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**Becoming a Teacher: Pedagogy, partnership and
participatory evaluation in a school-based pre-service
program**

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Abstract

This paper describes a project situated within the core pedagogy and curriculum subjects of a Graduate Diploma and Bachelor of Teaching program at The University of Melbourne that investigates the development of teacher pedagogy. The project was developed in response to key issues identified in the research literature about teacher education, pedagogy, and school-university partnerships. While pedagogical change is often cited as a crucial element of reform (Kincheloe 2004, 2005) little has been published that presents the perspective of the emerging teacher. The project aims to contribute to the small body of ethnographic research (Evans, 2002; Britzman 2003) about the narratives of beginning teachers as well as the issues involved in developing school-based cohorts. Approximately 80 pre-service teachers working within school-based cohorts across four primary and secondary schools were invited to write narratives or to engage in reflective practice about the pedagogy of teachers they observed and their own pedagogical development. A small number of students were subsequently interviewed. The study also included the education students undertaking some participatory evaluation about the cohort process.

The research narrative: An introduction

In 2004 a school-university partnership was established between The University of Melbourne and Collingwood College, which enabled two core pedagogy and curriculum subjects for the Graduate Diploma and Bachelor of Teaching programs to become school-based for one tutorial group of twenty five students. Following positive feedback from staff at the school and the pre-service teachers, it was decided to extend the opportunities for students to undertake this innovative mode of learning and subject delivery. Three school-university partnerships were formed in 2006, enabling three additional classes to be school-based. This paper - a work in progress - reviews the piloting of the school-based delivery of the core pedagogy and curriculum subjects from the pre-service teachers' perspectives of their experience. We privilege the voices of pre-service teachers in the discussion of the preliminary findings and interweave their voices throughout the text.

According to Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) and Kincheloe (2004, 2005), very little research exists that includes the perspectives, questions and voices of prospective teachers - the dominant voices being those of the university-based academics. In order to attempt some redress of this imbalance, we adopted a participatory evaluation approach (Papineau & Kiely, 1996) that allowed our pre-service teachers some input into the framing of our data collection, in addition to including their voices in the discussion of the findings. Our paper begins by connecting with the literature that underpins our research, and outlining the study's research methods. This foregrounds an overview of the cohorts' approaches to the development of teacher pedagogy, which is followed by a discussion of student perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the school-based delivery of the two core pedagogy and curriculum subjects.

Literature grounding the study

According to the recent Report of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), *Studying Teacher Education* (Cochran Smith & Zeichner, 2005), one of the most heavily debated issues in education is the effectiveness of different kinds of teacher education programs. Given the extensive range of literature that addresses teacher education programs, for the purposes of this paper we have highlighted some key readings across three domains that have influenced the shaping of our study: pedagogy, school-university partnerships and teacher knowledge.

Pedagogy

Conceptualising pedagogy was a central aim for each of the three cohorts. Pedagogy is a complex term that evokes an image of pre-service teacher education for many. It is a word that teachers report belongs in universities and that they rarely use (White, 2006). Some teachers mistakenly use 'pedagogy' interchangeably with 'strategy'. White, Scholtz and Williams (2006) suggest that the Victorian 'Principals of Learning and Teaching' train-the-trainer program does just this. Similarly, Anderson (2005), argues that the complexities involved in pedagogy have not been understood, or they have been denied, and suggests that the word 'pedagogy' has many different meanings.

Pedagogy determines how teachers think and act. Pedagogy affects students' lives and expectations. Pedagogy is the framework for discussions about teaching and the process by which we do our jobs as teachers. Pedagogy is a body of knowledge that defines us as professionals. Pedagogy is a belief that all children can learn and that it is the duty of the adult to participate in that growth and development. Pedagogy is a definition of culture and a means to transmit that culture to the next generation (p. 53).

Anderson's definition suggests it has something to do with both the 'art' and the 'science' of teaching, learning and the profession. Doll (2005) refers to 'pedagogy of practice' which he argues is not a pedagogy of mimesis, but a process of transformation of 'an individual's nascent, natural instincts, interests, powers, abilities into mature, reflective, successful and productive ones (p. 55). His use of the terms 'mimesis' and 'nascent' resonates with our reconceptualisation of pedagogy and our fundamental purpose of the cohort study, which was to support the education students in their process of becoming.

