

Balancing ideals with reality: Universities and schools working together to bridge the gap

Few would argue that society in the early twenty-first century is changing on a scale and at a rate not experienced before. In the face of this change, there is a constant call for schools to adapt to meet these changes. The implications for initial teacher education programs are critical if they are to equip beginning teachers with the knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of young people today. There is much evidence to suggest that when teacher education institutions, employers and teachers work together in the education of teachers, learning outcomes are enhanced. However, it is often the case that teacher education programs fail to assist pre-service teachers in making connections between the ideal (their aspirations as beginning teachers) and the realities of day-to-day practice in schools.

This paper reports an evaluation of an innovative program developed in partnership between one Australian university and local school systems. The initiative, the Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC), has been implemented over the past ten years and places immersion in a whole-school context at the heart of the pre-service teachers' professional experience.

The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach comprising surveys of 125 teacher education students and 40 school personnel as well as focus groups of key stakeholders. The study found that the TLC produced enhanced learning outcomes in terms of the pre-service teachers' understandings of the increasing complexity of the teacher's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. These findings have critical implications for the shaping of initial teacher education programs.

Introduction

This paper reports an evaluation of an innovative program developed in partnership between one Australian university and local school systems. The initiative, the Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC), has been implemented over the past ten years and places immersion in a whole-school context at the heart of the pre-service teachers' professional experience. The structure of the TLC results in a unique opportunity to see the reality of teaching on a day-to-day basis within the context of specific curriculum and professional units delivered through lectures, tutorials and readings. One of the intended outcomes is for students to gain a connected learning experience enabling them to bridge the gap between the ideal and reality. The evaluation explores the knowledge and experiences perceived to be attained by students from the perspectives of all stakeholders involved in the program.

University-school partnerships and teacher quality

Effective teacher education programs are critical in the development of teachers and as such must demonstrate clearly their ability to prepare students for meeting the demands of an increasingly complex society (Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training – House of Representatives, 2007). In a similar vein Ramsey (2000) notes “We must be confident that our systems of teacher education equip teachers with knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of young people preparing for the transition to work and participation in an ever-changing world” (p9). These sentiments have played a significant role in the rhetoric within teacher education and governing educational bodies in the last fifteen years in Australia and as a result new teacher education innovations have been created to meet such demands. University-school partnerships have been one such response for there is much evidence to suggest that the closer teacher education institutions, employers and teachers work together in the training of teachers the better the outcomes for all (Brock, 1999).

Innovations in teacher education training are not restricted to just Australia. Similar initiatives have been advanced in Britain since 1992 with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) largely transferring the ownership of delivery of content and mentoring of student teachers to staff in schools. Funding has been reduced to HEIs and transferred to schools leaving academics in the position of searching for other funding to sustain their work (Furlong et al., 1996; Butcher, Bezzina & Moran, 2007). The introduction of Professional Development School Partnerships in Northern America has also been strongly encouraged and widely implemented (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001; Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett & Dunn, 2007). The purpose in each of these contexts has been to enhance the training of teachers so that graduates are demonstrating high quality practices for the benefit of the students they will teach (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) Mission and Strategy Statement - <http://www.nctaf.org/>).

However, whilst these initiatives are considered important and universities make efforts to pursue such goals the outcomes are not always what was intended. As Ramsey (2000) states

In general, and in spite of the best efforts of some universities, teacher educators, employers and teachers, it is apparent that teacher education and schools are insufficiently connected. In too many instances they are out of step, marching to a different drum. As with models of preparation in many other professions, the initial education of teachers must occur to a greater extent in the workplace and be accepted more widely as a professional responsibility, consistent with what it means to be a member of a profession" (p207).

In Australia, the demand for effective field-based partnerships has grown over the last decade and many universities and teacher employer bodies are embarking upon collaborative ventures that will improve outcomes in teacher training. The Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC) is but one university-school partnership which, according to previous evaluations (Sutherland, Northcott & Butcher, 1997; Beck, Howard & Moran, 1997), has created opportunities for all stakeholders to 'march to same drum beat'.

