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Paper 1:

Building an effective school-university partnership: A cluster approach

Mary Dixon, Jodie Kline, Diane Mayer and Simone White

Deakin University has introduced a new Master of Teaching course incorporating a new form school-university partnership that we refer to as the 'cluster approach'. In addition to responding to recent state and National reports on teacher education (e.g. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007; Kruger et al., 2009; Parliament of Victoria Education and Training Committee, 2005), this cluster approach aims to respond directly to recommendations from the Australian Teaching and Learning Council funded project into practicum partnerships (Ure, 2009), and focuses specifically on one of the reform agendas of the National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality, that of 'improving the quality and consistency of teacher training in partnership with universities' (see

<http://smarterschools.gov.au/nationalpartnerships/Pages/ImprovingTeacherQuality.aspx>)

Learning to teach is a continuum whereby teachers create new understandings and build professional knowledge and practice in collaboration with colleagues during their pre-service teacher education and then during their careers as teachers (Fieman-Nemser 2001).

Learning to teach is not a sole learning activity; rather teachers learn in communities and in collaboration with colleagues. Moreover, teachers are always balancing 'being the teacher' while at the same time 'becoming a teacher' (e.g. Britzman, 2003). Thus, they balance the notion of 'doing teaching' while at the same time 'learning teaching', and this is nowhere more evident than during the professional experience component of teacher education. This cluster approach is based on these premises.

The work of Le Cornu (2004), Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) and Little (2001) also informed aspects of the approach, which is predicated on 'reciprocal relationships' amongst pre-service teachers, and between pre-service teachers and experienced teachers both in schools and in universities. It frames teachers as cultural producers of knowledge, pre-service teachers as new resources bringing different ideas and practices into schools and schools as knowledge building communities (Little 2001, Nias 1998, Retallick et al 1999, Veugelers & O'Hair 2005).