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**Effective Orientation Programs for Secondary Pre-Service Teachers through School Partnerships: A  
Case Study**

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## **Effective Orientation Programs for Secondary Pre-Service Teachers through School Partnerships: A Case Study**

### **Abstract**

*A sensitive induction into the routines of the secondary classroom and into the day to day working life of a secondary teacher is important in relieving anxieties and establishing positive attitudes in graduate student teachers. This paper reports on a school/university partnership program operating in a local senior secondary college in the beginning weeks of a one-year graduate diploma course, and on student reactions to the different elements of the program: a lecture series conducted in the school by practising teachers, an ICT module also delivered in the school, and a classroom experience program that matched up student-teachers with staff from several local secondary colleges.*

### **Introduction**

There is broad consensus that teacher preparation programs can be enhanced through effective partnerships with schools. The Australian Council of Deans of Education (2003) argued that professional practice must be at the heart of teacher education, and that theory and practice must be mutually informing, concurring with the call by the Ramsey Review of Teacher Education in New South Wales (2000, p. 63) for “a fuller integration of practical experience into educational programs for beginning teachers”. However, extending meaningful links beyond the usual teaching practicum experience remains a challenge in teacher preparation. Our paper reports on a secondary student-teacher induction program based in secondary schools in Bendigo, Victoria, that aimed to develop a productive partnership between these students and local schools in the first six weeks of their one-year course. The paper first reviews key issues associated with developing effective links, outlines the goals and content of the program, and then reports on students’ perceptions of its value. Our paper concludes by considering key implications for the content and focus of such a program, as well as broader issues relating to such partnerships.

### **Literature Review**

In Australia, partnerships between schools and universities have been promoted as an appropriate mechanism for achieving collaborative work and mutually beneficial outcomes. The Innovative Links Program (1994-995) that grew out of the Australian National Schools Network established a new reciprocal relationship between practice and research, and academia and teachers in schools (Merritt & Campbell, 1999; Cooper & Jasman, 2002) and reflected the “first formal initiative to develop university-school partnerships for teacher professional development” (Yeatman 1996, p. 21). Partnerships also constituted a key feature of the National Professional Development Program’s (NPDP) strategic initiatives and the 1995 NPDP Evaluation argued, “partnerships increase the number and range of people who take responsibility for the professional development of teachers”(1995, p. 3).

More recently, the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education (2003) highlighted the strategic position of school-university partnerships as both desirable and inevitable forms of practice to promote ‘innovation’ in a globalised ‘knowledge economy’ (2003, p. xvii). Cooper & Jasman (2002, p. 3) have identified a variety of models of school-university partnerships that link university faculties of education and local schools. Emerging themes in these programs include developing collaborative capabilities in student teachers as a basis for successful participation in teaching teams and partnership arrangements in schools. Thus, rather than rethinking how teacher education time is used, focus is based on practical experience requiring sound working partnerships between the University, teacher education staff and the school.

Partnerships are characterised in this literature as symbiotic relationships where the mutual interests of parties need to be served equally (Goodlad in Clarke, 1998, pp. 40, 41). The role of partnerships in pre-service education and teacher professional development holds the promise of increasing dialogue between the participating sectors (Carpenter 2002, p. 1) thus promoting redefinition of boundaries of each. In this context, legitimate expectations of partners need to be established, realistic resources made available and a sense of ownership apparent for all involved (Cooper & Jasman, 2002, p.4). The redefinition of boundaries through partnership collaborations between universities and schools, while acknowledged as a potential source of tension, can lead to further constructive outcomes:

- a practical and contextualised knowledge, important in the integration of theory and practice for pre-service teachers (Cooper & Jasman, 2002, p. 12)
- an endorsement of the crucial knowledge contribution made by teachers in schools
- a provision for mutual learning opportunities rather than singular focus opportunities (Carpenter 2002, p. 1).

In 1995, Yeatman and Sachs suggested that partnerships would provide “the new rub between theory and practice” producing “more practically grounded, broadly informed theory” (in Jasman, Payne & Grundy 1999, p. 28). The development of a more activist professional role between school and university staff (Cooper & Jasman, 2002, p. 4) can produce a ‘new cadre of knowledge workers’ (Kalantzis & Harvey in Cooper & Jasman, 2002, p. 4). Cooper and Jasman (2002, p. 2) claim that the “release of the Ramsey Review and the Commonwealth Review of Teacher Education, 2002 have aided in re-orientating focus towards teacher education and teacher educators”. Crucially then, initial teacher education programs take on particular importance from the perspective of school-university partnerships since they expose pre-service teachers to connections between theory and practice through a model of active, partnership engagement, networking, researching and knowledge-making.