Professional teaching standards and teacher quality

Simultaneously, in a move towards raising standards within the profession, State accrediting bodies have developed lists of competencies against which teacher education graduates and the teachers within the profession may be measured (Collins, 2004; Dinham, 2004). In 2005, the NSW Institute of Teachers (the accreditation body representing all teachers in the state of NSW, Australia) implemented a set of Professional Teaching Standards (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2005) for use with graduating and beginning teachers. Graduates need to demonstrate these standards at their most basic level to firstly to gain employment and later at a higher level of proficiency to prove their fitness for employment beyond the induction years. For more experienced teachers the standards may be used for professional development and to further 'crosscheck' their knowledge, skills and commitment but the process at this stage is not compulsory. The Institute designated three key domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Commitment consisting of seven elements overall and applied these across four stages in a teacher's career:

Table 1: *Teacher stages required of teachers in the new NSW Institute of Teachers framework*

Stages	Description of Teacher
<i>Graduate Teacher</i>	<i>A beginning teacher who has undertaken an approved teacher education course</i>
<i>Professional Competence</i>	<i>A teacher with at least 12 months' experience and has demonstrated successful teaching knowledge, practice and commitment</i>
Professional Accomplishment	A teacher who has been recognized by other teachers as having in depth subject knowledge, pedagogy and commitment to the profession
Professional Leadership	A teacher who has a record of outstanding teaching, is a committed educator and can articulate a vision of education

Note: Italics indicate compulsory stage that every teacher must attain before permanent employment will be granted

Since 2005, as a result of the Institute's Professional Teaching Standards, all teacher education institutions must clearly demonstrate how and where graduates from their courses have sufficiently covered the three domains at the first level of 'Graduate Teacher'.

Accreditation to meet these standards then is an important issue for teacher education institutions, schools and the employing bodies within the school sector within NSW. All teachers who were employed prior to October 2004 were automatically granted teacher competency status; a decision made by the Institute to demonstrate its faith in our currently employed teachers. The legislated Parliamentary Act (NSW State Government, 2004) has ensured that within NSW no school may employ a teacher who has not been accredited by the Institute.

Hence, teacher education institutions are therefore urged to create more meaningful learning paradigms within school contexts whilst ensuring that student teachers are meeting competency levels required by the state in which they will be employed. This is not necessarily an impossible task but one that requires careful planning and consideration. The TLC was implemented several years before the NSW Professional Teaching Standards emerged and as such was not designed to meet these explicit guidelines. However, the University now must clearly demonstrate how the unique offerings it provides to students facilitates their achievement of the graduate standards.

The purpose of the study

An extensive evaluation of the initiative was sought to further clarify the benefits and challenges of the TLC program from the viewpoint of not just the student teachers but also the university staff and school personnel. A research grant was awarded to three of our staff team (Australian Catholic University) and Mrs Ryan (Parramatta Catholic Education Office) in 2006 to facilitate this evaluation. In this way the research team consisted of University personnel and a member of the employing bodies thus creating a research partnership to evaluate the TLC. It was intended that this much needed data would enable the Australian Catholic University to clearly demonstrate the key learnings gained through this university-school partnership using the lens of the NSW Institute's Professional Teaching Standards.

An overview of the initiative

The TLC was initiated in 1997 in partnership between the Australian Catholic University's (ACU) Strathfield campus and nine primary schools belonging to the Catholic Education Office (Parramatta) Sydney. The project began partly due to concerns raised by staff at the Catholic Education Office (CEO) concerning the need for student teachers to gain more access to classrooms and the realities of teaching. An

existing liaison committee involving the university and the CEO enabled the conversations to generate responses to this issue and as a result the TLC was born. The initiative continues to the present with an expansion to 40 primary schools across four dioceses in the Sydney metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas. All second year primary teacher education students are involved in the program (approximately 150 students) unlike some university offerings where a limited number of students self-select to take part in school-university partnerships. The main focus of their learning is to align theory with practice. This is achieved through the integration of two curriculum units with one professional studies unit by providing:

- research based content and pedagogical components delivered through lectures and tutorials at university; with
- a practical component involving action learning on site in a school setting (Long, White, & Moran, 2006).

