

NEW CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION FOR TVET – WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING THROUGH THE CAREER CHANGE PROGRAM

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Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness and outcomes of an innovative teacher education for ‘beginning’ teachers with full careers in other professions and industries. Data were gathered over 3 years to study the experience of these teachers who undertake their initial teacher education and enter the profession simultaneously. This work is a benchmark practice of Victoria University (VU) commitment to enhancing educational access, participation and success for young people in the region. VU has formed a partnership with secondary schools delivering VET and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to address teacher shortages in secondary schools. The Career Change Program (CCP) has been developed to address this shortage by attracting qualified professionals with industry experience to teach in teacher-short-supplied subject areas. Praxis Inquiry (PI) model of teacher education is developed and applied by focusing on teacher learning in school settings. The program aims to set in place practices and procedures in partnership with key stakeholders that provide a framework for sustainable recruitment, selection and education of Career Change Teachers in Vocational Education. This framework will develop an international best practice of teacher education constructed as a partnership between schools, communities and university.

Keywords: work integrated learning, personalized support, Career Change

INTRODUCTION

‘The transition from musician to teacher has been slow and gradual. It has also been influenced by the fact that I have been spending more time and energy teaching. There has necessarily been less time for me to be a musician. However, there has also been a skill growth as a teacher that now matches my skills as a musician.... There has been a gradual realization that I am now a teacher and not a musician.’ (Career Change teacher).

The Career Change Program (CCP) at Victoria University is an innovative teacher education program delivered in partnership between the School of Education, Teaching and Learning Support Services, and supported by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). The program retrains experienced professionals and qualified trades people as teachers. Whilst working mainly in rural schools where shortages exist in subjects such as technology studies, information technology, mathematics, science and languages, the teachers concurrently undertake a two-year education program.

The structure of this teacher education program maintains the integrity of either the traditional one year full-time Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education or the Bachelor of Education (Vocational Education/Secondary). The features of the Career Change program include the provision of one day a week time release to enable study to occur away from the workplace, close mentoring and support from school based mentors and a high degree of personalized support from the university teacher educators. The subjects studied do not change but the method of delivery is more intensive: a

combination of residential workshops, seminars, visits to each teacher in their school and on-line communication. The program is delivered jointly by the School of Education and the Staff College (based in Teaching and Learning Support Services) at Victoria University.

Throughout the life of the program continuous review and reflection has occurred through a variety of evaluation methods. Whilst the program is seen as successful by the school principals and the program participants, this research examines and reports the learning and teaching practices and outcomes from the program so far and provides a framework for on-going practitioner research for improvement.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

The University has structured this two-year program to deliver either Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education or an integrated Bachelor of Education (Vocational Education and Training/Secondary). Imbedded within the Bachelor of Education (Vocational Education and Training /Secondary) is the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Cert IV TAA) and the Graduate Certificate in Vocational Education and Training (Grad Cert in VET). The Cert IV TAA is a requirement of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and allows teachers to deliver and assess within the vocational sector within Australia.

Towards the end of the preceding school year the DEECD advertises designated vacancies in statewide media. The schools make the actual selection and the VIT then advise on the required qualifications to be completed by the candidate. There are two pathways for these candidates; either they will present with a Bachelor degree and so complete a post graduate qualification in teacher education, or will have a vocational qualification and a minimum of eight years of industry experience and will need to undertake the equivalent of two years full time study in order to complete a Bachelor qualification (VET pathways) to meet the VIT registration requirements. VU receives copies of the applications in order to make a preliminary judgment of their likely academic learning needs. The candidates are offered places and all participants commence the program in the December. During this first week 'burst mode' of the program the focus is on building relationships and developing a collaborative learning group that continues for the life of the course and beyond. On returning in January the CCP teachers work intensively on program planning and delivery as well as engaging with the theories of learning and pedagogy needed to respond effectively to the learning needs of school students.

