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Do what we do: A Multimodal Approach to Planning and Teaching

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Deakin University

Quality teaching and learning in teacher education can be enriched across campuses for both the academics and the student bodies when focus is given to the development of dynamic ICT rich learning experiences. This paper focuses on the learning journey of two academics and their pre-service teacher education students located on two regional campuses, 200km apart, and how planning, communicating, implementing, presenting, evaluating, and reflecting took place within a framework of collegiality. The unit, entitled 'The Literacy Teacher, the Profession and the Community' was a final year unit within the undergraduate Bachelor of Education program. Specifically this paper discusses how a multimodal teaching and learning environment using a range of new communication technologies enhanced the both the teaching and the learning experience for our pre-service teacher education students.

Introduction

Teaching in institutions of higher education is problematic in many ways; the problems are even greater for academics working in rural and regional settings. The challenges of teaching (Ariza et al., 2002) in these settings demand solutions that are innovative, but which do not detract from the educational aims and objectives of the programs. The challenges associated with teaching in rural and regional contexts take place within the general concerns of academics about change to a range of aspects of academic work, a new work order in the form of the information society; internationalisation and economic globalisation; and more culturally diverse and mobile populations of students (Blackmore, 2002, Ballantyne et al., 1997, Beck and Young, 2005).

Despite the changes to universities and the work life of academics, teaching and research continue. In this paper we focus on the teaching aspect of academic life and the experience of two relatively new academics as we attempted to design and deliver a quality teaching program, guided by the principles of scholarly teaching in general and the scholarly teaching of literacy in particular.

Scholarly Teaching

... the rewards for good teaching are grossly inadequate (Cosser, 1998 p. 159)

It has been widely documented (Cosser, 1998, Taylor, 1999) that teaching is not as highly valued in higher education as research, publications and success at bringing in the dollars. Lynch (2002) et al. describe how it is seen as strategic for an individual who wants to get ahead to limit the amount of time spent on the scholarship of teaching (2002). Much discussion in the literature on scholarly teaching is based on a perceived need to better reward and/or value good university teaching. Cosser (1998) points to deficiencies in current practices for rewarding good teaching and the difficulties involved in changing institutionalised practices. Commenting on the situation in Australia, Taylor (1999) says that "where academic career advancement is strongly
linked to achievement in both teaching and research, much has been written about the need to recognise and reward teaching, but little progress made - research rules!" Taylor argues for what many sees as an unlikely scenario in which "the development of strategies to make teaching achievements as equally valued as research achievements, in terms of career progression" (Taylor, 1999 np) especially given the current funding environment and the uptake of an RQF model in higher education in Australia.

We have attempted to place our work for this paper within the field that has been termed 'scholarly teaching'. It draws on a range of work on the conception of scholarly teaching including the seminal work of Boyer (1990). According to McKinney (2004) scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. She argues that scholarly teachers view teaching as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a discipline in which to develop expertise. Scholarly teachers can be seen to do things such as reflect on their teaching, use classroom assessment techniques, discuss teaching issues with colleagues, try new things, and read and apply the literature on teaching and learning in their discipline (McKinney, Unknown). Scholarly teaching is also seen as closely linked to reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995, Schon, 1983).

An aspect of the scholarly teaching mentioned by Taylor and Richardson (2001) in their report on their project titled, Validating Scholarship in University Teaching, which draws on the work of Hutchings and Shulman that particularly resonated with us is that it involves question-asking, inquiry and investigation, particularly around issues of student learning; that it requires a kind of ‘going meta’, in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning—the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth—and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it (Hutchings and Shulman, 1999 p. 13).

Richlin argues that the purpose of scholarly teaching is to impact the activity of teaching and the resulting learning (Richlin, 2001). He sees the scholarly process as beginning with an observation, which identifies a problem or situation the teacher would like to improve or an opportunity the teacher would like to seize to improve quality of the teaching and learning with the next and most critical step being to document a baseline of activity. We did not have a baseline of activity when we started out to develop this unit but have used university wide evaluation data for comparison (see table 1).