The students work in teams of approximately four. The schedule involves weekly lectures, six weeks of attending tutorials and six weeks in the school context across Kindergarten to Year 6. While in school the student teams are integrated into a school staff, observe and reflect on teaching practice, and work with teachers in the delivery of the curriculum. It is unlike a typical teaching practicum in that the student teachers do not plan and present lessons but instead observe and assist in all classes across every subject. A major component of student learning involves the design and trial of school based projects for the development of students' own learning and for the benefit of staff and children at the school. Lecturers visit the schools during these six weeks and assist the students further with making links between what they have seen and done with what they are learning in lectures on campus. The involvement of academics in this manner aims to strengthen the "weak link between the practicum and the theoretical components" noted as a significant concern in *Top of the Class: Report on the inquiry into teacher education* (Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training – House of Representatives, 2007, p. 71).

The university staff have consistently designed and implemented this innovative learning paradigm over the past ten years. The role of staff every year has included lecturing and tutoring the student cohort and facilitating both university students and school staff in their reflection and work together. The university TLC Coordinator negotiates placements recommended by the Catholic Education Offices, briefs schools and students new to the program, oversees the assessment work and ensures that the program is evaluated regularly. The school executive seeks to spend time with the students assisting in their reflections whilst the teachers the students observe answer questions about the processes they use and why it is effective. The result is a program offering benefits in student learning which is evidenced in team assignment work and in the professional interactions with school staff and school students (Long, White & Moran, 2006).

One of the key findings to emerge from a doctoral thesis written about this initiative was that the TLC is an effective model for developing student teachers' understandings of teachers' work (White, 2003). White states that the students gained understandings about the complexity of the teacher's role, the political world of the teacher; and the importance of community and collegiality within the school context. She concluded that, as a result, this model better prepares and motivates student teachers for the profession than models that solely utilise the traditional practicum structures of lectures, tutorials and day-a-week visits to an assigned class.

Methodology

The most extensive evaluation conducted of the TLC took place at the end of 1997 (Sutherland, 1997) in the pilot year. Since then evaluations were conducted in 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006. These subsequent evaluations have focused largely upon the implementation issues of the TLC and less upon the learnings gained from such a program. Data collection methods have relied solely upon surveys completed by staff in the school executive and at the university in addition to the university students. In contrast, the evaluation conducted in 2006 required a more extensive method to gain deeper understandings of the perceptions of significant stakeholders during their individual experience of the TLC. To this end it has

provided insights into the level of success this partnership has achieved in enhancing teacher quality and bridging the gap between the pedagogical and professional ideals encouraged at university and the realities of day-to-day life experienced at school. Additionally, participants were asked to comment on whether they perceived the students' capacity and knowledge in the three domains of Professional Knowledge, Practice and Commitment had been improved. This was important data needed for identifying the ways in which students were developing their understandings of the realities of teaching.

The 150 students involved with the TLC program in 2006 were asked to complete a survey rating their perception of the role of the TLC in developing them towards the seven elements from the NSW Institute of Teachers' Professional Teaching Standards (graduate level). A five point Likert scale was used for this purpose. The response rate to the survey from student teachers was 83% with $N = 125$. There were three sections to the survey:

- Section 1 asked participants to respond to seven statements about the TLC program comparing it to the traditional offering of the three units on campus with a morning-a-week school visit;
- Section 2 asked participants to respond to the seven elements represented by 45 statements from the NSW Institute of Teachers; and
- Section 3 gave participants the opportunity to write their own responses with regard to key understandings, the ways in which TLC enhanced this learning, and any other comments.

A selection of schools were also surveyed using the same instrument however only school executive and those teachers who worked closely with the student teachers in a practicum following the TLC were invited to participate as they had worked most closely with the student teachers.. Fifty-four teachers were sent surveys by mail and 40 (N) were returned anonymously resulting in a 74% response rate.

Staff from two schools who had responded to the survey were then asked if they would participate in a focus group discussion which not only explored the learnings of the university students but also the benefits and challenges for themselves and their students in this university-school partnership. There were six participants from the first school and four from the second school in two separate focus groups.

Finally, staff from both ACU and CEO (Parramatta) involved in the school-university partnership were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss the growth and development of the program over the past ten years. The questions asked were similar although not identical to the questions asked of the school staff.

Results and Discussion

The survey

Section one of the survey required participants (school staff and university students) to respond to seven statements contrasting the TLC mode of delivery with the traditional method of units taught on campus (i.e. lectures and tutorials) and a morning-a-week program of visits to school to prepare them for a block practicum following the semester. It was anticipated that this would be important data that would identify clearly the comparison of these two approaches.