In the remainder of the first year the CCP teachers will return for further intensive blocks of study; the VET pathway group on four more occasions and the postgraduate group on two more occasions. This enables the VET pathways group to complete their additional requirements for the Grad Cert in VET studies that together with the Cert IV TAA form the additional study requirements. In the second year all CCP teachers are required to attend the university on two further occasions for intensive study. Each time the CCP teachers return to an intensive block of study the first session is always a "success protocol" where they share their successful and not so successful experiences and what they have learned in the process. The CCP teachers report this session invaluable in terms of their individual learning. The last time they come together is to present their final portfolios and a detailed evaluation of the whole two years of Career Change program.

PERSONALISED SUPPORT

An emerging factor in this type of program is the high degree of personalized support offered by university staff (Bolhuis, 2002. Moore, Martino & Cherednichenko 2005). In the initial stages of the course the three facilitators work closely as a team mostly co-delivering but always available for support. So much so that one of the challenges for the students is to differentiate who is responsible for which parts of the program! This relationship continues throughout the life of the program. These facilitators are the first point of call for nearly all enquiries and provide much counselling through ongoing listening and provision of advice in relation to a wide range of situations.

The university lecturers and in-school mentors provide additional support through school visits. The university offers mentor training for the in-school mentors in the initial week of the program. A vital aspect of the support is a full day free of the requirement to attend school, regardless of the time fraction the CCP teacher is employed and when they are at school the CCP teachers are not required to undertake additional duties within the school for instance, extra classes when other teachers are

away or yard duty. Further support is provided through a dedicated web page, registration with a learning management system, allocation of laptops managed by the schools through the DEECD at minimal fortnightly rates, provisions in programs for the time to have one on one-progress interviews with course facilitators and ongoing email contact and access to literacy support. These support structures are entirely focused on the CCP teachers within this program in addition to the support systems that are available to all students of Victoria University.

THE CHALLENGE

The approach used in the Career Change program is not without its concerns or its critics. Dill, (1996) raises the question: ‘Will alternatively certified teachers demonstrate a competency level equal to the traditionally certified teachers?’ How is this to be answered?

In examining site based teacher education practice in a number of countries, what becomes evident is that the quality of the teacher education program is not judged by the amount of time spent in either the university or the school, but rather the engagement in a critical discourse about the practices of teaching that enhance student learning. This engagement is ideally situated in the context of authentic experience and practice, but within the safe confines of professional debate and focused on analysis of evidence of teaching outcomes. Such a discursive environment (Kruger et al 2001) enables the teachers; student teacher, teacher educator and mentor teacher, to examine the learning artifacts of students so that teaching practice may be analysed and understood. Tools such as the Australian National Schools Network Protocols frame such enquiry, as does sustained inquiry about practice, normally driven by the authentic assessment practices of university courses. The achievement of the discursive environment is beyond reflection and professional dialogue and the starting point for development of ontological teachers and reflexive practitioners.

The evidence of the engagement in a critical discourse about the practices of teaching that enhance student learning is provided as part of the Teaching Portfolio which contains artifacts reflecting the praxis inquiry, teaching practice and research informing practice and developing substantive subject and professional knowledge. It also demonstrates reflective capacity in the form of case writing and commentary and annotated student work samples. A Philosophy of Education is also included which acts as a ‘reflective entry’ to the portfolio indicating the theory that has informed the pedagogy employed by the student teacher and in the case of this program, the Career Change teacher. In this way there is considerable integration. In designing their portfolio students are encouraged to organise their material so that they can clearly demonstrate how they are meeting the eight standards for provisional registration as determined by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

The eight Professional Standards are:

Professional Knowledge:

1. Teachers know how students learn and how to teach them effectively
2. Teachers know the content they teach
3. Teachers know their students

Professional Practice:

4. Teachers plan and assess for effective learning
5. Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments
6. Teachers use a range of practices and resources to engage students in effective learning

Professional Engagement:

7. Teachers reflect on, evaluate and improve their professional knowledge and practice
8. Teachers are effective members of their profession¹

Critical theory becomes central to teachers becoming aware of the social, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the students they teach’ and ‘the factors that influence their learning’. Teachers should also ‘draw on the body of knowledge about learning and contemporary research into teaching and learning to support their practice’. Item 7 of Professional Engagement lays to rest concerns that competence-based models are reductionist and run counter to reflective practice (Williams 1994 p8).

