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Developing An Inclusive Model For 'Teacher' Professional Development

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This paper reports on the findings of a recent teaching grant awarded in 2004, from the Australian Teacher Educator's Association (ATEA). The grant enabled a professional development teaching (PDT) team to be established at Norlane West primary School, Geelong. The team comprised of twelve 'teachers' who included two teacher educators, six Year 5 and 6 teachers and four student teachers. The aim of the project was to examine how a team of new and experienced teachers developed and changed their teaching repertoire and their professional identity through a process of teaching, learning and reflection. What made this particular project unique was the inclusion of student teachers in the PDT team and the action reflection cycle adopted by all members of the team. The reflective cycle consisted of a teacher educator, teacher and the team of student teachers all participating in a filmed teaching experience, editing and reflecting on their own teaching and then sharing the video with the other members of the PDT team. This individual and team reflection process proved to be very successful and an effective model for influencing 'teacher' professional development.

A 'new' model for teacher professional development

Teacher educators are often frustrated by tensions between the campus-based and school-based learning of their students. There is little communication between school and campus, and often student experiences in one setting do not connect with the other (Putnam & Borko, 1997). Placement as an apprentice to a single classroom teacher limits student awareness of options and does not encourage reflection and critique. Teacher educators have little educational input and their role is limited to assessment and troubleshooting. Teachers are left to remedy the inadequacies in students' practical preparation brought about by campus-based teacher educator's disjunction from practice.

There is an urgent need for a better way of using school placements to prepare student teachers to enter the profession. A more adequate preparation of teachers would help overcome entrenched beliefs about education that students bring from their own history of schooling and which are hard to change through campus-based experiences (Day, 1999; Richardson, 1996). It should prevent current problems of early career teacher drop out caused by a mismatch between student preparation and employer expectation (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

This paper reports on the early stages of development of a model for the placement of students in schools. The paper also aims to document how the model contributes to the development of a teacher repertoire and teacher identity to serve as the basis for future professional growth (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The paper focuses particularly on teachers' use of video to reflect on their teaching. While the literature makes claims for the value of reflection, it is hard to find a detailed account of what it means to reflect on teaching and how this reflection in fact contributes to teacher development.

The model described here developed out of a field-based approach we, the two authors, had previously implemented. Students were placed in groups of three in classrooms to observe and teach within the two-hour literacy blocks. Although this approach improved the connection between students' campus and school-based experiences, it failed in most cases to produce quality reflection and critique. It was also limited by the fact that it produced little evidence of benefit for the teachers who were unpaid volunteers.

Informed both by our experiences with the field-based program and by the literature on teacher education we worked to produce a model that would overcome these limitations. The model developed for this pilot was a relatively labour intensive one that designed for a single group of students. We are currently developing an approach for a whole cohort.
Principles that shaped the 'new' model

The design of the model was governed by a set of principles and practices derived from the literature:

- **Integration of pre- and in-service teacher education** (Fullan, 1995). Both teachers and students synergistically benefit from joint access to professional development activities. Integration makes it more likely that students' learning will transfer to the early career experience. Asking teachers and student teachers to reflect together also benefits teachers because it increases their awareness of their own teaching, gives them access to new theoretical perspectives, and gives teachers a break from routine and a new enthusiasm for teaching (Atay, 2004).

- **Use of a team including both teachers and outside members** (Day, 1999; Guskey, 1995; Huberman, 1995b; Joyce & Showers, 1980). Teams allow a pooling of expertise and mutual support. They make teachers active in initiating their own professional development and identifying development needs, and provide an environment for improving reflection and problem solving skills.

- **Negotiation of a focus for the professional development activity based on student teacher program, teacher needs and teacher educator skills.**

- **A focus on pedagogy, that is, on principled approaches to good teaching** (Gore, 2001). Quality teaching is central to the task of being a teacher, and beginning teachers need a strong vision of what it is to be a good teacher to sustain them through the difficult process of entry to the profession.

- **Use of an action reflection cycle.** Use of a cycle promotes teacher observation skills, shows teachers how to engage in evidence-based teaching, and promotes teacher agency and control of a professional development agenda (Huberman, 1995a; Wang & Odell, 2003).