Our focus on developing learning communities of education students within and in relation to school communities has also led us to further consider what we mean by pedagogy. After reading the transcripts of the group interviews we were struck with the extent to which the students focused on quite specific issues rather than just their individual development of knowledge *about* pedagogy. They seemed to learn *through* (Gardner, 1993, 2003; White, 2006) the establishment of community and the process of articulating their developing beliefs through telling stories. After carefully considering the data gathered during this study, we now forward this new conception of pedagogy as the need to belong, the need to theorise about one's developing knowledge and the need to articulate beliefs and values.

Axiology, coming from 'the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics or religion' (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 200) concerns basic beliefs and values. Our students articulated their developing beliefs and values as an important part of their pedagogical development. Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that relates to the nature of being which, in our context, refers to the basic human need to feel a sense of belonging. We argue that our focus on establishing a community of learners (Roghoff, Matusov & White, 1996; Matusov, 1999, 2001; Roghoff *et al.*, 2001) with a clearly articulated and demonstrated culture of valuing trust, support and inclusion has been influential in student understanding of pedagogy. Our students learned by *belonging* to this community, rather than just talking about this as an element of pedagogy. We attempted to have 'our pre-service teachers work together as 'knowledge producers, knowledge workers who pursue their own intellectual development' (Kincheloe, 2004, p.51).

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge, and in our study this came to mean knowledge about pedagogy itself in the first instance. This is, of course, quite different from the more specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of which Kincheloe (2005) and others speak. In our context, we mean the way teachers interact with students and how they establish expectations, negotiate tasks to be completed and ways in which students undertake their learning. In the second semester, the

Collingwood and Fitzroy cohorts worked on independent collaborative research projects. In the end of year two-day conference another layer of epistemological understanding was revealed as pre-service students demonstrated their sophisticated knowledge of and interaction with contemporary curriculum theory.

School-university partnerships

The pre-service cohort experiences we designed were grounded in a tradition of school-university partnerships. Partnerships have been relatively commonplace for many years – initially for preparing pre-service teachers for the profession (Toomey *et al.*, 2005). Over the last decade formal and explicit partnerships between schools and universities have been set up for the renewal and development of teacher professionalism. Examples include the Innovative Links project (see Beck *et al.*, 1999; Groundwater-Smith, 1999; Peters, 2002; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995), the Quality Teacher Program (see Perry *et al.*, 2002; Johnson & Williams, 1999) and the Teacher Renewal through Partnership Program, a two-to three-year program instigated by the Association for Independent Schools. Ure acknowledges that ‘there is a growing recognition of a need to see the teacher education curriculum as being constructed through collaborative processes involving three key stakeholders: the student teachers, schools and universities’ (2004, p. 6). A decade on from the nationally funded partnerships, schools are initiating their own links with universities as is the case in the Fitzroy, Collingwood and Carlton cohorts. We would argue they are seeking what Toomey *et al.* (2005) claim as symbiosis – that is mutual interests are used to shape the relationship.

In the four cohorts we have attempted to achieve what Toomey *et al.* (2005) refer to as a practice centred, knowledge creation conception of partnerships. Carpenter *et al.* describe this as an ‘orderly and evidence-based reconstruction of university course work so that it supports teachers’ (and teacher educators’) inquiry into practice’ (2001, p. 5). To move beyond instrumental partnerships that function as a supervisory and monitoring role for faculties of education and as the ‘power over’ relationship, partnership building must occur that involve *negotiated agreements* (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001). In some instances, this may involve a research project – ‘a collaborative engagement by school, teachers, student teachers and teacher educators with a question or a task regarded as having practical importance for the school or community organization’ (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001, p. 4) – an approach undertaken in second semester by three cohorts.

Negotiated agreements eventuated to some degree at the Fitzroy and the Collingwood cohorts. Yet the sophisticated relationships with schools and other community organisations that these partnerships require, and the subsequent intensification of teacher educators’ work have been identified as constraints by Toomey *et al.* (2005). These very constraints were raised as issues in an earlier attempt for a schools-based teacher education approach at the Melbourne College of Advanced Education (Stringer & Wilson, 1985), the institution which preceded the current Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.

Teacher knowledge

Cochran-Smith refers to *knowledge for teachers* as teachers’ ‘theoretical frameworks, beliefs, attitudes, values, pedagogical strategies, ways of knowing, and dispositions’

(2002, p. 15). She asserts that local knowledge of practice and working within inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work enables teachers at any level of service to connect their work to larger issues and to learn better when they generate what she terms *local knowledge of practice*. These ideas resonate with what each cohort was trying to achieve, albeit in different ways. Consistent with a socially constructivist pedagogy we advocate a transformative approach to teacher pedagogy that extends reflective practice through processes of enquiry. Questions Cherry Collins (2004, p. 237) raises about the dilemma faced with pre-service educators resonate with our own experiences: ‘How do we help pre-service teachers to understand the uncertainty of theory and the ubiquity of theory? And how, having understood that, are students to be helped to appreciate the importance of good theory?’