However, the literature also highlights constraining factors in school-university partnerships. The different cultures of universities and schools are often reflected as differentials of power and status serving to reinforce notions of elitism (Merritt & Campbell 1999), inequality in partnership endeavours and territorialism (Gore, 1995); Cooper & Jasman 2002). Partnerships might also be taken on as ‘de rigueur’ (Scanlon 2001, p. 2), rather than advancing as carefully considered, planned operations with strong educational integrity. Similarly, partnerships can be hastily conceived, haphazard, short-term, one-off, ad hoc programs where the partnership concept is not integrated as an on-going practice (Gore 1995). Further difficulties can also arise from lack of effective communication amongst partners (Gore 1995; Merritt and Campbell 1999) producing tension and ambiguity of roles within the partnership. Common concerns relate to unclear expectations, unspecified outcomes for all partner groups as well as time and financial constraints. The issues of workloads (for all staff and pre service teachers) and partnership project resourcing have also been well documented (Cooper & Jasman 2002; Gore 1995).

In conclusion, Gore (1995), for example, outlined broad guiding principles to facilitate genuine partnerships in education. In summary, some key issues for consideration include: democratic planning whereby the distinctive interests of all parties are taken into account; development of trust, communication and understanding of each partner’s perspective; joint responsibility for planning and consensus regarding approaches to be used; development of common goals with commitment from the entire staff to be encouraged; clear understanding of the nature and timing of various course inputs; the establishment of links between university courses and school experiences; the formation of programs through partnership as more than merely symbolic, with both school and university cultures experiencing change. In addition, problems associated with lack of, or limits on, rewards and recognition of individuals in universities and schools for collaborative activities need to be acknowledged and addressed.

### **Context of the Research**

This program for Graduate Diploma of Education students was first conducted in 2003 and repeated in 2004, through a partnership between the School of Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo, the Bendigo Senior Secondary College, and four local Junior Secondary Colleges. Bendigo Senior Secondary College is broadly recognized for its innovative approach to the use of new technologies for teaching and learning (Prain & Hand, 2003). With over 1800 students, the College is one of the largest Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) providers in Victoria, and aims to provide an environment where students’ self-discipline and independent learning skills are fostered. The integration of computer technology into the teaching and learning process has been enthusiastically embraced by staff.

The School of Education at La Trobe University has a long history of collaborative partnerships with schools in the region. As a result, a wide range of past programs has benefited practising teachers and pre-service teachers. This program built upon and further developed these professional, practical links. Its key purpose, however, has been to provide a useful introduction and orientation to the teaching profession for pre-service secondary

teachers.

The Partnership Program operated for one day a week for the first six weeks of the Graduate Diploma of Education course. The program had three key components, each of which was linked explicitly to subject areas within the University course:

- a Lecture segment conducted by school staff and community members
- an ICT segment that addressed implications of learning technology for the classroom
- a classroom experience segment that provided opportunities for pre-service students to observe and participate over the six week period of the program

**a. The Lecture Program**

The educational lecture series was developed to provide students with an overview of some key issues that schools must address in this century, and to help students realize that schools are part of a state-wide system, with a range of curricular and other implications. Six lectures took place over the period of the program:

- *Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*  
 An introduction to the Senior Secondary College provided by the Principal, along with a general overview of the role of Teachers (followed by a guided tour of the college).
- *Curriculum Standards Framework and the Middle Years*  
 A session designed to provide knowledge and understanding of the curriculum structure within which schools are required to work: the Curriculum Standards Framework; the Middle Years Program.
- *VCE, VET, VCAL*  
 A session which offered an overview of the range of programs now available for Year 11 and 12 students.
- *Student Well Being*  
 An outline of programs conducted in the area of Social Education at Bendigo Senior Secondary College. Covers the role of Tutors in supporting students throughout the year, along with programs that address Depression, Study Skills, Substance Abuse.
- *The Department of Education and Training*  
 An overview provided by a staff from the Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regional Office of the structure of the Department of Education and Training. The presentation also described the targeted program which provides support each year for beginning teachers.
- *Gaining Employment*  
 This session provided an overview of the process necessary to gain employment in government schools.