- **Use of video as a stimulus to reflection** (MacKinnon & Grunau, 1991; Richardson, 1990; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Hamann, 1992). Teachers are asked to present videos of their own teaching and to give a rationale for their actions. This is a method that helps teachers to identify points at which they could have acted differently. MacKinnon and Grunau (1991) showed that a great deal of learning occurred in a school-based program when students taught alongside teacher educators and the teaching of both was videoed and compared.

These principles were put into practice in a pilot program conducted in a primary school in a low socio-economic area in a regional city. After negotiating access with and in consultation with the school principal, a team was formed, consisting of two teacher educators (the authors), the five teachers, one male and four female, who taught year five and six in the school, and four student teachers. The student teachers were volunteers enrolled in a Middle Years literacy subject taught by Maclean, and they undertook reflective writing and lesson planning tasks associated with the project for partial credit. The students were all graduates in other disciplines completing the final year of a two-year teacher education course that qualified them both as primary and secondary teachers. A member of the school leadership team participated in the team, and the principal attended the early meetings. With some interruptions for a term break the team met weekly for one hour after school in the time set aside for meetings of the upper primary teaching group. An initial meeting was held to explain the nature of the project and to seek the consent of the teachers.

The action reflection cycle

The first meeting took place in August of 2004 and established an agreed focus on the teaching of expository and argumentative writing. This focus met the needs of the teachers as it was part of the established program and also related to the content of the students' coursework. Once the focus was established a cycle was set in place. This cycle began with a sharing of resources relevant to the teaching focus, then development and planning of teaching activities. Based on this planning, teaching of a session by one member of the group was videoed, and the video was used as a basis for discussion and reflection in the following meeting of the group.

This cycle was followed three times, the first time with a teacher educator (White) teaching a two hour session, the second time with a teacher teaching the session, and the third time with the four students jointly teaching a session that they had collectively prepared.

A final meeting was then held to reflect on lessons learned from the project and to consider how the model might be refined for future use.

The project did not begin smoothly. Funding was awarded in the middle of the year and had to be spent quickly under university rules. There was insufficient time to prepare the teachers for their
participation in the project. Some teachers were concerned that their group time together was being solely used for the project when they had already developed a more extensive agenda.

However after a few sessions attitudes became more positive. Teachers enjoyed the fact that they had something concrete to discuss in the form of the video, and also the involvement that comes from the fact that their own classes and children are being viewed. They very much enjoyed the chance to talk about their own teaching, something which often gets lost in the busy environment of a school. They also enjoyed the chance to think about the way they were teaching and to get out of their routine by considering alternatives.

A key reason for the success was that a teacher educator was prepared to take the risk of teaching a class of children. This immediately gave the project credibility with teachers, and established a model for others to follow.

Teacher: A big sell pitch for me was the fact that you said you teach. I never heard of a lecturer teaching before in primary school. I've been around a long time. I'd never seen one come in and take a class. Never ever.

A major development during the project was that we became more sophisticated about the use of the video. After a relatively unsuccessful start in which the video was replayed in an unstructured way, we developed an approach in which the teacher(s) viewed the unedited video of their teaching and nominated sections to be included in an edited version presented to the team. This initial viewing and editing was nominated as an important learning experience by a number of the participants. It was particularly important because it gave teachers agency in controlling the aspects of their teaching to be discussed.

For student use we also developed a structured set of questions focussed on key aspects of good teaching to use when reflecting on the video. These questions required the students to focus on principles of explicit and engaged teaching. For example, students were asked to reflect on their teaching focus, on student engagement and inclusion, and on achievement of planned outcomes. Students were also asked about dimensions of teaching such as student support, modelling and reflection. They were asked to reflect by evaluating their successes and failures, and to discuss what they would do differently if they were to reteach the lesson.

For each of the PLT team meetings, discussions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. These transcriptions were then used to analyse what the various teachers had gained from the action reflection cycle.

**Reflection as discursive practice**

For the purposes of this paper, we now explore our understanding of reflection as a discursive practice and then specifically look at how the student teachers reflected the video of their teaching. Based on a transcript of the team's discussion of the video, reflection is analysed as a form of discursive practice.

We ask how processes of identity formation are revealed by analysis of the team's reflective discussion of the video of student teachers. The analysis reveals how student teachers develop an image of themselves as professionals by watching themselves teaching. Students jointly construct an 'account' of their actions in planning and teaching the lesson (Edwards & Potter, 1992). These accounts construct the students as (would be) professional teachers (Archer, 2000). In reflection students are producing a representation of themselves as a member of the category 'teacher'.