Results in this section were particularly encouraging with percentages above 80% in most areas. The seven statements are given in Table 2 alongside the percentage of teachers and students who believed that the TLC enhanced learning much more or more than traditional programs.

Table 2: *Percentage of teachers and students who believed the TLC more greatly enhanced learning than traditional approaches.*

Statement	Percentage of Teachers	Percentage of Students
1. Through the TLC I [the student teacher] gained important knowledge about student learning.	85	82
2. Through the TLC I [the student teacher] gained a fuller understanding of the teaching profession.	90	89
3. Through the TLC I [the student teacher] gained an understanding of the operation of the whole school.	95	93
4. The TLC enhanced my [the student teacher's] capacity to make links between theory and school practice.	80	70
5. The TLC school projects were of value to the school staff and children.	85	86
6. After the TLC I [the student teacher] feel orientated and prepared for the block practicum.	85	63
7. The TLC is a worthwhile program in the development of Pre-Graduate Teachers.	90	84

Teachers overall were more confident than students about the enhancement of learning for student teachers. The difference in responses between participant groups was less marked in the statements concerning gains in knowledge about student learning, understanding of the teaching profession and the operation of the whole school and the value of the school projects (statements 1, 2, 3 and 5). Comments made by school staff in the open-ended questions supported this: *“I believe this is an extremely worthwhile program that provides students with an opportunity to see what happens in schools over time and throughout the school”* and from another teacher:

having the opportunity to become part of the school community many weeks prior to their practicum is so valuable! The more time they have to do this the better. Schools are living, breathing organisms – this gives students a great opportunity to experience the reality of schooling (with all the unforeseen changes, etc., that impact on each day!).

Students in the program commented similarly:

Through working in TLC I have been able to see how theory becomes practice. I found TLC to be extremely insightful, about the school's network, different teaching strategies, how to cater for a mixed range of abilities and become involved in the school community.

And from another:

What were the most important understandings I developed through this program? Seeing the theory being put into practice by experienced classroom teachers. I found it helpful being a part of the school community surrounded by professionals. I observed many things which I believe will help me become a more effective teacher. TLC was a great preparation for practicum and future teaching. [A] very worthwhile experience that has intensely enlightened my knowledge.

Developing professional knowledge. Section two focused on the NSW Institute of Teachers' Professional Standards. The first domain of professional knowledge was represented by ten statements covering the two elements listed in Table 3. Teachers were more confident than university students about the gains students

had made in this area. The overall mean of 75.4% demonstrated that teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students had developed knowledge and capacity in professional knowledge. The mean of responses from teachers and university students with regard to the individual elements in this domain is listed in Table 3.

Table 3: *Percentage of teachers and university students who agreed or strongly agreed that the student teachers' knowledge and capacity were enhanced in the two elements representing professional knowledge.*

Element	Percentage of teacher agreement	Percentage of university student agreement
Teachers know their subject content and how to teach that content to their students	75	57
Teachers know their students and how they learn	76	71

University students did not respond as positively to perceived outcomes in this domain with an overall mean of 63.7%. University students were particularly less confident of gains made in terms of knowing more about subject content and how to teach it.

Despite this, in section three where participants were invited to list their most important knowledge/understandings, skills and values learned through the TLC 30 comments from the 125 student participants were made with regard to what they had learned about professional knowledge. A typical comment is given here:

Through participation in the TLC the most important knowledge I acquired was how students learn and the importance of building a strong and positive rapport with the students; and the Maths project we had to complete that focused on the literacy and language involved in Maths and children's understanding.

Developing professional practice. The second domain of professional practice was represented by twenty-one statements covering the three elements listed in Table 4. Similar to the domain of professional knowledge teachers were more confident than university students about the gains made in this area. The overall mean of 82% demonstrated that teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students had developed knowledge and capacity in professional practice. The student overall mean was 72%. The means for each of the three elements in this domain are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: *Percentage of teachers and university students who agreed or strongly agreed that the student teachers' knowledge and capacity were enhanced in the three elements representing professional practice.*

Element	Percentage of teacher agreement	Percentage of university student agreement
Teachers plan, assess and report for effective learning	74	61
Teachers communicate effectively with their students	84	73
Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments through the use of classroom management skills	89	82