Epistemologically, Clandinin and Connelly go some way to addressing these issues. ‘Professional knowledge landscapes’(1995, 1996) signify teacher knowledge *outside* the classroom. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) comment that they have increasingly seen ‘teacher knowledge in terms of narrative life history’ (p. 2) and that ‘these narratives of experience, are both personal – reflecting a person’s life history – and social – reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live’ (p. 2). They emphasise the importance of context and argue that ‘knowledge was both formed and expressed in context [and that] this context is immensely complex’. It is this very context that we hope our pre-service teachers will explore in addition to what Connelly and Clandinin refer to as ‘personal practical knowledge’ – the knowledge situated in teachers’ past experiences, their present mind and body, and in their future plans and actions. However, this theoretical work falls short of supporting teachers to appreciate the importance of good theory.

Methods and data collection

One of the aims of this project was to use evaluation processes to better understand how well school-based classes for two core subjects in the DipEd and BTeach courses worked. We were also interested in pre-service teachers’ perspectives. Specifically, What was their experience like? To what extent did they begin to think about pedagogy? and How did they engage with it? In order to address these questions we chose a participatory evaluation approach that would ‘represent the values and concerns’ (Papineau & Kiely, 1996) of both pre-service teachers and their lecturers in shaping the program for the following year. As the school-based delivery of subjects was an innovation, in this sense, it was a departure from the conventional mode of delivery. The intention of using a participatory approach was to make explicit the structures and processes of the approach and to identify how they impacted on the pre-service teachers’ experiences.

In the final class for the first semester, students were asked to respond in writing to four open-ended questions.

1. What is worthwhile about the cohort way of working?
2. What are some of the limitations about the cohort way of working?
3. In what ways could the cohort be improved?
4. How has this way of working developed your knowledge of pedagogy?

Open-ended questions were included as these often ‘contain the gems of information that otherwise may not have been caught by a questionnaire’ (Cohen *et al.* 2000, p. 255).

We proposed to interview a small sample from the groups as part of the evaluation of the cohort model. We were particularly interested in getting pre-service teachers’ perspectives of the program and we asked them to write questions that would be used to form the basis of the interview.

Each cohort spent 30 minutes in small groups (4-5 participants) to discuss their responses and to reach consensus about the three most important questions to ask student teachers in an interview. These questions were included in the final set of interview questions.

1. What have you gained from the cohort experience?
2. Do you feel that you have missed out of anything by being part of the cohort. If so, what?
3. How has the cohort option made a difference to how you see yourself as a teacher? Has it increased your readiness?
4. Did you feel part of the school community? Why? Why not?
5. Has your pedagogy changed over time in the cohort due to your involvement at the school?
6. If you could go back to the start of the year, would you choose the cohort again or the regular classroom?
7. How did the first semester support you in your second semester project?

In the second semester, a simple survey was designed that used a Likert rating scale, and two open-ended questions which asked students to provide a general comment about their experiences in the cohort together with suggestions to improve the cohort approach. The attraction of a Likert scale was its potential to tap respondents’ attitudes, perceptions and opinions of and to ‘provide more opportunity than dichotomous questions for rendering data more sensitive and responsive to respondents’ Cohen *et al.* 2000, p. 255). Again the opportunity to elicit further ‘gems of information’ was the reasoning for the open-ended questions.

The following table sets out the numbers of students involved in the program. The schools in which the cohorts were based were all inner city government schools. Students in all schools were representative of range of socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Subject	Cohorts	No. of Students Semester 1	No. of Students Semester 2
Learning & Teaching (Semester 1) Curriculum & Assessment (Semester 2)	Collingwood: P-12	26	22
	Fitzroy HS and PS	32	23
	Carlton PS	26	16
	Total no. of Students	84	61

Table 1 School settings for the cohorts

Four pre-service teachers from each of the above groups (12 in total) were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews for approximately 30 minutes after their studies were completed. The interviews were audio-taped with the permission of pre-service teachers and these were later transcribed.

Establishment of the Collingwood and Fitzroy Cohorts

In 2006, pre-service teachers were invited to join one of the two cohorts: Collingwood and Fitzroy. Initial information forwarded to all students was followed up with telephone and email conversations with those who expressed interest.