EVALUATION

The purpose in conducting ongoing evaluations of the program are to:

- describe the curriculum, teaching and learning experiences of Career Change teachers and staff in the program,
- identify the professional learning processes and practices of Career Change teachers in the program as they develop as teachers,
- examine, analyse and interpret the relationship between Career Change teachers' experience of teaching, learning and curriculum of the Career Change Program and their development towards the Professional Standards for Teaching.

The resources that contributed to the evaluation included :

- Regular student evaluations of units of study, teaching and course experience through University and national standardized measures;
- Lecturer's journal of experiences and observations of significant moments, insights and experiences described by students;
- Survey which identified perceptions of the course and the readiness to teach;
- Semi structured interviews with small groups of Career Change teachers and mentor teachers are held twice in each year of the course.

In addition in 2005 a DEECD (then the Department of Education and Training) evaluation was conducted independently of the School of Education, and included the Career Change teachers, their mentor teachers and principals in their schools.

'By reflecting back at University on what I had seen at the school I was better able to understand the observation and the learning at the university.'

Qualitative data is analysed using the Victorian Institute of Teaching Standards for Teacher Professional Registration as the framework. The data were validated through collaborative practitioner meetings with students and teacher educators in semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured individual interviews capture Career Change teachers' views about the relationship between the course experience and their own development as a professional teacher as well as a critical commentary on other data about their experience. The interviews also provide an opportunity to discuss the Career Change teachers' interpretation of their classroom teaching and the relationship of the course to their own classroom capability.

Data Analysis - the first 2 years

I am really happy with my career change and can see myself staying in this area for the rest of my life. I've already applied for an acting Leading Teacher position next semester.'

The data gathered and analyzed from the first 2 years of this project suggest that the Career Change program has produced positive outcomes with a number of issues.

Learning outcomes for Career Change teachers

Career Change teachers demonstrate an ability to manage the academic content of the course. Work is of a high standard. Career Change teachers also indicate a high degree of satisfaction with course delivery. Most (60%) believe that the single school practicum experience they had due to their paid capacity provides them with less opportunity to learn than if they could work in a number of schools. They also note that their mentor teachers are very busy and that this makes it more difficult to receive adequate support from them (45%).

Standards Reached and Teacher Competence

'We have done our VIT full registration interviews. We sat before a panel of four and presented our evidence. It took a lot of work but it was very fulfilling. It was amazing to look at what we have learned over a year. So whatever you two are doing (lecturers) we are learning heaps and thankful for that.'

There is strong conviction that these teachers are well prepared to meet the professional standards with 90% indicating that they are capable in planning, sensitive to their school student needs, can identify student difficulties and are able to teach thinking skills in the context of their subjects. There is mixed feeling about the balance of theory and practice in their program with 50% confirming that they perceive their course is less theoretical than traditional programs. They do not consider this a negative factor, but a reality nevertheless. However, they indicate overwhelmingly that they consider themselves to have a good knowledge of critical approaches to pedagogy and a sound capacity for reflection (85%).

Principals view of Career Change teachers

The surveys, directed at Principals who are employing a CCP graduate and those in the second year of the program, held a question that sought evidence for judgements about the teachers' effectiveness in terms of student learning outcomes/student attitudes:

2. *Please comment, if you were able to do so, on:*
 - 2.1 *The teacher's impact on student learning. For instance have student satisfaction surveys been completed by their students and are they above average, average, or below average?*
 - 2.2 *Has the teacher in any way contributed to the growth of programs in the school e.g. curriculum development, increase in student participation, special projects?*

What was somewhat disappointing was the lack of 'hard' evidence relating to teachers performance in this regard. Only one school supplied statistical evidence. In that example the CCT was rated well above average for the college being in the top 11% of a staff of 90. Another CCT in the same school, 'R_____ is always sought after as the Maths teacher of choice and his survey results are well above the average.'

Similar surveys conducted at another college were not specific in terms of individual ranking other than to report that on a whole staff level results had improved after the arrival of the CCT (small country P-12 school).