Comments made in section three of the survey regarding this domain numbered 58 from the 125 students and 34 comments from the 40 school staff covering areas such as greater awareness of the need to implement behaviour management strategies to optimize learning, greater awareness of the diverse needs of

individual learners, the need to implement a range of teaching strategies to meet individual needs, and enhanced ability to develop engaging resources. A sample of comments made concerning learning in this domain is:

Experiencing all the classrooms and teaching styles – participating on a professional level with the whole school. The TLC tasks helped me feel I contributed and developed skills in creating tasks that suit students’ needs” and “I learnt a lot about the preparation that goes behind each lesson, the amount of planning and programming. I learnt how important you structure your lessons, whether in catering for all learning styles/children’s abilities and the environment, the importance of giving constructive feedback as well as rewards. [I learnt about] the environment and the atmosphere, in the classroom, in staff meetings, in the playground, in school assembly, or even in the staffroom. It’s a place for communication and you can never feel alone. There are so many resources available and you can help each other. Overall, it was great.

Developing professional commitment. The third domain of professional commitment is represented by the final two elements in the Professional Teaching Standards and is primarily concerned with improving teacher practice and how teachers must work with others in the educational context. The overall mean of 66.6% demonstrated that teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students had developed knowledge and capacity in professional commitment. The student overall mean was 78.2% showing that in this domain university students valued more highly the knowledge and capacity they gained in the area of professional commitment. The means for each of the two elements in this domain is listed in Table 5.

Table 5: *Percentage of teachers and university students who agreed or strongly agreed that the student teachers’ knowledge and capacity were enhanced in the two elements representing professional commitment.*

Element	Percentage of teacher agreement	Percentage of university student agreement
Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice.	71	77
Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community.	62	80

Aligned with the stronger university student percentages in this domain comments from students were also more frequent. From 125 students 48 comments in the area of professional commitment describe benefits in learning about the importance of reflective practice, critical self-evaluation and accepting constructive feedback and the value of teamwork, communication amongst staff and cooperation in the school network. A sample of comments are as follows: “*I learnt more about the sense of community, the different roles in the school and the involvement of parents in school life*”, “*The individual classroom teacher works best when supported by the wider school community*” and:

The importance of the whole school working together to ensure that the needs of the students are met. It also gives us an idea of how complex schools’ structures are and the value of working co-operatively in teams to achieve goals that benefit the school.

School staff made 41 comments regarding these same areas. A typical comment from a teacher is given here: “*The program places the Pre-Graduate Teacher in a real teaching situation in a real teaching environment in a real school community. They get to experience teaching as it happens each day with ups and downs while being supported by experienced and supportive colleagues*”.

The Focus Groups

The focus groups provided opportunity to gain greater depth about many of the issues discussed in the survey. The key benefits that emerged from these discussions focused upon the:

- comparison of different stages of learning and teaching styles;
- benefits for schools as well as for university students;
- benefits for university staff;
- understanding students gained about hidden agendas within school culture;
- opportunity to absorb the reality of day-to-day school life in schools;
- linkage of theory with practice;
- authenticity of the partnership; and
- clarification of career choice for students.

Comparing stages of learning and teaching styles. The opportunity to compare stages of learning with teaching styles and has been identified as a key benefit over the many years of implementation in the TLC (Beck, Howard & Moran, 1997). Students in annual unit evaluations have also frequently commented on these benefits. This evaluation was no exception. Staff could readily identify that this was a benefit for students involved with the program. One teacher noted the particular learning that took place for her student teacher:

I wanted to comment on something that [the school principal] said about going across the grades, going across the three stages [as this] was really powerful for one of my students in particular. You can always get narrowed down to the teacher you are with and their teaching style [in practicum], but giving the students the opportunity to see a range of teachers or their teaching styles, there is someone you could align yourself with even if you're not aligning with the teacher that you are working with. My particular student had a problem with projecting her voice and she was terribly discouraged that she couldn't do that, but going to see other teachers that were very similar to her, gave her a lot of hope. Yes, I think it's very powerful and very worthwhile.

