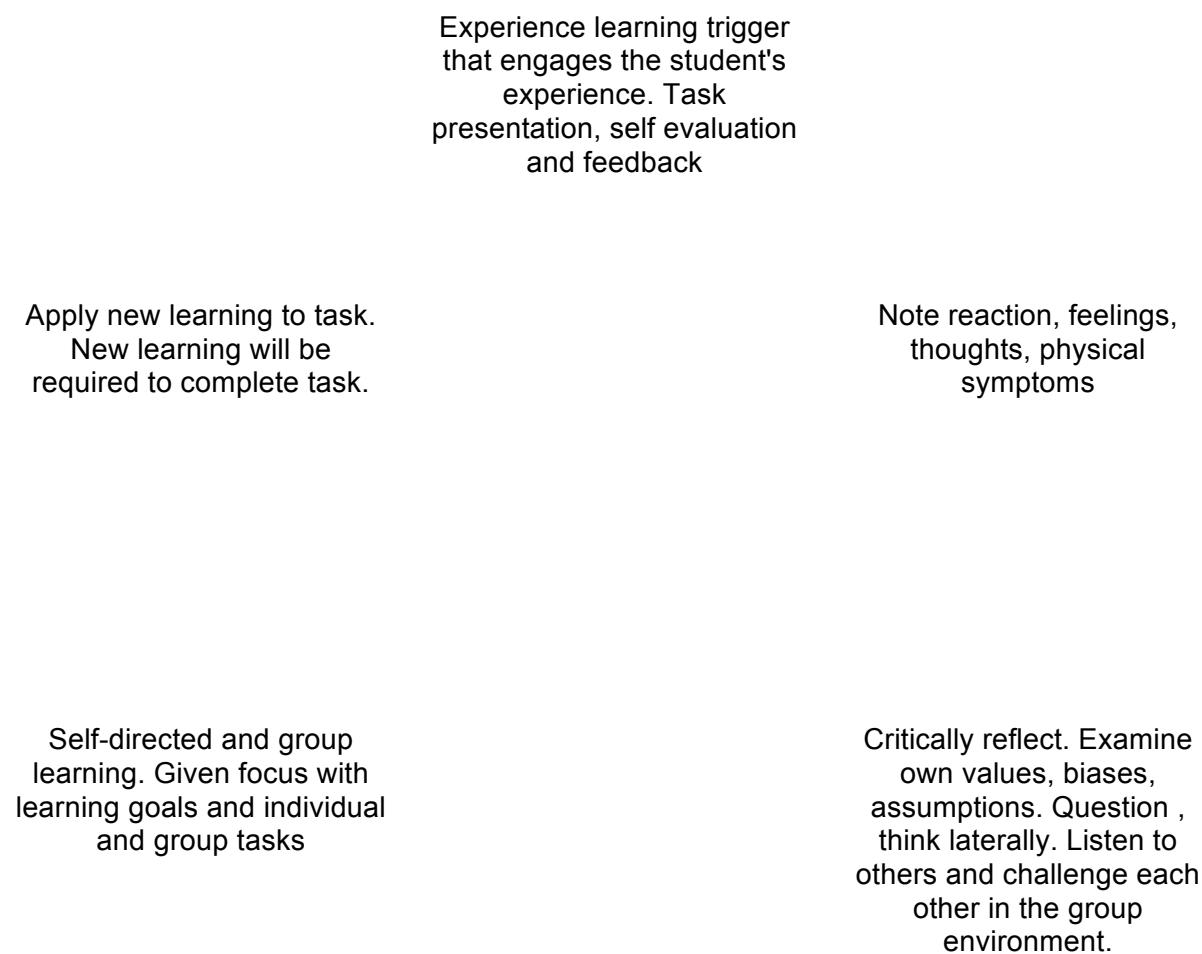
The discipline of social work therefore offers education students a significant body of theoretical knowledge and practice expertise in the arena of school, family and community relationships. In addition to the knowledge and practice base of professional social work, the Newcastle social work program has developed a unique model of experience-based social work education at the heart of which is a concern with the process of learning as much as the content. The model recognises the fact that in a constantly changing world, professional

learning is an ongoing process that begins well before entry into a degree program and continues well beyond graduation. Important features of the Newcastle model of social work education include:

- integration of theory and practice in recognition of the dynamic interaction between the two;
- collaborative small group learning that incorporates both task and process analysis;
- a foundation in a social justice and strengths framework;
- an emphasis on critical thinking and creativity;
- the application of knowledge and skill to real social work practice issues and tasks;
- staff involvement as facilitators, guides, mentors, coaches, co-learners and assessors (School of Social Sciences, undated).

Courses are structured as a progressive series of learning units which cover a number of themes and which are organised around specific learning goals and tasks. Figure 1 (*ibid*) outlines the cycle of learning that is undertaken in each learning unit over a period of four to five weeks.

Figure 1: Newcastle's experience-based model



Identify learning needs.
What do I need to know to
respond to this situation?
Reading and research.

The model values experience as an important learning resource and draws on this resource at a number of points. Learning begins with an experience which seeks to engage the learner's energy, and emotions, and make conscious and explicit preconceived ideas, relevant personal experiences, prior knowledge, beliefs and values. Examples of trigger experiences would include films, videos, performances, guest speakers (including those with direct experience of the particular issues such as practitioners and/or consumer groups), and field visits. A group task guides the students' learning journey in terms of establishing learning needs, and determining individual and group activities. The task will engage students experientially as they prepare and present their group task in accordance with a brief which establishes the format (for example, role plays, street theatre, running forums/consultations, presenting poster sessions, conducting interviews) and the audience (for example, fellow students, politicians, practitioners, consumer groups). The lived experience of group dynamics is also processed individually and collectively.

