I have commenced teaching the Creative Arts at the Catholic Teachers College, Baucau, in East Timor. The Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) course has been accredited by the Australian Catholic University and Dance and Drama is taught in semester 1 with Music being taught in Semester 2 of first year. There are currently forty-nine students in the first year of the course and fifty three in the second year. My teaching in Baucau is recognised as part of my lecturing load at Charles Darwin University where I am employed as a lecturer and coordinator. This unique arrangement allows me to come to Baucau for an intensive two weeks at the beginning of each semester (American semester), leave behind readings and assessment tasks to be completed and return for one week towards the end of the semester to revise and finalise assessment. My lecturing at CDU is planned around these times. It is a unique teaching and learning experience for everyone.

As a lecturer I have attempted to teach in a variety of modes to assist students with their teaching and learning. Intensives, one day a week for six weeks and online work have all helped extend the teaching and learning process for students and the teacher. In this paper I will share my research into different models of teaching culminating in my teaching experience in East Timor.

Introduction.

Teaching in the pre-service teacher education course at Charles Darwin University has involved the development of external programs available in print based and online form, intensives during semester 0 and different modes of delivery to accommodate students who are either out of phase or affected by the change in the pre-service course, live remotely or need to work fulltime. This new intensive type mode has involved classes running every Monday from 9.00-4.00pm for six weeks. Added to this has been an invitation to work at the Catholic Teachers College Baucau, East Timor and deliver arts units to internal students in their pre-service course. This has involved teaching a two-week intensive at the commencement of their semester and returning towards the end for a week of revision and assessment.

In most instances the decision to try these different models of teaching has been based on economic reasons rather than any pedagogical reasons. However the resulting teaching and learning has in many ways been more dynamic and appealing to students and lecturers. Whether the teaching and learning has in fact been better for the student’s learning is still open to discussion as most students tend to evaluate the unit based on their enjoyment, relevance and suitability to their own economic situation.
External print based materials.

The push to make the B.Ed pre-service course external came from a demand to attract more students to a regional university desperate to obtain new enrolments and also from a perceived need to offer flexibility in study to our clientele. A regional university at the top of Australia has a very large area to provide for and the Northern Territory University (prior to 2004) saw the possibilities of offering courses to students from all over the top end as well as Asia. At the same time increased tertiary fees meant that an increasing number of students needed to work and study at the same time. External print based materials provided for these situations and in fact as is pointed out in the following quote, print based materials do work very well in delivering units to external students.

*Print is easily the most important educational medium, in terms of proportion of teaching delivered that way, in both distance teaching and campus universities.... Logistically, it shines: it is the easiest medium to design (single author), to produce (established publishing mechanisms), to deliver (bookshops and libraries), to handle (light and portable), to use (random access, contents, indexes).... Print is similar to the lecture in that it can support only the description of the teacher’s conceptions, but the key advantage that, like most educational media it is controllable by the student...they can re-read...(Laurillard, 1993, 109)*

Lecturers were encouraged as part of their load to write the units they were responsible for in external print based form, they were sometimes given a decreased teaching load to assist with this or alternatively the writing of external materials was outsourced. There was very little guidance given to lecturers other than a specific format of Unit Information, Study Guide and Readings. Often lecturers and frequently external writers made the content and assessment tasks very different from the internal unit. This added to the marking and maintenance of internal and external unit by one lecturer. In the beginning very little substantial load was given to the marking and maintenance of an external unit in a lecturers load.

Students while grateful for the opportunity to study at home were often inundated by paper work and in particular readings for each unit. They felt very isolated and often found it difficult to contact a lecturer who was busy teaching the internal unit and obviously giving first preference to it. Lecturers were also often loathe to read up on a totally new unit (if written by someone else) or become familiar with a second lot of assessment tasks. The attrition rate among undergraduate students in particular, rose. In an effort to stem this attrition rate and to assist lecturers, coordinators of the course recommended that first year students only do two external units a semester. Re-writing of external materials has involved similarity of content and assessment as well as a more generous load for marking. However in many instances now, the marking of external materials is often given to external markers due to the numbers. With careful mentoring by the lecturer, if possible, this can result in much better servicing of external students but unfortunately this does not always occur.