This group of students will work together in both 'Learning & Teaching' (Semester 1) and 'Curriculum & Assessment' (Semester 2) at Schools. The general requirements for these subjects, including attendance at lectures are as for other workshop groups. The class will run on Tuesdays and Wednesday morning from 8.30am until 11.30am on the school sites. Students will gain experience in both primary and secondary classrooms. One aim of the program is to quickly become immersed in school culture and to have regular contact with teachers and students.

Students in this cohort will **not** undertake formal placements at either school. The approach taken builds directly on the content of the subject 'Learning & Teaching' in that it begins with an exploration of personal and professional identity. In first semester, students will write about their observations of school life using a range of narrative techniques and genres. Links will be made between observation, writing and pedagogy throughout. In second semester, in the subject, 'Curriculum & Assessment' students will form teams to work with teacher teams to investigate curriculum issues. Students will use writing and aspects of narrative (voice, perspective, stance) to clarify the relationship between curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and contemporary social issues.

Further, these students were given clear expectations about their involvement.

It is expected that students enrolling in this cohort are willing to:

- work collaboratively with others;
- share their experience through writing (no prior writing experience or expertise is required);
- remain in the cohort for semesters 1 and 2; and
- work independently and flexibly (Handout to students, February 2006).

The cohort groups met weekly at the schools and quickly established themselves as supportive communities of inquiry that encourage dialogue about pedagogy and the process of 'becoming' teachers (Britzman, 2003) their experience. The community of writer-enquirers was conceptualised as a development of Laurel Richardson's (2000) celebrated text, 'Writing as a form of Inquiry.' In addition to tutorial room dialogue, the focus on individual writing and, in the second semester, research processes, the students spent time in school classrooms at the partner schools. They were also involved in the broader school community functions including 'open days' and actively supported this aspect of school life. At the end of the year, the two cohorts

were involved in a two-day conference where their research projects of the second semester were reported.

A narrative approach

The emphasis on this cohort approach was not on creative writing, but on exploration of pedagogy and curriculum using a narrative approach. To guide the narrative aspect of this study, three questions (Hay & White, 2005) were used:

1. What happened?
2. How do you know?
3. What does it mean?

These questions are intended to highlight the relationship between events and other elements of the narrative (e.g. voice, perspective, stance, sequence of events, 'plot'). During a workshop with one cohort of students, the basic questions above were explored in relation to students' recollections of pedagogy. Further, the supplementary questions in brackets below were used to amplify and clarify certain elements of the students' stories.

1. What happened? (Is there a sequence of events?)
2. How do you know? (Is there more than one view of these events?)
3. What does it mean? (Which elements are significant and why in constructing an overall narrative?)

Examination of the narratives contributed throughout the year suggested an unsurprising split between students who gave an account of some incident in realistic reportage fashion and those who saw an opportunity to be more creative, fictive and imaginative. Many students didn't venture beyond questions 1 and 2 or, in dealing with question 3, limited their analysis of significance to their own perspective. A handful explored the variety of possibilities offered up by changes in voice and perspective. From the experience of the workshop and the writing which emerged from this project, it appears that there is a broad conceptual gap between student understanding of, and enthusiasm for, writing stories about teaching and learning, and understanding of a method of writing based on theory about the elements of narrative. At first glance it would seem that what is required is more detailed analysis of these elements, such as voice, perspective, characterisation, in the context of particular stories a 'review' or critique of the stories, in time-honoured literary-discipline fashion. However, this does not really seem to serve the purposes of a form of writing or, in Richardson's terms, 'inquiry' that is focused on professional reflection rather than 'creativity'.

There is a clear need for this kind of approach to uses of narrative in education. To date, much of the work in pre-service teacher education, including our own in the Postgraduate Diploma of Education at Melbourne, has consisted either of stimulatory stories contributed by staff (see, for example our stories 'Just who do you think you are?' And 'Too good for me' (Hay, 2004) followed by workshop sessions, or 'scenario' exercises, in which students assume the role of teacher and find a solution to a problem. Somewhere between this limited role-playing, which can obscure as much as it reveals, and an approach which, unfortunately, as in the case of this project, tends to divide the students into 'writers' and others, there appears to be a way of using narrative, and even narrative theory, to highlight pedagogy.