The analysis is influenced by two views about the nature of reflection. First, reflection can be seen as personal theory building as beliefs about teaching and learning are modified in the light of insights from critical events. Accounts of teaching interpret events through the lens beliefs built up in the course of a personal history of teaching and learning experiences, through the perspectives of other teachers and the perspective of students, and through the lens provided by theories of teaching and learning (Brookfield, 1995). Second, reflection can be seen as a social process conducted within a community of practice as the team negotiates shared tasks, shared understandings and a shared repertoire of tools and actions (Wenger, 1998). The group produces products in the form of revised goals for future actions or in the form of revised routines.

**Analysis of reflection on the students’ lesson**

In the reflective discussion used as a basis for this analysis, four student teachers, four teachers, a teacher educator and the team leader for the upper school discussed an edited 20 minute video of the student teachers taking a two hour lesson on persuasive and argumentative writing. The lesson was jointly planned and taught by the four student teachers. The reflection occurred a week after the taping, after the student teachers had viewed the complete video and edited excerpts for presentation. The student teachers took it
in turns to present the section of the lesson that they had taught. This lesson focussed on two forms of persuasive writing, letters and editorials.

In this section six texts taken from the transcript of the video reflection are analysed to demonstrate features typical of the process of reflection. These texts are consecutive and follow the stages of the lesson as students reflected on the video. Analysis of the six texts demonstrates that reflection on the video is based on a number of key moves:

- the application of categories from professional discourse to teaching actions or events,
- justifications or accounts of events and actions,
- identification of a 'problem' in the teaching,
- negotiation of shared evaluations,
- identification of options and choices.

Modelling

The lesson begins with a display of the editorial page of the local newspaper in a poster format. A copy of the editorial is also displayed in enlarged format. Students first look in these texts for 'persuasive words', then the student teacher, A, models the breaking up of the editorial up into the three stages of persuasive writing students are familiar with from previous lessons: opening statement or issue, arguments, and suggestion.

As Text 1 shows, the enlarged display becomes the initial focus of reflective discussion, as the video makes it quite clear that the print is not visible to the students, and their reluctance to answer is due to the fact that they cannot see the print (T is teacher, ST is student teacher, TE is teacher educator).

Text 1 The displays are too small

ST A: All right we started off with modelling basically. Where we talked about editorials in the newspaper and were basically again recapping on persuasive words and point of view and that sort of stuff. And then talked about where they could express that if they wanted to express their opinions and concerns with community. So we went into editorials in the newspaper and that sort of thing.

ST S: So we had a framework for them to follow which made it easier for them to grasp how the editorial was structured which we found quite good for them to use.

ST R: Really good. Yeah. Especially when they went on to write their own editorial at the end. Without having that sort of...there for them to copy. Like they just wrote their own.

ST R: But something we realised from watching the video is that all of these were too small. Way too small for the kids. They couldn't read them and they couldn't see them and we were wondering why they probably weren't answering our questions and it's because up on the board they couldn't read the story.

TD: Would have been better to do the next size up and just handwrite it on there.

ST R: Yeah. At first we thought it was maybe just one or two of them was too small but watching the video you can see that even if the kids are sitting right in front of you, that every single one of these was just too small.

ST A: Even having a whole board like that and writing it up and then sort of breaking it down so you have to read it from the back of the pack where they were sitting.

TM: Would you put them in smaller groups and have one per group sitting…

ST R: …yeah that's probably an idea.

TM: Going to save yourself time and whatever and just run them off. If they sat in a circle and got one in front of half a dozen of them.