Benefits gained for schools. A number of benefits were identified by school staff: the opportunity to reflect and articulate what you do and why you do it; the completion of the school project by the university students; getting better teachers as a result of the TLC process; and providing time for space in their own classroom. One teacher remarked that due to the TLC program:

I need to articulate why, clearly why I do something, so for me, it's looking at my teaching and not just saying, well, I just do that, actually reflecting on why I teach the way I do and why I believe it's best practice. It forces me to reflect.

The school projects for the most part were selected by the school and were primarily for the benefit of the school. University students also learned about the non-teaching tasks that teachers need to undertake outside of teaching hours. Details of timing and managing the project were negotiated between school staff and the university students. Staff remarked that one of the key benefits for them and most particularly for their own pupils was the completion of the school project. As one Assistant Principal noted:

I was just talking to [name] the coordinator of Maths this morning. We were talking about the TLC students, I don't know why, but we were, and we were talking about the resources that they have provided, the mathematics resources, maths games, the templates, the whole lot of it. Fantastic! I've been teaching for 30 years and I don't think I've seen some of the stuff that they put together.

The school executive and the personnel from the CEO in particular could see the benefits they gained through employing teachers who had been through this process. One school principal said this:

I think from a selfish point of view, what happens with the TLC program as part of the teacher education is, it sounds terrible, but we get something out of it. Whereas when they're here for practicum, basically we don't get anything out of it, it's the students and probably the university that's getting something out of it. And we don't mind doing that, we don't mind having them for practicum. But in the TLC, we are part of a whole process that helps educate these teachers, and I think that the greatest value for us with teacher education is what we get in the process of the TLC and then of course at the end of it, what we get as a result of teachers coming out of ACU.

Teachers also spoke of the help that was possible due to the available 'pairs of hands' from student teachers in the classroom. It was not so much the one-to-one attention that students could give the school pupils which had been raised in previous years' evaluations but instead teachers were referring to the space during a lesson that allowed them to focus on the children whilst the student teachers ran group work for them. One teacher remarked:

I was remembering a time when I had all four of last years' TLC students engaged in student group work, and it was a fantastic opportunity for me to just sit back just watch the group dynamics and how each group related to each student teacher.

In response to this comment, another said:

I'm a nut case when it comes to anecdotal notes and when I was in that situation, I actually took down notes about my class and following on from what you were saying, how they were working within the group as well. It just gave me a breather to sit back and think, yes, they can do this but they can't do that.

Benefits for university staff. In recent times as the research agenda has become the most pivotal method through which universities can gain necessary funding academics have spent less time in schools. As one academic said: "*And this is the advantage over prac now, because prac, of course, doesn't have any of us basically in the field doing supervision because we don't have time anymore. So we pay people, external people to come in and be in the field. TLC still anchors academic staff back in the field and it's the only program that does*". Being back in schools has the benefit of clear discussion with students about what they are seeing and doing as well as keeping academics in touch with the nature of schools and the personnel employed there.

Learning about hidden agendas within school culture. Teachers and the staff from the university spoke about the way in which the TLC taught university students about the political culture of schools. Compared with a traditional practicum the TLC gave students the opportunity to work in a variety of contexts with teachers. Projects needed to be negotiated and undertaken, classes were observed and discussed with teachers, staff meetings were attended and specialist staff and school secretaries were interviewed. As one teacher commented:

I think for the students themselves (the TLC students) it's an opportunity for to them to get to experience the culture of the school and get to know us on a different level than in the classroom straight off. It's good for us too because we get to see a bit of them outside the classroom too.

Similarly, a teacher from another school commented: "*I think they get the sense of what the school is all about, the common language that's used in the school, the procedures and that all adds to the culture and the climate of the school as well*".

ACU staff commented on difficult situations where staff in schools were not acting professionally, the student teachers were able to identify the lack of professionalism but then didn't know where to go with that information. Questions that students asked themselves were: should they tell someone? Should they ignore it? What about the children who may be at risk because of the unprofessional behaviour? The

immersion into these types of dilemmas were a particularly powerful tool in teaching students how to deal with staff in a professional context. As one ACU staff member said: “*So it is about them learning how to negotiate that territory, it’s a different territory and seeing how to work their way through*”.