Lynch and Sheard (2002) identify aspects of the scholarship of teaching, such as engaging with educational literature, evaluating their own teaching and/or publishing in educational journals. They say that interactions between an individual's motivation towards activities involved in the scholarship of teaching and his/her capability to pursue these activities are significant factors in the degree to which academics give time and effort to scholarly teaching.

For this purposes of this paper we are using Richlin's conception of the purpose of scholarly teaching to impact the activity of teaching and the resulting learning. Richlin lists two elements of the scholarly process that he sees as essential:

1. systematically observing the Teaching\Teaching Connection™ and
2. putting the results of a teaching intervention into context.

(Richlin, 2001 p. 58-60)
We identify with Richlin’s scholarly process, a process that begins with an observation, which identifies a problem or situation that the teacher would like to improve or an opportunity the teacher would like to seize (Richlin, 1993a, 1998). We saw the development and teaching of a new unit as both a problem and an opportunity to provide our students with the richest possible learning experiences we could provide while immersing them in educational technologies, where this was an effective strategy, and at the same time empowering them to develop as reflective practitioners.

Richlin identifies the next and most critical step as the need to document a baseline of activity (2001 p. 60). Given that this was the first time this unit had been taught we did not have base line data on this unit for comparison so data on student evaluations for the entire university for the previous semester have been used instead.

We have used a descriptive format to provide a snapshot of our planning for teaching, the conduct of our teaching and reflections on the dimensions associated with scholarly teaching. The many threads that contributed to the fabric of our unit provide a way into the lived experience of the development and implementation of our unit.

The Context

Deakin University proudly proclaims its links to rural and regional Australia. The VC’s 2003 strategic plan explains that “Deakin has large campuses in Melbourne and in rural and regional Victoria and is a leader in distance education, flexible learning and professional development programs”. This is seen to be a large part of what makes Deakin unique. The Deakin strategic plan also says:

Our rural and regional locations and connections ensure that we pay particular attention to the relevance, innovation and responsiveness of our teaching and learning, research, partnerships and international activities in those areas that might be described as South Central and South Western Victoria (Deakin University, 2003).

These plans, published by the university executive, demonstrate Deakin’s commitment to its regional and rural campuses and communities.

While the university’s commitments to rural and regional education are commendable academics teaching in rural and regional areas still must overcome challenges, perceived and real, of distance, isolation, lack of support structures, limited numbers of teaching staff, the consequent narrow range of expertise and limited range of viewpoints. They are challenges that impact on academics as well as students. This paper describes some of the strategies employed to overcome these challenges.

A commitment to a shared understanding about effective teaching and learning, including scholarly teaching in higher education, underpinned our planning and preparation for this unit. At the outset we identified and articulated the core beliefs that were to underpin the unit. These core beliefs were also key content in the unit. These included the value of being a reflective teacher, of working in Professional Learning Teams, of making links to Professional Communities and multimodal teaching and learning. We wanted to model the theory we were teaching; we wanted the conceptualisation of our unit to reflect our passion about effective teaching and learning; we wanted to immerse our students in the best learning experiences we could
organise; and we wanted to use the most appropriate and the most effective communication technologies to plan, implement and evaluate our teaching program.

The setting

In 2005 the Geelong and Warrnambool campuses of Deakin University include a new literacy unit called The Literacy Teacher: The Profession and the Community for students in the fourth year of their Bachelor of Education degree. In 2005, at the onset of the planning for this new unit we recognised that only two academics would be responsible for the teaching of this unit; one academic on each campus. As a consequence discussion surrounding professional isolation and consistency of teaching across campuses permeated our discussions. The unit focused on the importance and effectiveness of professional learning teams and community participation in schools, as well as the use of new technologies in the teaching of literacy particularly for students identified as at risk of not succeeding in literacy. Therefore to ignore the issue of collegiality in this unit appeared to position us as hypocritical.