**b. The ICT Program**

The eLearning sessions were designed to demonstrate how learning and teaching in schools have changed dramatically in the past ten years. The aim of these sessions was to demonstrate the resources which support learning and teaching at Bendigo Senior Secondary College, and to showcase what is happening in a range of classrooms at the College.

- *BSSC* *webpage*  
 This session demonstrated the use of the College Extranet by teachers to share work amongst colleagues and enable students to access class work at any computer.
- *Educational Resources*  
 A range of key educational sites exist to support teacher education. This session introduces students to these sites and provided the opportunity to explore.
- *Web Based Learning*  
 The introduction of the web ten years ago provided teachers with unprecedented opportunities to access resources to support the classroom. This session offered an overview of a range of online learning and teaching formats which can be used across all subject areas.
- *ICT in the Middle Years*

This session was presented by a teacher from a local 7 – 10 College to show how ICT is used in the Middle Years.

- *Online Forums*  
The notion of learning taking place “anywhere, anytime” was reinforced in this workshop which looked at the values and benefits of online forums to explore and develop ideas around a range of topics.
- *Research via the www*  
This session provided a librarian’s perspective of the web as a teacher’s tool to support classroom practice.

Students each Friday were divided into two groups (of approximately 45) attending one or other of the parallel programs, and switching to the other after morning tea.

### *c. The Classroom Experience Program*

Each student-teacher during the first week of the course was matched up with a teacher from BSSC or from another secondary college in Bendigo, and was required to observe and assist in three or more classes per week for the duration of the program.

The Classroom Experience Program was not restricted to Friday, but potentially spilled out into any parts of the week where teacher and student-teacher timetables allowed the opportunity for classroom observation. While students were advised that visits to school were primarily for the purpose of observation, every encouragement was given for teachers to incorporate their visitors more actively into their lessons, and in many cases this occurred with very beneficial consequences.

### **Aims of the Research Project**

The research goals of this study were to:

1. identify pre-service students’ perceptions of the relative value of the different components of the program and their relationship to each other
2. identify teachers’ perceptions of the value of the program to both pre-service student participants and themselves
3. identify components of the program that need modification, and
4. identify the best combinations of school-based and university-based components.

This paper focuses on the first, third and fourth aim.

### **Participants and Research Method**

The whole cohort (n = 84) of students was invited to participate in a survey questionnaire of the program, including opportunities for extended comment (see figure 1), and eight students were invited to participate in an interview lasting around 30 minutes. Student responses to the program were canvassed through informal written comments in the second week of the academic year, via informal class discussion in mid-year, and more formally by way of a survey and individual interviews at the end of the academic year. The student survey/questionnaire and interviews were conducted in October 2004, enabling participants to provide considered responses at the completion of their course. Student selection for interviews was made on the basis of a range of responses indicated by survey results, gender, undergraduate study area and regularity of attendance in the program. To identify student-teacher perspectives, concerns, and issues associated with the orientation program, a qualitative research method grounded in constructivist epistemology was adopted (Guba & Lincoln, 1992) using a case study approach (Merriam, 1992), with multiple data sources used to document the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Data were collected through survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and group interviews. Semi-structured interviews with student-teachers focused on such issues as their responses to each component of the program, their perception of the strengths and limitations of the program, and their recommendations for future use of the program. Interviews were coded and analyzed using constant comparison in order to identify recurrent themes. The four researchers and research assistant coded and analyzed the data independently. Discussion sessions were then conducted to compare results, to determine if any sub-categories existed, and to refine and clarify discrepancies in coding. The results from these procedures formed the basis for further ongoing identification of theoretical and practical issues.

**Findings**

Discussion below draws mainly upon students’ summative appraisals at the end of the course, which predictably, are more measured and slightly less effusive than in the early weeks of the year when students were excited by the sudden privileged glimpse into the internal workings of a school, and the very early exposure to classroom life. Findings are discussed in terms of (a) the classroom experience program, (b) the lecture program, and (c) the ICT program.