Opportunity to absorb the reality of day-to-day life in schools. The experience of seeing every class and teacher in the school means that students have the advantage of seeing the ‘great’ classes and the ‘not so great’, the teachers who work exceptionally with the students and those that struggle. University student teachers are involved in most aspects of school life across the school. This is different to traditional practicum when students are assigned to one teacher on one class. One teacher commented:

If a student was to come to a prac and have one teacher, if they were with a teacher who was dissatisfied with the school, they are just going to fill their head with negatives, whereas in the TLC meeting with lots of teachers, they get to see the school from every angle.

Linkage of theory with practice. Despite only 70% of students agreeing that ‘the TLC enhanced their capacity to make links between theory and practice’, staff involved with the program were more convinced that this was occurring. One ACU staff member commented on what she saw was the main goal of the TLC:

I think for me it has always been linking the theory and the practice rather than we will have an academic unit here and we will plonk a prac and never the twain shall meet. I think it has been a model, which has really facilitated that much more effectively than the conventional models.

And a teacher also observed:

It [TLC] gives reality to the theory, rather than just – you can come out of university and know your theory, but the best learning is really seeing the culture of the school and seeing being with the staff and having that learning. I think it’s valuable in that aspect.

Authenticity of the partnership. Authenticity of the partnership did not emerge as a strong characteristic of the TLC. School staff did not see that this was an authentic partnership in that many of the implementation details are dictated by the university rather than negotiated with the schools. One principal noted:

I don’t see us in a partnership and I feel that we get asked if we would take them [the students]. In a partnership, you’re both working together, whereas this, you get the phone call or the sheet or whatever we get and Robert and I discuss, is it a good thing? Have a look at it, look in the diary, what’s happening around that time? Is it possible? Blah, blah, blah, blah. And then we say, yes. I feel rather than a partnership, it’s a request from you and we’re doing you a favour by taking them. Of course, as I said earlier, the results are that they are doing us a favour when they are actually doing it.

But in a partnership, we’d be sitting down planning what people were coming and how many were coming. You might have some ideas for projects that you believe the students should be doing. I don’t think we’ve ever had that sort of a working relationship. Not that I see it as negative, it doesn’t worry us but if you are going to talk about authentic partnership, I don’t see it as a real partnership I see it as a job we do to help you and in that process we get some return.

At the beginning of the initiative the main purposes and structures were conceived in a more collaborative manner (Butcher, Bezzina and Moran, 2007) but once the model was created individual schools were called upon to take up that model and work with it. When forty schools and 150 students are involved such a partnership with each school is not possible. It is evident from the principal’s comments above that she does not consider this to be a negative but simply a reality of how schools and universities work.

Clarification of career choice for students. The positioning of this program at the beginning of the university students’ second year of training means that clarification of whether this career is for them or not

is still an option to be explored and acted upon. It isn't too late for them to change their mind and it is certainly not too early to be convinced that this is what they want to do. The CEO staff member commented:

And that was one of the things that they [the teachers] were very strong on – weeding out the people who were not going to be future good teachers and they felt that this program helped them do that early in the piece without somebody spending four years at uni and then coming out and people saying “I don't think teaching is for you.”.

Conclusion

These results are an indication that the TLC is an effective means for developing the competencies required of pre-graduate teachers. For the student teacher seeing each of the domains lived out across the whole school gives breadth and depth to their developing understandings. The TLC gives more to the students than what has been mandated as necessary by the NSW Institute. They see with greater clarity the profession as a whole, the school culture and hidden agendas, the tasks teachers complete outside of teaching and the way in which staff work together. They can then compare this reality with the models of effective teaching practice they are encouraged to explore at university and the result is a clearer understanding of what lies ahead in their chosen profession. Hence, their view becomes much more global and assists the trainee teachers in seeing the whole profession 'warts and all' as is clearly articulated in the following student comment:

“[I have learned about] how important group collaboration is in a school, [how] teachers working together is essential and [how] there is more to teaching than meets the eye. Being able to experience all stages and grades allowed me to see all the different aspects of students of different ages and seeing many different styles of teaching and classroom management skills – no one is the same” and “[I have learned about] how to effectively and professionally link theory to practice. [About] the development of student rapport in various classroom social contexts and about understanding what occurs behind the scenes of a classroom”.

The benefits of such a model have only been possible due to the shared vision and hard work of this university-school partnership. Teachers, school executive and university personnel work alongside in this initiative ensuring that this unique learning opportunity results in students developing clear understandings of the teaching profession thus bridging the gap between ideals and practice.

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