In order for our students and ourselves, as the academics, to benefit fully from such a unit we needed to conceptualise how the unit could be planned, structured and implemented in order to live the defining concepts from the unit. We also needed to capitalise on the knowledge, experience and expertise of the teaching staff across the two campuses. We drew on the work of Sadler, who points out that “managing academic life today requires us to recognise the move away from a focus on good teaching in the sense of ‘good’ presentation and management of subject content towards good learning, that is, learning that is significant, up-to-date, and enduring in both value and depth (Sadler, 2000, p 3).

Our aim was to empower our students with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to be outstanding teachers of literacy who could work effectively in a range of teams and settings while embracing effective use of ICTs.

Professional Learning Teams

Productive teamwork in which teachers gain new knowledge about what they do and how students learn has the power to change the culture ... and make continuous learning and improvement not only possible but manageable. However, like teaching, working in teams does not come easily nor follow a predictable recipe. It's only through working in teams over time that we learn what makes them function effectively and in ways that both contribute to the goals of the school and are capable of being sustained (Johnson, 2003).

We agree with Johnson about the power of professional learning teams as well as sharing his concerns about the challenges of working this way. Our decision to work collaboratively to prepare and deliver our unit meant we need to share ideas and responsibilities as we worked collegially to achieve our goals. Working in this way allowed us to experience and better understand the theory as well as demonstrating our commitment to this theory. In this era in higher education when workloads are increasing and work tasks often conflict for the attention of the academic (Marginson, 2000) it also seemed highly practical to embrace such a collegial model.

Working collaboratively in this way allowed us to address some of the problems related to being situated on regional and rural campuses and, to being relatively new academics
(one in the first year at a tertiary institution). It allowed us to address the problems associated with isolation, and to widen the breadth of perspectives on the issues addressed in our unit. We also brought in outside expertise in the form of ‘expert’ teachers from our local educational communities.

Another issue was the desire to empower our student to take responsibility for their own learning journey (Cushman, 1994). These students were in their final semester and therefore would become qualified teachers in the coming months. In order to achieve this goal we wanted to create the unit so that we, as academics, played a facilitatory role, using technology as part of the facilitation process. We conducted the initial planning and preparation but the students then took a leading role. For example the students stage-managed the Literacy Forum, prepared and asked questions of the expert panel and responded to panel members.

These experiences provided much of the material for assignments including a final group presentation focussed on an issue identified from The Literacy Forum.

**New Technologies and Quality teaching and learning in rural and regional tertiary contexts**

The overarching characteristic that we felt would determine and measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of our use of ICT was the teaching and learning opportunities that we provided for our students. High quality teaching and learning was our goal but we also wanted to explore the potential of technology-supported teaching and learning in useful and productive ways. How we developed this was our challenge. As this was a new unit all lecture and tutorial material had to be developed. The way we set about doing this was through a feedback loop which consisted of planning, reflecting, enacting, seeking feedback and then using that feedback for further planning.

For the planning process we needed a form of instant, or close to real time, communication that allowed us to work in a similar way that we would have if we had offices in close physical proximity. Email is a useful means of communication that we often used but we realised that a more immediate form would help us carry out our planning more efficiently. One of our colleagues had recently introduced us both to ICQ. This close to real time messaging system flashes on screen when a message is receive whereas the university email system daily changes the settings (during network logon) to only check mail every 30 minutes. We had many messages going back and forth during a 30 minute segment so it proved to be a very useful conversational tool.