**Classroom Experience Program**

Of the three parts of the partnership program, the classroom experience component was most generally responded to positively by students. Seen initially as a welcome glimpse of what lay ahead, it served to allay anxiety of the unknown:

*“Takes some of the mystery/unknown out of our expectations as future teachers ...”*

For many it was a confidence building experience:

*“It has given me more confidence about my ability and what is expected, and has taken the edge off the coming round”. . . (starting six weeks later)*

*“good to get into the school and develop a comfort zone . . .”*

For others it signaled a welcome practical orientation to the course ahead:

*“very useful . . . to get right into the practical side of things.”*

*“Having ‘real’ teachers giving tips . . . from the coal face is an eye opener, and a great base for going out on first teaching rounds.”*

Others welcomed the experience as the liminal phase of a professional *rite de passage*:

*“gave me some confidence; got me **out of** my comfort zone”*

Eight months later, by the end of the diploma course, the Classroom Experience Program was still seen as a valuable introduction to the practicalities of teaching by virtually all students.

I found the classroom experience program a valuable introduction to practical issues relating to effective teaching and learning	SA	A	U	D	SD
	32	17	8	4	2

The dissenting minority were typically those for whom the matching-up did not work, either for logistical or personality reasons.

One interviewee tidily summed up some of the perceived benefits of the observation program:

*“(First), I’m **immersed in the school**. I thought that was important. Secondly, I’m **learning from an experienced teacher**. Thirdly, I see **how she manages the class** – which was quite expert in my view...”*

The aspect of immersion which many student-teachers touched upon in their responses was the experience of working in an unfamiliar environment with a predominantly teenage population.

The classroom experience program was helpful in easing any concerns that I may have had about working with young people in a classroom situation	SA	A	U	D	SD
	20	23	9	6	3

The first encounter with young people is something about which many mature-age students are apprehensive, and observing classes early in the year evidently helped dispel some anxieties for those lacking recent contact with adolescents:

*“For a lot of us who have not been in a secondary school for . . . it was terrific to go and rub shoulders with kids, pass them in the corridor, make eye contact with them, overhear their chat in a very foreign environment that we are all hoping to head to . . . For me it gave the confidence to look teenagers in the eye and say g’day, how are you going...”*

*“I’m a non-confrontational person and having been at Uni for 5 years now, I’ve more or less adjusted to the attitudes and personalities you get at Uni . Taking a trip back into the high school was initially a bit of a shock – I didn’t have much common language, but these sessions got me on the starting point for being able to translate.”*

The opportunity to *learn directly from experienced teachers* was also commented upon by many students, who appreciated seeing teachers working in ways with which they were unfamiliar.

The classroom experience program has taught me a lot about classroom communication	SA	A	U	D	SD
	13	25	12	8	4

The majority of students enrolled in the diploma course would not have been inside a secondary college in more than a decade, and for perhaps a quarter the period would be more than twenty years.

Some were impressed by the casualness and informality of the teacher-student relationship:

*“the students were so motivated by the fact that (the teacher) was just who she was, and she kind of sat in her chair and talked very animatedly and you could see she wasn’t putting on a persona – and I suppose that was something I took away with me as well . . .having come from a school that was pretty much structured . . .very little group work, you always sat at your desk – those kind of things - It was nice to walk into a classroom and see that it doesn’t have to be like that”*

Others saw observation as providing a useful insight and induction into classroom procedures:

*“It was helpful to sit in a class and just see the way it kind of needs to happen – like the teacher comes in and greets the kids – they have a bit of banter and then they get into the work and conclusions of lessons – yeah, it was good to see that.”*

An equally important aspect of the classroom experience program was the opportunity for students to talk to their teachers about various aspects of their work. Many commented on the kindness of their teachers in sharing their ideas and professional knowledge, and many gained an early understanding of the complexity of a teacher’s work and the enormous demands upon their time. Even the small minority who were teamed with teachers whom they deemed unhelpful recognized that the stresses of the job can often explain an individual’s apparent off-handedness.

The classroom experience program provided insights into the mult-layered nature of teachers' work	SA	A	U	D	SD
	19	22	12	6	4

Much more common among responses were those that praised teachers for their cheerfulness, friendliness and resilience:

*“We all know that teachers are so incredibly busy, so for them to stay back and have a bit of a chat about this and that was very worth while . . . As students, the sooner we get into schools the more comfortable we will feel . . . it's like learning a whole culture that we may not have thought about before.”*

Observing and talking with teachers who clearly have a passion for their work provides a similar inspiration for students:

*“thankfully, I got assigned to a really relaxed, happy class. . . . Apart from anything else it just made me realize that sometimes teaching can be very, very fun – L. looked like she was enjoying herself immensely”*

*(The most valuable aspect of the orientation program was) “seeing teachers who enjoy what they do”*

*Classroom management* is predictably an area of concern for many students embarking upon a secondary teaching course, and here once again there would seem to be merit in exposing the aspiring teacher to good models of management as early in the course as possible.