The experience of this project suggests that a simple question method, such as the one above (which was initially used with pre-service early childhood educators to improve story-telling skills) may well help students understand the complexities of any 'story' of pedagogy. The area of greatest difficulty and promise - it seems is implicit in the question 'How do you know?'. Our students responded to this as though it were self-evident 'I know because I ...saw it, heard it, was told it', but when we asked them to focus on how their perception might have been influenced by leaping prematurely to the third question ('What does it mean'), we began to expose the context of the story and the role of the narrator as significant elements in any account of pedagogy in action. We also began to highlight the way the voice and perspective of the narrator actually influenced both the selection and ordering of events and the meanings that were available to an audience/reader. In order to move students' observations and reflections on pedagogy beyond the recount, it will be necessary to develop ongoing workshops in which the range of genres of student writing is enhanced with improvisation, radical change of perspective and above all, complete reinterpretation of the meaning of events. We will need, over time, to collect a body of narratives of pedagogy and apply the questions illustratively in school-university workshops so that students can begin to see a way of representing pedagogy that is not limited either by pragmatic problem-solving or the ability to engage in 'creative' writing.

Establishment of the Carlton Cohort

Lee Street Primary School approached the University of Melbourne to form a partnership in late 2005, enabling BTeach students to undertake the core subjects Learning & Teaching' (Semester 1) and 'Curriculum & Assessment' (Semester 2) as school-based. An e-mail was circulated to BTeach pre-service teachers students inviting them to join the cohort with the additional offer of being able to undertake a practicum placement at the school. Participation would, however, mean an 8am start to accommodate subjects held on campus and would involve an hour's tutorial followed by an hour and a half hour in the classroom. Travel time of half an hour was built in, which meant the class was reduced by half an hour.

A reflective practice approach

We required students to reflect on their emergent pedagogies in the context of a journal to be kept over the course of the semester. It was intended that the journal be a tool for analysis and introspection – a dialogue with oneself (Holly, 2003). We hoped this would become an on-going practice in which students thought about who they are personally and professionally, what their beliefs are, and the impact these would have on pedagogical actions they will initiate as teachers (Dixon et al., 2004). We wanted students to use their journal to puzzle about their learning (Holly, 2003) and to use writing as inquiry – what Richardson and St Pierre (2005) describe as a condition of possibility for producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently.

Journal entries each week focussed on the interrelated theme for the lecture, the workshop, and the readings that had been assigned for the week. Prior to the students' allocated time in the classroom, the focus for classroom observations and subsequent reflections were discussed and clarified. Our awareness that teacher knowledge often remains tacit underpinned the desire for our students to become *reflective practitioners* (Schön, 1999). In the tradition of Dewey (1933) we wanted reflection to be an active and persistent consideration of their beliefs and knowledge. Yet, we were

also mindful that reflection can be carried out ‘mechanically and ineffectively’ (Mason, 2002, p. 17) whereby people simply think back vaguely about incidents that were observed. Whereas, we wanted our pres-service teachers to consider how their own beliefs and values have impacted on their interpretation of an even or critical incident, what impact this may have on their future actions and practice. Perhaps the three questions (Hay & White, 2005) used in the other cohorts would have been useful to include.

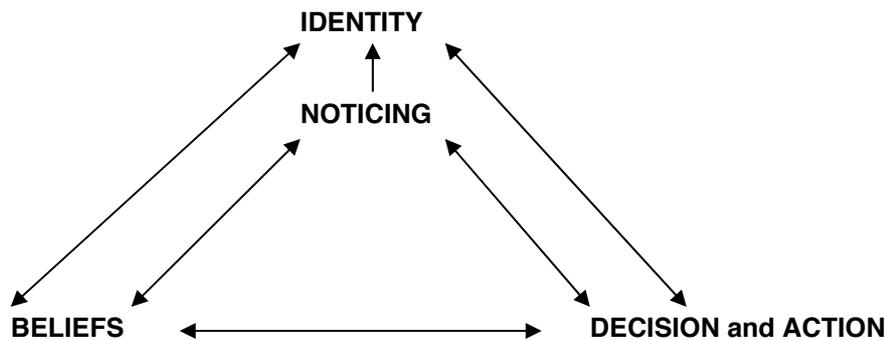


Figure 1 Shaping personal and professional theory (Dixon *et al.*, 2004)

We asked the student to focus on ‘noticing’ during their visits to classrooms. We explained this according to Mason’s description of ‘disciplined rather than sporadic and serendipitous noticing’ (2002, p. 61). While his technique of noticing applied to practitioner research, we believed it was equally valid in this context. We also used Figure 1 as a means of inviting students to think about the three independent aspects: identity, beliefs and action – and to note how they continually interact with each other in shaping teachers’ personal and professional identity. Students were encouraged to be mindful of the three elements in Figure 1 and of how interactions took place between them. In doing so we wanted students to become increasingly aware of their individual subjectivities and to become not only reflective but reflexive – that is to think about how their personal beliefs and experiences have impacted on their perceptions of classroom observations.