Email was also used to contact school personnel to invite them to participate in the Literacy Forum. The Literacy Forum was held in a large lecture theatre on the largest campus. We physically brought together the students from two campuses for this event. In this way we made physical as well as virtual links between our students. Audio Visual support people at the university filmed the Literacy Forum and create a streamed audio version for the web and CD ROM of the video of the entire forum as well as an online iLecture format. These resources were later available for our students to support their assignment work. We also trialled a Elluminate Live. It is a desktop computer conferencing system described on the University website in this way: (eLive is the university name for this communications tool)
eLive is a world-class, real-time training, demonstration and collaboration environment that is powerful, flexible and easy to use. It enables the delivery of live, online learning, training, coaching, mentoring and meetings. Effectiveness is increased by engaging participants with the ability to talk over the Internet, chat via text online, share video, whiteboards, multimedia files and applications—all in one intuitive, graphical interface (Deakin University, 2005).

We used eLive during semester to view, share and edit final presentations and other documents in real time. The audio component allowed us to talk as this was happening. On rare occasions we used land line telephones.

WebCT Vista (a Learning Management System rebadged as Deakin Studies Online - DSO) provided a means to share resources with our students. The students used the discussion board during the development of the questions for the panel as well as a place to complete assessment tasks. We found this range of communication tools allowed us to select and use the most appropriate tool to meet our needs of any specific task at any point in time in the most effective way. None of these tools on their own would have allowed us to work as effectively but these examples show the breadth of the digital communication tools we harnessed to achieve our objectives.

We attempted to make use of a variety of new technologies to enhance the learning opportunities for our students and increase the quality of the learning experience and our productivity. We used the range of computer based technologies as communication tools to plan our semester's work using a feedback loop which included planning, reflecting, enacting and giving feedback. The planning process started well before semester and continued throughout semester.

Planning, reflecting, enacting and feedback: a web of communications

Planning

This stage was initiated with a 'brain storm' session. This is where we explored the unit objectives, consider our students needs, and discuss how we could create authentic learning sequences that would be contextually relevant for our students. This discussion and planning was rarely face to face. Rather it involved using mediums such as ICQ, email, and occasionally telephone. Once ideas and issues had been discussed, one of the two academics would elect to develop the lecture and tutorial material.

Reflecting

Once a 'draft' of the lecture and tutorial material had been developed we sent it electronically the other academic for reflection and feedback. This produced a significant professional dialogue between the two academics. From reflection and discussion came innovation and improved teaching and learning practice. We were wary of the danger of unenthusiastic presentations and classes, and as a result worked diligently to produce multimedia and other engaging forms of learning that demonstrated our passion and provided opportunities for our students to share in contextually rich learning experiences. Often the 'first draft' of the lecture and tutorial material was 'dry' and it took the 'fresh eyes' of the second academic to evolve this into something that students would find more relevant, challenging and useful.
**Enacting**

Enacting, or facilitating the teaching and learning was an opportunity to put into practice the planning and discussion that has previously occurred. It was a time to enact the craft of teaching and learning we had carefully constructed. Strategies such as cooperative learning, student negotiated tasks, peer teaching, and a strong focus on open ended questioning while not new to us, appeared foreign because the context of our learning and the tools to facilitate learning were different. What we were finding is through embracing our students across two campuses in the shared decision making of the unit, and employing technology to allow communication, positioned the academics as risk takers in the learning environment. Students began to recognise that they were empowered members (Cooper, 2005) of the process whose voices, opinions, and decisions were integral to the success of the unit. Lecturing was a part of the process, but coupled with that was student dialogue which encouraged active, independent and interdependent learning. The strategies and tools employed allowed students to become active constructors of their and each others learning. They interrogated content, explored alternatives, questioned ‘experts’, challenged their own views and knowledge bases, all the while being reminded by the lecturers of the aims and objectives of the unit.