The classroom experience program provided me with a valuable introduction into techniques of classroom management and supervision	SA	A	U	D	SD
	17	22	9	9	5

Some students clearly gained much from seeing skilled managers in action:

*“She (the associate teacher) was quite expert at striking a balance between a class that was silent and repressed and having a class that was relatively noisy and working in a creative way . . . So, her classes were rarely silent but then they were always working – I thought that was a great skill that she had.”*

A central goal of the university/school partnership is the contextualization of teacher education studies – the attempt to achieve some sort of integration of theory and practice, whereby theory can in some manner give shape and meaning to school based experiences, and that the process of theorising can in turn be facilitated and enriched by observations of teacher and student behaviour in a school setting.

*Teaching Practice and Skills* is one of the two core Education subjects studied in Semester One of the Diploma course at LTUB, and is designed to help students become acquainted with the basic elements of the teaching-learning process, understand key principles of effective instruction and management, and gain experience in reflecting upon and analyzing their own teaching performance. Whilst the subject is intended as an induction to the students' first practicum undertaken early in May, there is potential benefit to students in being able to draw upon their classroom observations from the first six weeks of the year to illustrate principles or practices discussed in lectures or readings. As one student commented,

*“when we talked about classroom management or this or that, there were certainly opportunities where students would . . . drew upon their observational experiences to talk about issues that we came across . . . whether it was discipline – do you send a kid out of class or not – or I saw a teacher do this, and I don’t think I would have done that – yeah, so in that first semester people were able to bring what they observed to talk about further in Wilf’s class.”*

*“At that stage we had covered a certain amount of information (at University) that was directly about actual skills in teaching. So it was good to go into class and watch someone practising, and go ‘Wow! You’re doing this, this and this, and I like this and don’t like that . . .”*

Such comments lend pleasing support to the original notion of the partnership as a means of fostering reflective and critical thinking about teaching practice.

### **Lecture Program**

Whilst the observational component was predictably noted as the most valuable part of the program for most students, the initial tour of the senior secondary college and lectures by teachers and Regional Office personnel were generally well received by students.

Informal feedback at the time of the program had indicated a lot of enthusiasm and appreciation among students for the chance to hear about teaching from “real teachers” within a real school setting.

*“I think it’s very useful – the lectures seem slightly more relevant than the lectures at uni . . .”*

*“I found the first session very helpful, having people directly involved in secondary teaching offering their knowledge”*

*“interesting and different to my memories of a secondary school – the carpets, technology, no bells, and general level of resources was exceptional. . . .The atmosphere was relaxed and seemed quite ideal for the encouragement and facilitating of learning amongst its students.”*

Seven months and two teaching rounds later, students typically forget how little they knew at the start of the academic year; only a handful of those surveyed at the end of the year chose therefore to comment specifically on the lecture program. Survey results nevertheless indicated a reasonable level of satisfaction with the content and the delivery of the weekly lectures.

The program provided useful insights into current issues relating to teaching and learning at junior secondary level	SA	A	U	D	SD
	7	29	11	10	5

I found the program informative about post-compulsory education such as VET and VCAL programs	SA	A	U	D	SD
	6	40	12	4	3

I found the program informative about support resources offered by the Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regional Office	SA	A	U	D	SD
	5	18	22	15	4

I learnt a lot about the processes involved in being employed as a teacher	SA	A	U	D	SD

	4	30	22	8	3
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*“It was just good to hear people (a graduate teacher) who are out there in the field now, talking about their experiences, and I think for that to be at the beginning of DipEd gives you a good feel for the reality of what’s in store.”*

*“It was really nice just walking in to a school and seeing all the students walking around and seeing the teachers and having morning tea in the staffroom. . . . just to get that feel for what it’s actually like to be in a school, which you don’t get here at uni.”*

*“It was a good way to start the DipEd course – to be in school early and particularly to hear about a range of aspects of education and school operation.”*

Although some students noted a bias in lectures towards the concerns of a senior secondary college (despite a broadening of the content, following the pilot program), it was widely acknowledged that most of the lecture content was generalizable:

*“OK, the context was that particular school (the SSC), but these are very much the issues that we would probably face in a different kind of a school, whether it be a senior or junior campus. Thinking back, I was particularly pleased with the explanation about the curriculum; the issues around welfare were very interesting.”*

### **ICT Program**

Commenting on the ICT sessions in the third week of term, one student wrote, *“The level of IT was exciting but also scary. I’d imagine that non-IT people may be overwhelmed by the e-learning part”*. The words were prophetic, and anticipated a fairly strong divide among students in their reaction to this part of the program.