Online materials.

With the advent of online software such as Web CT, Blackboard, Top Class etc, lecturers were suddenly provided with another medium for the teaching and learning of their external students. While it was initially recognised that not all students had access to computers and therefore we could not replace our print based materials with online courses, aspects of ICT were incorporated to involve the external student in the units. This was done with emails, discussion boards and CD
Roms. We are now moving to fully online units and students being advised of the ICT requirements before they commence courses and/or units.

Online materials were provided for internal students particularly to overcome the large numbers in lecturers and tutorials. Students and lecturers could introduce themselves, interact and discuss issues pertinent to them via emails or discussion boards. It also allowed students an opportunity to read lecture notes prior to the lecturer, or access them after the lecture or access them if a lecture was missed. As a lecturer I found it freed the students to interact with me in class, knowing that they didn’t have to write notes as they could access them from the web.

Charles Darwin University (as we are now called) uses blackboard, which it has named Learnline. Students are automatically enrolled in a unit they are completing, whether internal or external. Responses from students concerning this medium has been very favourable particularly in being able to access lecture notes, resources, readings and interaction with colleagues and the lecturer through the discussion board. This same internal unit can also be accessed by external units to provide additional information and interaction to the print based materials. When creating the internal Learnline site lecturers can add an external section that explains any differences between the two. This tends to create a more seamless unit for internal and external coverage of the unit. It also allows external students an opportunity to interact with other external and internal students. To ensure students access the Learnline site a number of assessable item are placed on the discussion board.

Online delivery of units in whatever form can create a number of issues and in our efforts to provide flexibility for students, a number of issues have been over looked. Lecturers often need considerable assistance in this mode of delivery, not just in how to use it, but why they should use it. What often challenges a lecturer is the use of technology to teach in meaningful ways as many already feel they are doing this already without the aid of technology. As McKenzie (2000, p.57) states ‘The most important thing to remember is that great teaching is more important than great equipment.’ He is of course referring to computers and it is important to note that this is technology’s greatest challenge - to assist teachers to use technology as a tool to enhance the good teaching they are already doing. There are also a number of issues in relation to the assessment of discussion board interaction which has not always been dealt with. There are often problems with technology, student log ons, access and time involved in preparing and managing the online unit.

Generally the students have welcomed online materials, particularly as they feel more involved with other students and in accessing the lecturer. Discussion board feedback is often and more personal. In many instances it also allows students initial access to the unit while waiting for print based materials to arrive and to peruse future units in advance of the semester.

**Intensives.**

Intensive one-week coverage of a unit was initially designed to allow students to ‘catch up’ or allow external and remote students an opportunity to have face-to-face access to a unit. These intensives have been offered in Alice Springs where we have a large number of external students. Increasingly we have met the demand of internal and external students who are endeavouring to ‘fast track’ through the course as well as out of phase students and interested external students. Students enrol in Semester 0, and attend from 9.00am – 4.00pm for the five days. They then have the rest of the following semester to complete any assessment tasks not covered during the week. This mode of teaching suits some units more than others and some lecturers of mathematics and issues units have lamented the lack of time to reflect on issues and
‘forced’ discussion and application of some concepts. Other lecturers, such as myself who teaches the Arts unit, enjoy the opportunity to interact and become totally absorbed in the arts for a week.

Again there has been little discussion or direction given in how to run these intensives to benefit all involved. Lecturers are given a choice as to when to hold them and a reduction in workload for that semester. However the ‘pressure cooker’ type of delivery involves a careful rethink of presentation. Constant lecturing all day benefits no one. Guest speakers who provide variety in the presentation of content can often be distracting for students and time consuming for lecturers to organise. There can sometimes be a ‘desperation’ in delivery, which is not as evident over an entire semester. Students and lecturers often complain of being exhausted after the week and some lecturers are concerned that only surface learning has occurred.

Students however are eager to access this mode of delivery as they see it primarily as a time saver. External students view it as an excellent opportunity to study without the tiresome ‘busy tasks’ often associated with external print materials and to meet and interact with other students and lecturers. They also admit that the intensives help them to understand the concepts within the units more thoroughly, without losing too much time from paid employment.