**Feedback**

At the conclusion of lessons students were invited to reflect on what they had learnt, what they felt they still needed to learn or explore, and how they felt they could achieve this learning. We used this feedback to work in a reflective feedback loop. Following each session we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the past teaching sessions. We reflected on our aims, our teaching methods, and the outcomes we felt we had achieved. At this stage of the process we focused on gaining multiple sources of feedback; from each other, from our students, from various other stakeholders such as practicing teachers and principals. We used these data sources along with our aims and objectives to reflect on how we could improve our future teaching sessions. This data informed the planning and teaching of our unit and was used to negotiate the construction of future teaching and learning opportunities embracing student and collegial feedback.

While this process may appear simplistic in nature, we argue that it encouraged meaningful learning and positioned students as genuine stakeholders in their learning. It taught necessary professional skills which allowed our students to enter the teaching profession better equipped to work meaningfully and productively in professional learning teams, a concept that has been embraced by many primary schools in Victoria, and with members of their school community (Cotter, 2003).

**Links to the teaching community – The Literacy Forum**

While students had a right to expect quality teaching from the academic teaching staff, they were also very interested in hearing from practitioners currently practicing in the primary sector. We also felt that it was important for our students to gain access into the broader community of educators to give them a snapshot of their future working
environments. In order to expose our students to the thinking of highly effective practitioners in our school communities we collegially organised what became known as ‘The Literacy Forum’. The panel was made up of four highly experienced and respected ‘experts’. They included the winner of the Teacher of the Year award for Victoria in 2005 currently teaching in a grade 5/6 classroom, a current Prep teacher who had been a former regional literacy consultant, a former Early Years Literacy Program developer and current middle years cluster consultant from Melbourne and a former Reading Recovery tutor who is currently Principal of a local primary school. The participants included one male (the Prep teacher) and three females.

Building on the notion of shared decision making (Council, 1998) and positioning our students as meaningful stake holders in the process we invited our students to brainstorm, discuss, construct, edit and present questions to this panel to gain an insight into the practices associated with effective literacy teaching and learning in the primary school sector. During the one and a half hour forum the panel answered the student’s questions and in doing so provided valuable insights into the teaching of literacy in particular and the realities of teaching in general. Students recognised that the quality of the open ended questions they had jointly constructed was an essential ingredient that drew the sort of responses required from the panel. We suggest that part of what made this forum such a popular and worthwhile learning event was the fact that it was positioned directly at the students learning needs. Students were scaffolded through a process which allowed them to construct questions that were relevant and engaging, and enhanced their thinking and learning. Their background knowledge of the issues was activated prior to participation in the forum through the process of question development.

Further to this, as the two campus joined together for the Literacy Forum, it was an opportunity for students from different campuses to meet face to face. While many students had been communicating in the virtual world across campuses, the opportunity for face to face discussion proved popular. Students recognised that there were greater similarities between the two campuses than they had previously realised. Sometimes students in more remote locations ‘feel’ that they are more disadvantaged than their counterparts in city locations but this experience helped them realise that students located in large city campuses can also feel isolated and/or lonely and find the experience of learning in a large institution overwhelming. Students were able to talk openly and honestly about their fears of being ‘teacher ready’. It is also worth mentioning that the quality of the questions and subsequent discussion was an opportunity for professional educators outside the tertiary sector to recognise and gain an appreciation into the learning and thinking of pre service teachers.

The student feedback from this session was extremely positive. For many it further contextualised issues, for others it sparked new thinking. The only negative aspect that was mentioned involved our students wanting more of the valuable time of these highly skilled professionals.

Links with Professional Associations

Considering our charge was to facilitate learning that would encourage professionalism and collegiality with colleagues and community we were reasonably satisfied that we were positioning our students to achieve this with strong links into the teaching
community and a process for ensuring quality teaching that would demonstrate skills and strategies desirable for teacher practitioners. However, one area that we were yet to consider was how to make links into our professional associations. We felt it important to expose our students to the valuable contributions these associations make. This led us to a decision to invite our students to join the Primary English Teacher’s Association (PETA).