The group as a whole in their end-of-year survey responded positively to the ICT component:

The program gave me valuable insights into resources and appropriate uses of ICT to support learning in senior secondary school	SA	A	U	D	SD
	11	32	12	8	2

I gained valuable insights into resources and appropriate uses of ICT to support learning across all levels of secondary school	SA	A	U	D	SD
	7	28	18	9	3

Approximately one-fifth of the student surveyed actually named the ICT segment as the most valuable part of the program; an additional group were sufficiently impressed by the ICT sessions to suggest that much more emphasis should be placed on this area in the course as a whole.

It is clear, however, from both surveys and interviews that a dissenting minority experienced some frustration with the sessions on account of their limited computer skills, even while acknowledging the quality of the instruction and the relevance of the program content:

*“Well, the ICT component of this course and the Orientation at BSSC is the component that gives me the most grief because I am really inadequate in that department. . . . What was shown to us – the chat rooms and the forums and the . . . unravelling what BSSC has to offer students and staff through their technology of the*

*school – was mind boggling – it was mind-blowing – and the teachers that . . . held those sessions in the computer lab at (school) – they were fantastic, innovative and exciting and passionate – but for me it was just completely overwhelming . . .”*

Another concern related to the discrepancy between the technology resources at the host college – a “Navigator School” and international leader in the area, - and those found at the typical secondary in Victoria or elsewhere

*“So, on the one hand it’s great to know – but I just wonder how many schools . . . you would get a job in where you would really use this stuff when from my limited experience, finding computer rooms, access to computers is a real bug-bear for all teachers – . . . But look, it was really interesting – but I felt very, very overwhelmed.”*

If the ICT sessions sought in some way to inspire a sense of wonder and excitement among these future teachers at the educational potential of advances in technology, the point was evidently lost on those whose preoccupation is more with the here and now . . .

*“...like one man was showing us these . . . Internet capsules that cost like \$50,000 each and he said – this is what’s in your future – this is what you’ll be dealing with in the next 5 years...He was addressing how we should go about dealing with those amazing advances in technology rather than saying how do we deal with the minimal amount of technology in a school when we’ve got 5 computers to share for one class – how do we use those resources to their maximum. So, in that sense, I think there was a bit of cynicism.”*

Even this student, however, was impressed by the breadth of interest in ICT across the whole curriculum, which the program successfully demonstrated.

*“we had a lot of varied staff who came and presented to us, which was good - to see that teachers in English and in Woodwork and all those different types of areas did have a lot of experience in IT and could teach about things like that”.*

For an apparent majority of students - particularly those with solid computer skills – the ICT component had much to offer. Interviewees commented on a number of features which caught their attention:

*“Being introduced to sites such as Vivisimo and Educational search websites which are teacher based – (and) bring up all these different units of work, ideas, essays – things like that to help the teacher . . . That’s a great resource and I’m glad I found that because I’ve used that a number of times since then – I used it in my rounds.”*

*“Yeah, . . . talking about forums we could set up for students – the discussion forums on the computer set-ups within schools – I found that very useful.”*

*“I certainly found that most useful and informative – especially the area of exploring the Internet and using it as a teaching aid – I found that was quite a revelation – but I think one of the reasons why – is that I’ve got a positive attitude . . .”*

It is questionable how far “attitude” goes to explain the differences between those who relished every minute of the ICT program, and those who experienced some degree of bewilderment. Few would argue with the student who noted that

*“the ICT was good because it’s such a big part of education these days (and) it was good to have a look at it, even though a lot of it may not have related to . . . the different methods and teaching styles of some of the teachers.”*

The problems experienced by students typically related to their limited technological know-how, and to the need for more basic hands-on experience. That way

*“you’re obviously more engaged with what’s being discussed – I don’t know how you could do that with some of the things they were discussing – but overall, the ICT wasn’t too bad.”*

Lack of familiarity with the area also resulted in cognitive overload for several students who struggled with the fairly concentrated delivery of the sessions:

*“Honestly – I don’t remember a hell of a lot from those classes – I wrote excessive notes but when I sit down and read them, they’re not very real because we were being taught these concepts that we didn’t have enough time to make concrete.”*