Text 1 begins with a recount or retelling of what occurred in the lesson. A's actions are interpreted in terms of categories labelling teaching moves: modelling, recapping. A gives reasons for the students' decisions actions, namely that they used newspaper editorials as an example of places where opinion is expressed. The analysis of persuasive texts into four stages is categorised as a framework, and the reason for using the framework is that it makes it easier for them to grasp how the editorial was structured. The final part of Text 1, quite good for them to use Really good. Yeah demonstrates the evaluative quality of reflective talk, and that it is about the negotiation of shared evaluation within the group. A reason for this positive evaluation is given in terms of the outcome of increased student independence Like they just wrote their own.
A further characteristic of reflective talk is finding a problem *we were wondering why they probably weren't answering our questions*. An explanation is offered that was not obvious at the time of teaching but that becomes obvious in retrospect from the different point of view of the video camera: *it's because up on the board they couldn't read the story*. The finding of a problem then leads to the final stage of the reflection which is offering of suggestions about how the problem might have been avoided. The teachers offer two different suggestions for action, to handwrite a larger version of the poster and to make copies of the poster to distribute to the small groups, *would have been better to do the next size up and just handwrite it on there. Going to save yourself time and whatever and just run them off. If they sat in a circle and got one in front of half a dozen of them*. Notice how the teacher suggestions are couched in a conditional modality to emphasise that student teachers have choice and the suggestion are not directions. These teacher suggestions are then jointly ratified by the student teachers: *Yeah Yeah Yeah*.

**Wait time**

After the students complete the account of their actions the reflection the teachers begin to initiate discussion. A good example is Text 2 in which a teacher (not the classroom teacher D) comments on the questioning at the start of the lesson when the children were slow to respond to the student teacher's questions. This delay is reinterpretated in positive terms as *'wait time'*. Here the reasoning is not given as a justification of the actions of the *we* who taught the lesson. Rather it is a construction of the teacher as *you*. The teacher observer, based on her own experience, generalises about how a generic teacher would behave in an equivalent situation where an answer was not forthcoming. This generic form of argument includes A by assimilating her to the category of professional teachers.

**Explicit teaching**

In the next segment of the lesson students are introduced by the student teacher R to a model persuasive letter relating to a school camp. They jointly deconstruct the letter into the three stages of persuasive writing while R records their analysis on the white board. R then assigns a further task where the students in small groups analyse a second letter using a prepared sheet with the stages of persuasive writing marked out in boxes as a planning frame. Reflection is not just about constructing an image of the teacher but also about constructing a representation of the relationship between teaching and learning and between the teacher and the students. In Text 3 the student teacher R asks for reassurance about the highly structured and repetitive explicit teaching style that deconstructed and constructed texts using modelling, guided and shared activity, small group activity and procedural facilitation. This explicit teaching style reflects the approach that the class teacher had previously taken.

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same. The teaching style is justified in through implicit reference to the needs of the children in the class who come from a low socio-economic community, and are characterised as a homogenous group as the audience and our kids. These students are characterised as needing repetition and structure in order to learn effectively.

**Engaging activities**
A third student, S, then introduces students to the task of planning their own persuasive letter using the same writing frame as a basis. These letters are based on a choice of one of five preprepared scenarios relating to the local school community, for example, that the skateboard park was closing down, people were concerned about dog droppings on the pavement, neighbours were arguing, and antisocial driving behaviours were occurring in the street. As Text 4 shows, these scenarios engage the students, but they also to some extent stereotype the neighbourhood they live in.

Text 4 Toilet humour

ST S: We tried to select scenarios that could affect them. It did happen and they did respond. They went ooooooh, oh no! you know and especially like the skate park too. I asked them if some people did actually use the skate park…

T D: …the bowls. The concrete bowls. Up that way

ST And the dog poo they liked that

ST Anything to do with poo kids like

ST Anything gross yeah

ST Toilet humour

In Text 4 the students are also characterised as needing their activities to be engaging and relevant, which justifies the teaching in terms of the kind of learning principles for middle schooling that the student teachers had been exposed to in their coursework. But the construction of what students of this age will find engaging is all their own.

**Ownership**
At this point in the lesson it becomes clear that the students are working faster than expected and than if the lesson proceeds as planned it will finish too soon. While students are writing the plans for their letters the student teachers get together and introduce two new tasks. The students are first to produce a second plan for a letter taking the opposite point of view from their initial plan. They are then asked to write in their workbooks a second letter, based on an issue of their own choice, completed independently without the plan format. This task is introduced by an improvised discussion and modelling jointly led by the students. Text 5 deals with this problem of timing.

Text 5 Too much time

ST A: We could do that. And then we got them to write up an issue that concerned them personally so they did that on their own.

ST S: That was because they grasped it really quickly.

ST A: Yeah.

ST S: And we had too much time we thought oops. What were we going to do? Which worked out quite well cause it gave them a bit more ownership towards their own sorts of things that are going on within their own lives and using examples like around the school too and somebody said they wanted a coach, a football coach.