We used Comber and Kamler’s 2005 text, Turn-Around Pedagogies (Comber and Kamler, 2005), which was provided as part of the student’s membership of the professional organisation the Primary English Teacher’s Association (PETA). In the text teachers describe their experiences dealing with and understanding literacy difficulties and improving literacy outcomes for at-risk students. It rejects a deficit model and instead recognises the rich cultural and linguistic resources which reluctant literacy learners possess and bring to school. It also recognises the advanced use of technologies by many of these students outside of school and the value in using them to engage reluctant learners. But more importantly these teachers were working in pairs, an experienced teacher with a newly qualified teacher in each pairing and so provided links to the understandings we wanted to promote about the value of teachers working in professional learning teams. So this text provided a very useful resource that made strong links to the content in our unit and provided our students with the opportunity to join their first (in most cases) professional association. In many of the cases technology played an important role in the turn around of the students in the text. We tried to replicate this model in our ways of working. This proved popular and beneficial. The PETA provided valuable resources for our students, and also gave our students another avenue to gain insight into the profession of teaching.

Evaluation and future directions

We believe that our process of collegial planning and implementation demonstrates scholarly that we took a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. We believe that we have demonstrated a view teaching as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a discipline and our willingness to develop expertise. We believe we have demonstrated scholarly teacher behaviours such as reflecting on our teaching, discussing teaching issues with colleagues, trying new things, and reading and applying the literature on teaching and learning in our discipline. Scholarly teaching is also seen as closely linked to reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995, Schon, 1983) and we believe this was one of the strengths of our work. Another aspect of the scholarly teaching Hutchings and Shulman, that of question-asking, inquiry and investigation, particularly around issues of student learning that we used to deepen our understandings with an eye to improving own classroom practice and consequently to advancing practice beyond it (Hutchings and Shulman, 1999 p. 13).

We believe that we also addressed Richlin’s purpose of scholarly teaching which expects scholarly teaching to demonstrate an impact on the activity of teaching and the resulting learning (Richlin, 2001). We were involved in his scholarly process in terms of identifying a situation the teacher would like to improve, in comparison to previous experiences of teaching in higher education as we seized the opportunity to improve quality of our teaching and learning compared to the data available to us in terms of university wide student evaluations of teaching.
Table 1 – Student evaluations on our unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECL410 Semester 2 2005 - Evaluation Summary (our unit)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my analytical skills.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my problem solving skills.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my written communication skills.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my ability to work as a team member.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider what I learned in this unit valuable for my future.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library learning resources were appropriate for my needs in this unit.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My experience in this unit encouraged me to value perspectives of people from different cultures.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of work required in this unit has been appropriate.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements for completing assessment tasks in this unit have been clear and specific.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this unit to other students.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of on-line technologies in this unit enhanced my learning experience.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Student evaluations across the entire university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Wide Evaluation Summary</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my analytical skills.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my problem solving skills.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my written communication skills.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit developed my ability to work as a team member.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider what I learned in this unit valuable for my future.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library learning resources were appropriate for my needs in this unit.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My experience in this unit encouraged me to value perspectives of people from different cultures.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of work required in this unit has been appropriate.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements for completing assessment tasks in this unit have been clear and specific.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this unit to other students.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of on-line technologies in this unit enhanced my learning experience.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our evaluations were higher than the university average of every criteria. On the criteria ‘I consider what I learned in this unit valuable for my future’ the mean for our unit was 4.5 compared to 3.9 for the university wide data. For the criteria ‘This unit developed my ability to work as a team member’ - one highly relevant to this unit - our mean was 3.5 compared to 4.4. Probably the most surprising result for us was the low mean for ‘the use of on-line technologies in this unit enhanced my learning experience’ but this tends to be associated with the use of WebCT Vista which is mandated across the university for all units in all courses so students may not associated this question with the range of technologies we used. Given that it is a face to face unit the scores on this criteria may have been reflecting a valuing of the high level of face to face contact.