### **Discussion and Implications**

The findings indicate that students perceived the main value of the program to be the induction process in classrooms that enabled individual students to engage with the realities of teaching in a congenial, relatively low-risk context where they were one-on-one with a teacher. The students were also generally appreciative of the insights they gained into the use of new technologies to support teaching and learning, although this introduction was overwhelming for some. Though keen to understand the context within which teachers work, students were less enthusiastic about the value of lectures on the regional setting which apparently failed to target their immediate concerns. Each of these findings has implications for (a) an appropriate ‘curriculum’ for a partnership program dealing with an introduction to schools, (b) the effective development of a staged engagement over a year with the appropriate theoretical and practical expertise, incorporating input from both university faculties and schools, and (c) the challenge of catering for pre-service teacher diversity of background and expertise within a partnership program focused on an immediate introduction to the practicalities of school life.

The findings suggest that an appropriate ‘curriculum’ for this kind of partnership at the outset of a course can focus profitably on classroom practicalities. Students’ informal tracking of teacher practices and decision-making was broadly perceived by the pre-service teachers to be an important starting point to the students’ knowledge base about effective teaching. Many of these teachers, who have been out of the school system for over ten years, acknowledged the striking degree of change to school routines, classroom practices, and learning approaches. In this regard the partnership works where both university staff and teachers in the program have an understanding of the needs and background expectations of the pre-service teachers.

Engagement with new technologies in schools, as the findings indicate, represents significant challenges for many of the pre-service teachers. This diversity of background knowledge means that some pre-service teachers feel de-skilled in this area at the outset of the course, and need considerable support throughout their course to cope with these challenges. Students acting as peer tutors during the academic program, supplementary written support material, and group-based projects can provide some strategies for addressing this issue. A further strategy might entail participant teachers providing ongoing or one-off support to the academic program to enable a sustained partnership throughout the year.

Catering at the outset of a course for pre-service student diversity of knowledge and skills poses a considerable challenge in a faculty/school partnership program. Because of time and resource constraints our program sought to link lecture-style delivery of material with a more individualized classroom approach. While this approach was generally supported by the pre-service teachers, there is scope to consider ways in which catering for learner diversity, a foundational principle in teaching for the twenty-first century, might be fully addressed in the practices of the pre-service program. Such an approach might entail diverse pathways and practices for pre-service teachers in the partnership program in the first six weeks of the course.

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## Diploma of Education Student Survey of Orientation Program 2004

Name:

If you are willing to participate in a short interview on this subject please circle the following: YES NO

Please fill in this survey circling the letter that most closely matches your response to each statement, where A indicates strongly agree, B agree, C uncertain, D disagree, and E strongly disagree.

1	The program provided useful insights into current issues relating to teaching and learning at junior secondary level.	<b>A B C D E</b>
2.	I found the program informative about post-compulsory education such as VET and VCAL programs.	<b>A B C D E</b>
3	The program increased my understanding of the need to be sensitive to students' social needs.	<b>A B C D E</b>
4	I found the program informative about support resources offered by the Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regional Office.	<b>A B C D E</b>
5	I learnt a lot about the processes involved in being employed as a teacher.	<b>A B C D E</b>
6	The program gave me valuable insights into appropriate uses of ICT to support learning in senior secondary school.	<b>A B C D E</b>
7	I gained valuable insights into appropriate uses of ICT to support learning across all levels of secondary school.	<b>A B C D E</b>
8	I found the program insightful in relation to the effective use of web research for learning.	<b>A B C D E</b>
9	I found the classroom experience program a valuable introduction to practical issues relating to effective teaching and learning.	<b>A B C D E</b>
10	The classroom experience was helpful in easing any concerns that I may have had about working with young people in a classroom situation.	<b>A B C D E</b>
11	The classroom experience program provided insights into the multi-layered nature of teachers' work.	<b>A B C D E</b>
12	The classroom experience program has taught me a lot about classroom communication.	<b>A B C D E</b>
13	The classroom experience program provided me with a valuable introduction into techniques of classroom management and supervision.	<b>A B C D E</b>

See questions on reverse of sheet

14. Which aspects of the orientation program did you find the most valuable in terms of your induction into teaching?
15. Which aspects of the program did you find the least useful in terms of orienting you to teaching?
16. What changes would you recommend for next year?
17. Are there any other aspects of the program on which you would like to comment?

