This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30045206

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2010, AARE
Pre-service teachers’ practicum experiences: Developing pedagogy and professional skills through relationships between supervising teachers, coordinating teachers and university staff.

Pre-service teachers’ practicum experiences: Developing pedagogy and professional skills through relationships between supervising teachers, coordinating teachers and university staff.

Gail Chittleborough  
John Cripps Clarke  
Peter Hubber  
Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria

Introduction to the topic or context and/or mapping of the literature

Pre-service teacher education combines university education and professional experience. Within constraints including time, and the availability of schools and supervising teachers, universities and schools work together to provide the best opportunities for pre-service teacher to develop their pedagogical and professional skills. However, the role of universities, schools and teachers in the training of pre-service teachers is changing as the needs of the pre-service teachers are changing; thereby requiring a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of the agents involved in the education and preparation of pre-service teachers (Ure, 2009). This study looks at the professional experience of pre-service teachers undertaking a combined undergraduate Science and Teaching degree over 4 years.

Partnerships between schools and universities provide a more unified and shared responsibility of the development of pre-service teachers (Goodrum & Hackling, 2008). Shared goals and better appreciation of the pre-service teachers previous experiences - at university and school has been shown to be beneficial (Ure, 2009) in providing a unified education experience. The authentic school professional experience with one-on-one mentoring by a supervising teacher is a most significant learning opportunity in the pedagogical development of the pre-service teacher.

Pre-service teacher education has to accommodate the changing needs, skills and identities of pre-service teachers. They commonly have pressures on their time and attention, with increasing demands of paid employment (ACER, 2010; ACER, 2008). The development of their identity as a teacher is a significant part of their induction in to the profession (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009) and there is an expectation that they have technological skills and knowledge of emerging scientific issues and topics to contribute to schools.

Aims of the project or research questions and/or focus of enquiry

“There is a significant relationship between students achievement and the quality of teachers” (Goodrum, 2008, p. 1) so by investing in teacher’s professional development students also benefit. This study investigates aspects that influence the pre-service teachers professional experience: the relationships between school and universities, and pre-service teachers, teachers and university staff to identify significant components of the professional development program that provide rich and rewarding experiences for pre-service science
teachers. This research aims to identify areas in which they are adequately skilled, and areas in which the pre-service teacher need further training to better prepare them for the future.

Research methods and/or analytical and/or theoretical frame

The research uses a case study using interview data. The participants included staff from participating schools, the coordinators (2) and supervising teachers (10), the university staff involved in organising placements (3), science education university lecturers (2) and the pre-service teachers (17) in their third year of the four year Bachelor of Science/ Bachelor of Teaching course. The interview questions investigated pre-service teachers’ expectations, attitudes to teaching, level of preparation, teaching experiences and involvement, experience with children, professional relationships and professional development. Similarly, interviews with the supervising teachers and school staff involved with the pre-service teachers provide insight into students’ experiences in both university and schools.

The analysis of transcribed interview data was used to identify major issues. Validity is established through triangulation using comprehensive interview data, and the consideration and inclusion of multiple perspectives, providing at times divergent points of views on each issue. Three aspects which prove useful in locating issues that contribute to the experience of the pre-service teachers are considered:

- Design - the design of the practicum within the constraints and limitations of the university.
- Identity - the pre-service teachers’ experiences and development;
- Partnerships - the schools’ involvement with universities in the development of pre-service teachers.

Research findings and/or contribution to the field

The issues emerging from the data with respect of the design aspect included a lack of preparedness among pre-service teachers, a lack of planning and preparation of lessons by pre-service teachers, and workload issues during practicum. The issues arising about the pre-service teachers identify included the potential loss of identity through the buddy system, meeting professional expectations, the need for confidence to grow alongside the need for accurate personal assessment, reflective practice to recognise strengths and weaknesses and having adequate discipline knowledge to teach. The issues concerned with the partnerships aspect include establishing and maintaining professional relationships among the stakeholders and ensuring everyone is aware of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder.

The nurturing of pre-service teachers begins through the design of the university program preparing the pre-service teachers for their placement in schools. Relationships prove pivotal in the pre-service teachers’ development as a teacher. Recognition of the expertise of each stakeholder ensures concerted approach to the pre-service teacher’s professional development.

References