Other evidence is anecdotal e.g. 'No hard data but student and parent comments both formally and informally indicate that J_____ has made a difference'. 'M_____ has developed into a most competent teacher'. 'Good. Has encouraged students to continue LOTE" It is not clear whether or not this comment is based on survey data: 'Student satisfaction is high. The students have positive relationships and opinions of the two teachers'.

Some responses (3) simply indicated that surveys either were not done or about to be done. Others used increases in student subject enrolments to indicate a positive response to the teacher (3).

A Principles of Learning and Teaching survey was used in one instance to indicate that the CC teacher was 'above average.'

Only one negative response was received where student satisfaction levels are below the average and the Teacher's expectations of students and classroom management (have) not developed.'

Overall we can conclude that of the 17 schools surveyed covering 21 CCP teachers, only one was below average with the majority, where reported, being above average/viewed positively (76.4%).ⁱⁱ

Contribution to the School beyond Teaching.

All candidates demonstrate both a desire and ability to contribute to their schools in a variety of ways. Outlines of plans for their Applied Curriculum Projects (a course requirement) indicate the significance of their contribution. Projects range from the introduction of VELs into the science curriculum; investigation into Maths teaching with a view to creating greater engagement; a Personal Development program focusing on the needs of young adolescent boys; development of courses, modules and units in hospitality, automotive, systems, textiles, etc; the development of a music

facility. Career Change teachers are also undertaking administrative roles: timetable; school camps; student welfare.

Selection and Disposition

82% of Principals indicated that they would fill vacancies with CCTs if the opportunity arose in the future. 91% rated the potential of the teacher as either high (59%) or good. Of those who indicated it was either 'unlikely' or a definite 'no' we can identify the factors that guided their decision.

Strengths of the Career Change Program at Victoria University

- Early introduction of skills training: classroom management, teaching strategies in methods to be taught.
- Early introduction to learning theory. Practice/theory links clearly articulated.
- Integrated programs with built in TAFE components.
- High level of personalization and support through designated coordinator; school visits and contact with mentors and supervisors.
- A demonstrated ability to work flexibly with both DE&T and VIT in integrating various elements of the program e.g. full registration.
- Full registration is available on successful completion of the course.
- High retention rate.
- Targeted mentor training.
- Integrated learning and assessment tasks e.g. Applied Curriculum Project.
- Ability to respond flexibly to needs of individual learners in the school context e.g. due dates for assignments; introduction of interpersonal skills modules; additional classroom management sessions.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, according to Feiman-Nemser, the quality of teacher preparation revolves around two other dynamics: one, conceptual orientations in teacher education i.e. what should be in a teacher training course; and, two, the quality of program delivery. Whilst structures will provide some enabling features they alone will not account for variance (Feiman-Nemser, p 220).

So in the final analysis, given the multitude of alternative programs and the great variance in 'traditional' models, it comes down to an issue of 'quality control'. Concerns raised about standards in the preparation of teachers, relating to '(1) selection, (2) faculty, (3) content, (4) method, and (5) evaluation' (Haberman, 1991b, in Dill, 1996) are not felt to be an issue with the CCP where constant communication and negotiation exists between DoE ie the employing authority, VU and VIT. The focus of this communication is accreditation of courses; issuing of authority to teach; vetting of initial graduate qualifications; establishment of guidelines for post-graduate teacher education study; and design of procedures for provisional registration. The latter related to the 'Standards of Professional Practice or Full Registration'ⁱⁱⁱ which articulates in detail the competencies practicing teachers must demonstrate.

These data report that the CCP teachers highly valued their induction to teaching both at the school and university; that they bring strong knowledge and experience to the classroom and the culture of the school; and that they are confident in stimulating innovation and reform in their classrooms and schools within the first 2 years of teaching. When the first groups graduated from their teacher education program, all were confidently approved as fully registered teachers on the basis of an extensive exposition of practice developed and examined at the school with peers and principals. This process normally follows two years probation as a classroom teacher for all other graduate teachers.

The university will continue to both modify and improve the program based on feedback from Career Change teachers, school personnel, DEECD and VIT.

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