Students’ journal entries varied considerably – some were simply recounts of what they observed, some merely fulfilment of what they viewed as a hurdle task, which appeared to lack the discipline we had been trying to instil, and some were highly personalised responses to observations of teacher pedagogy and their own emergent pedagogy. Occasional snap shots appeared in their journals of reflexivity and of emergent pedagogy, described by one student as being in its embryonic stage, as seen in this journal extract.

Katherine had a very strong culture of rewards and prizes with table points for good behaviour (which constituted a quiet working environment (whispers only), and immediate attention whenever the teacher was speaking or giving instructions. This led to the ‘volume meter’ on the board showing indicators from silent-whispers-quiet voices-too loud!! These strategies seemed a little extreme (and similar to my own primary classroom experiences). However, it definitely seemed to achieve its object ... I

don't want my classroom like this. I want children talking and discussing their ideas and experiences with each other.

What this snapshot also reveals is a shaping of what Clandinin and Connelly refer to as 'personal practical knowledge' – a connection with the 'teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions' (1988, p. 25).

With the benefit of hindsight a workshop which familiarised students with the three major theories that guided our work would have been beneficial: Mason's (2002) theory of noticing; Dixon *et al.*'s (2004) personal and professional theory; and Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) concept of writing for inquiry.

What did student perspectives, questions and voices reveal about the cohort approach?

Our findings are discussed in relation to some of the key themes that emerged from data analysis of surveys completed by the pre-service teachers across all cohorts at the end of each semester and semi- structured small group interviews conducted mid-way through the second semester. Findings sometimes varied across cohorts, although several dominant themes clearly emerged.

Positive Experiences

Of the 38 returned surveys (68% return rate), 85% of pre-service teachers across the cohorts agreed that they would repeat the cohort experience and 95% agreed or strongly agreed that it had been a positive experience. This was somewhat surprising given the limitations and concerns pre-service teachers had raised in the surveys. Seventy-one percent of the pre-service teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that the cohort experience provided insight into how schools worked. Of those who disagreed, 23% were from the Fitzroy Cohort. Possible reasons for this were that the cohort was in its first year of establishment and the discontinuation of school-based classes in second semester. The 100% strongly agree response from the Carlton Cohort can be attributed in part to the continuation of the school-based classes and the opportunity for students who were dissatisfied to take up a University tutorial in second semester instead of a school-based cohort.

Comments on the open-ended questions in response to what was 'worthwhile' frequently related to the opportunity to be re-familiarised with a school environment prior to their first practicum placement. Pre-service teachers from the Fitzroy Cohort claimed that *actually witnessing how a classroom works before we went on placement was helpful - settled our nerves about being in a classroom before placement. Getting into classrooms – we got a feel of the school since most of us haven't been in a school since we left.* As a Collingwood Cohort respondent attested in the first survey: *Being in a school environment allowed us as students to re-connect with school life and gain deeper understanding of the workings of a school* and a Carlton Cohort respondent noted that *it is good to be able to observe teaching as we were straight away thrown into it on our first school placement.* For some pre-service teachers it was just being off campus: *Great to be out of uni – frees your thinking up a bit.* And for many pre-service teachers it was being in a real teaching environment – *facing issues real*

teachers face and having first hand primary school and classroom experience that appealed. In the Carlton cohort interview the pre-service teachers recalled:

When we were doing assessment my teacher immediately offered to show me student portfolios.

And when Anne [the deputy head] heard we'd been talking about assessment in our tute she gave us a presentation on portfolios the next week.

Yes, and Chris [the principal] came and spoke to us about school policies when she heard us questioning an issue on excursion payments.

However, one of the most frequent claims about why the cohort experience was 'worthwhile' related to camaraderie and the notion of becoming a member of a community or a group. This appeared to be valued above everything else. Students viewed the cohorts as *more friendly than a normal tute* and remarked on *a real sense of group and group dynamics* and *a greater sense of community than [in] a standard tute*. Several respondents felt there was *a group identity to draw on*. It was also mentioned that trust developed between cohort members and a close bonding through shared conversations and experiences.

As one Collingwood cohort student stated:

Some great connections between students were made. There has been a real dialogue and an ownership of the progress. If I see another student from this cohort walking into a lecture, or on a train station our shared connection with this group provides a basis on which great conversations about teaching and life have grown – far more so than any other tute group.