Our data shows that the mean value for our unit was above the mean compared to the university wide data for every criteria. The average of means shows that our unit evaluations compared to university overall was 4.05 compared to 3.62.

Table 3. Average of means
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our literacy unit</th>
<th>Whole University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average of means</td>
<td>Average of means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Evaluation of teaching – our unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester 2 - 2005 ECL410</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff of this unit stimulated my interest in further learning.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff of this unit motivated me to do my best work.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff gave me helpful feedback on how I was going.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit was well taught.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a clear idea of what was expected me in this unit.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course materials in this unit were of high quality.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 Evaluation of teaching – university wide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester 2 - 2005</th>
<th>University Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff of this unit stimulated my interest in further learning.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff of this unit motivated me to do my best work.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff gave me helpful feedback on how I was going.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This unit was well taught.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a clear idea of what was expected me in this unit.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course materials in this unit were of high quality.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from student evaluations of the teaching of this unit reveal even strong results in comparison to University Wide data. On four of the seven questions the mean was 4.2 and all means in this section are above 4.0 while only university wide data only reached 3.7 on one criteria with other scores ranging from 3.5 to 3.6.

It would appear from this data that the students viewed both the teaching and other aspects of this unit in a very positive light.

Through the purposeful use of ICT's we were able to plan, communicate, enact and evaluate teaching and learning sequences that encouraged deep critical and creative thinking from our student body. It allowed us to develop a professional collegial relationship that minimised feelings of isolation and maximised rigour and conversation through non traditional professional learning team channels. The range of online environments we used allowed us to challenge the boundaries of our professional learning experiences and to redefine how meaningful cross campus teaching and learning could be enacted.

In an era where university workloads are ever increasing, we were able to employ specific ICT tools such as email, ICQ and ELive to help us work communicate efficiently over distance and space. In this way we were able to manage our workload more effectively as we shared ideas, jointly constructed content and provided timely feedback.

Through positioning our students as join constructors of their learning through listening and acting on their input we believe that a very active dialogue was created within our learning community. This dialogue encouraged our students to be active independent and interdependent learners capable of working effectively with various group within their educational community.

The process we implemented to develop teaching materials encouraged enthusiastic, current and purposeful material to be produced, that included the perspectives of academics, practicing primary teachers and pre service teachers enriched by our feedback and reflection loop. All members of the learning community felt ownership over the content and the process which saw engagement increase, resulting in pre service teachers graduating having practiced many of the skills necessary to not only teach literacy effectively, but to also work meaningfully and productively with members of their learning community. They were partners of the learning journey, accepting
responsibility with enthusiasm and empowerment. University system evaluation date for this unit indicated well above average unit evaluation results from our students.

As we turn our attention to the future direction of the unit we remain focused on the importance of close links with our students, empowering them with the skills and tools to negotiate their learning journey, all the while ensuring the skills and strategies they learn as part of this process are transferable into their future work places. Further to this, as academics we remain steadfast in our approach to collegial work. Rural and regional university settings have the potential to be isolating work environments. It is our challenge to explore options, seek alternatives and master different ways of undertaking our work in order for us to have the opportunity to discuss, develop and enact high quality teaching and learning episodes that meet the demands of our current tertiary student population and the communities which ultimately seek their services.

Conclusion

We were concerned to make our unit relevant, responsive to the needs for these students who were in their last semester of their pre service teacher education program. We believe that through participation in this unit our students as well prepared as possible to embark on their own learning journey in the teaching profession. Many students still expressed concerns and nervousness about their preparation to apply for and obtain a teaching position in a school and about their level of skill and understanding to take on the daunting task of full time classroom teaching. Some saw this as an enormous leap from student teacher to responsibly of a practicing teacher; responsible for lives of the children in their classroom. But we believe this unit encouraged risk taking, collaboration, partnerships and reflective professional practice through shared decision making and ongoing dialogue while building bridges to the professional community of teaching and that students viewed it positively.

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