Text 5 constructs an account of the student teachers’ agency in fixing up a problem by referring to their thinking processes. The writing task is retrospectively reinterpreted, favourably, in terms of the theoretical category of ‘ownership’ reinforced through the language personally, on their own, their own sorts of things.

**Sharing time**
The lesson concludes with the fourth student, K, leading a 'sharing time’ in which the students present their letters orally to the rest of the class. Some students just read out the letters, but many choose to dramatise the text in some way to turn it into a performance. Further constructions of the students are evident in Text 6.
Text 6 It's the stage they're at

T M: With the guide like that though they're pretty well...they've got that model there in front of them, they can follow it. I mean if you'd done that without those sorts of things you would have had people going off and some not understanding what to do. Some you know repeatedly coming back to you saying oh I'm stuck, I don't know what I have to do next.

ST R: And this is why their independent editorials at the very end, the last activity, the pay outs are great and we didn't even give them any...we just said to write your own pretty much. We didn't say that you had to follow that structure that we'd been using...

T M: and they had something to hang onto.

ST R: Some were even writing where it says like I believe and I strongly recommend or whatever it says in the black paper [one of the worksheets]. They were writing that in say red pen and then writing their own thing and they copied the next bit, the argument, in red.

T M: It's like giving them a coat hanger and hanging something on when they're stuck. They can revert back to the model you've given or if they're feeling very independent they can move on to the next step. The struggling student definitely needs that and might need it 10 times before they actually don't need it anymore.

In Text 6 the students are not constructed as a homogeneous group but differentiated into struggling students and others. The discussion contrasts those who need help and who say I'm stuck and those who can work independently. It portrays teaching as offering support, like a coat hanger, to shift students along a continuum from dependence to independence. The success of the lesson is characterised in terms of the ability of the students to write their final letter without support, and also in terms of the multileveled way the lesson offers students meaningful activity at a range of levels. The use of red pen to include scaffolded language offers a strong image of scaffolding through the incorporation of the teachers' language into the students' own writing.

Contrasting teachers and student teachers

While this paper mainly concerns the student teachers, it is interesting to contrast their focus on the detail of the lesson with the use the teachers made of the video experience. The teachers used the videoed lessons as a stimulus to crystallise dissatisfaction with the way they were currently organising their teaching. They had got into a rut with a system in which the students rotated between different learning stations. The structured teaching modelled in the video lessons offered a more appropriate approach for primary students needing support to make the transition to secondary school. The teachers also saw the benefits of cooperation in the preparation of units of work, so that the effort and the benefits could be shared within the group.

Conclusion

The reflective cycle worked at a number of levels to help the student teachers establish a professional identity and teaching repertoire. Through participation in the teaching team student teachers accelerated their socialisation into the profession. Through interaction with the classroom teachers, students learned how to talk like teachers and to see the classroom events as teachers would. Discussion of the video also helped the students look at themselves and at the children through a number of lenses (Brookfield, 1995): The camera mimicked how they would appear from the children's point of view, and allowed the students to see themselves through the children's eyes. Students were also able to see themselves and their teaching through the eyes of the classroom teachers and they began, prompted by the presence of teacher educators, to see the lesson through a theoretical lens in terms of principles of teaching and learning.

However there are clearly a number of shortcomings in the reflective process outlined here that have to be overcome. The spread-out, once a week, nature of the reflective process meant that the students did not get to know the children or the classroom program well enough to teach effectively. The videoed lesson would have been more effective if the students could have taught a unit or a sequence of lessons to simulate more closely the experience of a classroom teacher. Because the students did not know the children well they tended to view them as a homogeneous group rather than as individuals.

There was also a lack of critical reflection. Critical reflection occurs when teachers seek to question the assumptions that are part of the everyday 'normal' taken-for-granted world of the teaching profession (Brookfield, 1995). Where there is pressure on student teachers to be socialised into the profession and to be accepted as 'real' teachers, and where they are conscious of their lesser status and experience, it is very difficult for them to question the assumptions of experienced teachers about what is normal and natural.
As teacher educators we need to find a way to build on the reflective teacher conversations documented here to allow a more critical edge to appear. In fact as we saw above the experienced teachers were far more critical of their own practice than the students, and used the experience of teaching to make quite radical changes to their practice.

References