In the final survey students again commented on the sense of really *feeling part of the community – in such a big program it is easy to get lost, but the cohort was a great way to feel part of something – I felt like part of a group rather than an individual learner*. These comments remind us of what a lonely place the university campus can be and how important it is to be and feel part of a community of learners (Roghoff, Matusov & White, 1996; Matusov, 1999, 2001; Roghoff *et al.*, 2001). While we espouse the theory for classrooms, this essential requirement can often be overlooked within the university environment.

The less positive aspects of the cohort approach

A strong commonality across the cohort responses was a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty about choosing the cohort option. Despite the acknowledged gains, a notable number of pre-service teachers felt they were missing some important aspects of the course and that they may be disadvantaged by this choice. At the end of the first semester, student responses from the Fitzroy Cohort included: *Wonder if students in uni are learning something we are not. It didn't feel like a real class and I am concerned that we are missing out on more formal teaching aspects of the subject. There is less time for discussing course work and assignments and lectures.*

Comments from the Carlton Cohort revealed similar anxieties: *I feel like I am learning less than other classes and not getting a great grasp on the theories. The amount of time in the classroom is probably a bit too short and I am not getting the three hours of 'seminar time' with my peers*. Likewise, responses from the Collingwood Cohort hinted at being disadvantaged: *I am left wondering what they do in other tutes that we are missing. I felt we missed out on some of the activities they*

did at uni. Expectations at the beginning were that there was to be more class work and content (teaching strategies, tips etc.) This expectation was not met.

However, only two students raised this as an issue in the second semester survey, which suggests that this insecurity had dissipated. Those who stayed on were committed to the cohort approach. At the end of the first semester, it was revealed that more than a third of the Fitzroy cohort had been “allocated” into this group by the computer system (Allocate8). They did not choose it, and students in the Carlton cohort were given the option to swap over to a University based tutorial.

Lack of observation time and actual class time was another consistent limitation raised by respondents in the three cohorts. *Time observing in classrooms was rather limited. I was hoping for more time – I only had four hours in the classroom. There was not enough time to settle in. Time in the classroom was rushed and I always felt I had to rush off back to uni ... not enough time to talk with our lecturers and peers.* This was also frequently raised as a way in which the cohort approach could be improved: *We need a full morning or at least up to recess in the classroom observing.* In the second semester, the time allocation was changed for the Carlton Cohort so that there was an hour of interrupted classroom Survey responses and the interviews with pre-service teachers identified this as a great improvement. However, with the foci on team based projects at the Fitzroy and Collingwood cohorts, survey responses revealed that pre-service teachers lamented the lack of classroom time, despite their enjoyment of an inquiry learning approach: *I would have liked to have more practical experience in the classroom so that I can get more understanding about the ‘real’ teaching world – wish there were more classes* and some students noted that *there was a sense of missing out on what people were doing in the regular C&A tutes.*

Perhaps the most concerning limitation raised by the respondents to the both surveys was that *sometimes [we] feel like intruders in the school or like an invader in the environment – other teaching staff did not know who we were in the staff room, or they felt awkward. One thing I really dislike is feeling awkward – I like to come across comfortable and like I fit in. I was worried he [the teacher] did not want us there and if he had been informed about not giving us more ‘admin work’.* Overall, there was a sense of discomfort and displacement expressed by a number of respondents across the cohorts. Pre-service teachers attributed this to *a need for more concrete discussions with the school and more importantly the actual classroom teacher.* A respondent from the Carlton Cohort noted: *my impression was that the classroom teachers were not sufficiently briefed about the cohort’s purpose in general- so it was almost an unexpected burden on them.* A staff survey of responses to the school-based classes initiated by the principal of the Carlton Cohort confirmed that the purpose of the program was unclear to her staff. Communication between the staff had been inadequate, as had the enactment of collaborative processes (Ure 2004, p. 6). Partnership building (Toomey *et al.*, 2005) needed to occur through *negotiated agreements* (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001) among staff, pre-service teachers and university staff.

As one pre-service student at the Fitzroy Cohort wryly observed, *due to the experimental nature, we were part of the empirical mapping out of the subject for the future. I think a long period of planning followed by implementation would be better.*

In a telling general comment in the first semester survey, a Fitzroy Cohort respondent said, *I would like to repeat the experience, but with more meaningful contact with the school, staff and students.* And in the final survey a student added to this stating that *we were simply not involved enough. It felt like we were located in the school for the sake of it rather than being part of the school community.* Such comments are indicative of the sophisticated relationships with schools that these partnerships require (Toomey *et al.*, 2005) and imply the need for a subsequent intensification of teacher educators' work if partnerships are to succeed (Stringer, 1985; Toomey *et al.*, 2005).