It is interesting to note that lecturers are being encouraged to try different modes of delivery in an effort to free them from extensive teaching time and give more time to writing and research, while meeting the needs of groups of internal students affected by the change over to the new B.Ed. I have recently completed my Arts unit to a group of twenty-five students over a Monday, from 9.00-4.00pm for six weeks. This worked extremely well and both the students and myself had the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the Arts with time each week to reflect on what we were doing and to discuss issues the following week. However this can only occur with small numbers of students, our normal internal enrolment would not allow for this unless lecturers co-taught units and even then timetabling issues may arise.

Models of teaching for East Timor.

Teaching and learning at the Catholic Teachers College Baucau allows for a combination, of almost all the above modes. External materials in the form of readings, questions and CD Rom activities are left behind for students to complete in the weeks that I am not there. Assessment tasks are also to be prepared during this time. I provide intensives in the first two weeks of their semester in the form of six hours sessions (2 x one hour lecture, for all students and 2 x 2 hour tutorials, smaller groups) per week. Some classes are not held during this time; however the majority of classes are continued. Over this time content as well as some assessment tasks are covered. I return again for one week at the end of semester to revise and complete assessment tasks. Eventually when the internet is connected it is envisaged that Learnline will also be used to communicate with students. This and classroom discussion is difficult due to language, however a translator and new online programs assist in overcoming these problems.

Other difficulties arise in my lack of understanding of East Timorese culture, especially as it relates to the arts. I cannot begin to know or experience the lives of my students given the turmoil of the last twenty-five years in East Timor. The history of this country and the lives of its people during this time has had a huge impact upon the development of their songs, their music, their dances and stories and their art work and I am only beginning to learn some of their songs, stories and crafts. I therefore model arts activities using my own cultural experiences. I encourage the students to replace my songs, stories and art work with their own. Assessment tasks specifically asks them to plan and present their own dances, stories, songs and arts work. I challenge them to explore where these art experiences have come from and to record the history
to include in the resource books that are then prepared for students to use in their future teaching experiences.

The pedagogy of the arts remains the same for any country. The reasons for including the arts in our primary school curriculum is explored from an integral part of a child’s development, to the latest understanding of brain research and multiple intelligences to a unique symbol notation with similarities to literacy and numeracy, to problem solving, developing the whole child, and a recognition of the importance of creative expression in life. All aspects of arts pedagogy is explored in an interactive way where students explore through movement, dance, drama, creating, music, singing, playing, drawing, painting and making. Through their own experiences they recognize the joy and creativity of the arts as well as the unique possibilities of expressing themselves in a different medium.

Student evaluations at the completion of each semester has shown that while students are satisfied with this intensive approach they have made suggestions to improve assessment criteria and feedback, and I am aware of the need to learn more tetum to communicate more socially with the students. Generally this model is working very well, and as my experiences of East Timor expand and as my students experience of my cultural background increases then the learning experience will continue to change and develop. In many ways this is no different to all the other models of teaching discussed in this paper. However my experience at the Catholic Teachers College Baucau has enriched my teaching as I determine the essential core of why, how and what we teach. I have explored the important aspects of being a teacher as well as the important aspects of teaching the arts in the primary school. This has been a reinvigorating experience and at times I feel I may be gaining more from the experience than what I am giving!

Conclusions.

Teaching, for me, has always been a learning experience as I seek to provide meaningful learning experiences for all my students. It’s a huge challenge as every student has different needs to be considered in the process. I have a unique opportunity at CDU, our position in remote Australia means we have to offer something ‘different’ to encourage students to enrol with us and while this journey has often been unchartered and without strong pedagogical foundations it has enabled us to try alternative modes and offer many different ways for students to explore the units we teach. It has certainly helped me to determine what I teach, how I teach and why I teach. The development of my teaching pedagogy makes the whole teaching and learning experience an immensely challenging and exciting experience that I am still passionate about. Tertiary educator Judith Newman maintains that, ‘Our beliefs about learning and teaching can only be uncovered by engaging in systematic self-critical analysis of our current instructional practices’ (Newman, 1987). This is what I believe we are doing at Charles Darwin University and East Timor as we seek to cater for all our students.

References.