The Newcastle model of social work education is thus very consistent with the vision and goals of the proposed primary education course on schools, families, and communities as it allows for the prior knowledge, experience and capacities of the education students to be acknowledged, valued and enhanced; it promotes the development of a capacity for critical self-reflection; and it embraces the service, experiential, critical and reflective elements of service learning (d'Acosta, 1996). Further, the model is underpinned by the strengths perspective, which, whilst apparently simple in concept, presents challenges to the dominant paradigm that privileges a focus on deficits, labels, and limitations. A strengths perspective incorporates the notion of empowerment, which embraces the following key ideas:

- The importance of collaborative partnerships.
- An emphasis on expansion of participant strengths and capacities.
- A focus on both individual or family and the environment.
- Active involvement of parents, carers, and community members.
- Assistance to those most disadvantaged by social and economic structures and changes (Saleeby, 2002: 9).

As a one-off course with a large number of students the structure of the learning process requires some modification but the essential elements of the model outlined above can be incorporated into the primary education course. The course will be introduced with a trigger experience that confronts the impact of contexts - for example a series of vignettes of personal stories involving for example: parents from a priority school reflecting on their experience of re-engaging with the school system as a parent, the opportunities and barriers to their relationship with the school and with teachers, their hopes and aspirations in relation to their child's education and the ways they could be involved, and their perceptions of life in the local community; or practitioners from local community service organisations discussing the impacts of policies on particular families and communities. The trigger experience will be followed by workshop activities aimed at exploring values, assumptions, and experiences with the interaction between school and community. The students will then work through a

cycle of learning working towards the implementation and reflection on a group-based service learning project directed towards the enhancement of school-community relationships.

A third partner in the course development is the University's community services arm known as the Family Action Centre which functions under the umbrella of the Faculty of Health. The course is thus a cross-faculty and cross-discipline initiative. The Family Action Centre operates a number of community programs including the boys in schools program and the engaging fathers program. These programs offer knowledge and skills development in educating boys and engaging fathers for professionals and parents across Australia through seminars, action learning projects, training programs, post-graduate courses and publications. The Centre has an excellent reputation for community collaboration in program and resource development and through action learning. The Family Action Centre is thus a crucial resource in terms of firstly, advice on the course development, and secondly in the recruitment of service learning projects.

Engaging Stakeholders

In keeping with the principles of service learning outlined above, the service learning component of the proposed course needs to be grounded in real projects that embrace the aspirations, interests, opportunities and resources of schools and their communities of interest. To this end the planning phase of the course has involved consultation with community development practitioners, schools, and district superintendents, in relation to course objectives and content, as well as the service learning projects. Advice from these stakeholders has been incorporated into the course outline and into a project brief which has been distributed to all primary schools in the four school districts that already have a working relationship with the University through teacher education internships. Schools have been invited to submit expressions of interest in participating in the service learning by proposing projects from their own contexts which have a school-community focus and objective. Social and community service agencies who are known to the social work educators through the social work field education program, have also been invited to submit expressions of interest in the service learning program. Schools and agencies have been asked to identify projects which:

- Provide an opportunity for student project groups to engage with the school community and/or the broader community.
- Provide an opportunity for student project groups to engage with a range of community organisations in addition to the participating school.
- Provide an opportunity for students to draw on a strengths perspective in working with families and/or communities.
- Provide an opportunity to enhance the school's capacity to engage with the parent/carer and/or the broader community.

This process ensures that the project proposals are relevant and useful to the participating schools and communities.

Project Possibilities

Projects are likely to reflect contemporary issues and concerns that confront schools and their communities. For example projects might focus on parenting and family relationships

including engaging fathers and/or significant males, grandparents, carers and community members in education; lifelong learning; boys' education (including a focus on literacy); nutrition; the environment and sustainability issues; economic and social participation.

The following questions were offered as a guide to schools and organisations in thinking about project possibilities.

Community Information

- Does your school/organisation need some information to assist in the development school -community relationships?
- Are any of the following types of information needed?
 - Socio-demographic information about the local community.
 - Information about local resources/services.
 - Information about perceptions of the school - amongst the parent/carer community; local residents; local businesses.
 - Information about what parents/broader community value about the school/area.
 - Information on what parents/carers would like to learn more about in relation to the school/ aspects of education.
 - Information on what local services can provide the school.
 - Information about parent/carer/broader community issues in relation to literacy/numeracy education.

Community Education

- Are there programs that local services/people could contribute to the school and in what areas?
- What community information/education would assist teachers/parents/carers?
- Are there potential workshops on specific matters that would be of value to your school /local community?

Community Development

- Are there groups you would like to engage with more actively in the education process - eg fathers? carers? wider community?
- Are there areas of literacy and numeracy that could be enhanced by wider community involvement eg mentor programs, volunteers support?
- Are there events the school would like to run?
- Are there local community events the school would like to be represented at?

Evaluation

The proposed course in its pilot year will be supported by a range of evaluation strategies to review both the process and impacts of the course from the perspectives of the various stakeholders. Proposed evaluation strategies include:

- Critical reflections of students.
- Independent University course evaluation surveys.
- Qualitative interviews with participating school and agency project leaders.
- Tutor feedback.
- Quantitative survey project participants, and other stakeholders.
- Post-project consultation with those involved in course design.

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