Learning about pedagogy

In the literature review it was acknowledged that pedagogy is a complex term (White, Scholtz and Williams, 2006) but we have stated that conceptualising of pedagogy was a central aim of the three cohorts. Our analyses of the different data sources suggest that in many instances, pre-service teachers are struggling to flesh out and personalise what pedagogy means to them. Typical comments across the cohorts were *I still struggle with the concept of pedagogy, and my knowledge of pedagogy is patchy and incomplete. I still haven't grasped pedagogy and it's a term that is still hazy for me.* Yet in the second semester survey 89% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the cohort experience enhanced their knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum. In the first survey, some students were already making claims such as *it helped 'breathe' practice into theory, made pedagogy relative via experience and reflection - experiential learning!!! It helped. Seeing different teachers and a variety of teaching practices - snapshots of their pedagogy - helped in developing our own pedagogy. A deep insight into 'how schools work' made my beliefs about teaching and learning clearer.* School-based classes provided for some *an authentic look at teaching environments, where pedagogy is more ... present and ... on the table compared to other environments.*

A number of pre-service teachers acknowledged questioning the emphasis on theory. *In first semester I questioned what's the point - it's all about me what I think - I thought just teach me how to teach - but with the start of the Curriculum Assessment subject I started to see the importance of my values and beliefs and how these will influence my own approaches to assessment and curriculum.* These comments connect with Collins (2004) of the dilemma we have in helping students appreciate theory when they are simply bent on being given 'the recipe'. Other respondents claimed, *the ability to speak with practising teachers, and the opportunity to see them in action was pivotal in helping me bring it [pedagogical understanding] together.* A response from the Carlton Cohort, however, was more cautious, acknowledging that *the subject has helped me make links between theory and practice, pedagogy and curriculum, but I am not totally convinced that being part of the cohort in the school necessarily supported this.* Perhaps this comment best expresses our own tentativeness and uncertainty as to what extent the school-based delivery of classes have assisted in developing pre-service teachers' knowledge of pedagogy.

Conclusion

The pilot study has indicated that the pre-service teachers value the opportunities that school-based subjects offer. Over the past year, we have observed the potential for the cohorts to be highly productive learning communities, in which pre-service teachers

are able to theorize and construct their own 'personal practical knowledge' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 1999) through immersion in the 'local knowledge of practice' Cochran-Smith (2002). However, the study has also identified tensions and concerns that require immediate attention if the cohort program is to continue. At this pilot stage we deliberately privileged the voice of our pre-service teachers, but in effect the study has silenced the voice of the teachers, albeit unintentionally. We acknowledge the necessity to be more inclusive of their voices in the partnership building and the negotiating of agreements (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001) that we undertake with the school. From the outset we must develop on-going communication with teachers, make the purpose of the cohorts explicit, ensure they are fully cognisant of the program content, and seek their input to it. This groundwork needs to be undertaken prior to the commencement of pre-service teachers in the schools so that respectful relationships can develop among the three key stakeholders: teachers, university staff and the pre-service students.

We have become increasingly aware that school-based classes require a high level of commitment and are far more time consuming than classes held on campus. We have also learnt that school-based approaches do not suit all pre-service teachers and believe that we need to articulate more clearly what the expectations are of those who choose to participate in a cohort approach. Given that we are committed to a focus on the development of teacher pedagogy, more structure and support to assist pre-service teachers in their theoretical framing of practice and in constructing their 'personal practical knowledge' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 1999) is critical. As stated previously, in order to move pre-service teachers' observations and reflections on pedagogy beyond the basic recount, it will be necessary to develop ongoing workshops so that links between observation, writing and pedagogy can be made more clearly. To enhance students' engagement with the narrative approach, we will need, over time, to collect a body of narratives of pedagogy and apply the questions identified earlier, in school-university workshops so that students can begin to see a way of representing pedagogy as their narratives. A more unified approach is intended so that these workshops can operate across the cohorts. Importantly, we need to involve pre-service teachers in the analyses of their narratives, as part of the participatory research approach, which did not occur in the pilot phase.

As with most new projects, this has not been a smooth ride. However, we can now build on the learning outcomes from the pilot study and hopefully offer a more refined understanding to other years and contexts. An e-mail received after the final school-based class from one of the school principals has affirmed the progress made with partnership building – a sound basis for the continuation of this innovation:

All of us have been so impressed by the standard of the cohort who has remained with us. They will be an asset to any school; they are a very talented and hard working group of young teachers and the future leaders of our schools, which gives me heart knowing that education has a bright future. [We] look forward to continuing the partnership in 2007.

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