

InSights

Key components of effective professional experience in initial teacher education in Australia

A paper prepared for the Australian Institute
for Teaching and School Leadership

Associate Professor Rosie Le Cornu 2015



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1. Introduction

Professional experience is recognised consistently in both the literature and in reports on teacher education as a critically important part of initial teacher education programs and is regarded highly by pre-service teachers and experienced teachers alike (Ramsey, 2000; Parliament of Australia, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Bullock & Russell, 2010; Cohen et al, 2013; TEMAG report, 2014). Whilst professional experiences are considered pivotal to initial teacher education, they are not without their critics, nor, as shall be shown, are they problem-free.

This paper begins with clarification of terminology and provides some background information including a consideration of some of the challenges facing professional experience in the current context. It will be argued that there is a need for consistency in key elements of professional experience policy and practice across all universities in Australia. This does not mean that one size fits all or that a uniform approach is being advocated. It is acknowledged that different contexts require different approaches to meet the diverse needs of students and the profession. This is in line with the *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia Standards and Procedures* that explicitly encourage 'flexibility, diversity and innovation' (AITSL, 2011, p. 2). The paper presents seven key components of effective professional experience that have been identified in the literature. These components are discussed and for each component, indicators of high quality practices have been proposed. These indicators are illustrative only. It is recognised that not all of them may be present and indeed some may not be applicable in particular contexts.

The components are considered under the following three categories:

- High quality integrated initial teacher education programs
- High quality placements
- High quality partnerships

2. Terminology

Terminology is very important when one is trying to achieve national consistency. Consistent usage of terms needs to be followed to minimise confusion. Over the last few decades we have seen multiple responses to the changing contexts in which we work. These have included changes in how professional experiences are conceptualised, structured and supervised. Such changes have had implications for the term used to describe the experience itself and for the terms used to describe the roles of the various participants. Hence the literature contains a plethora of terms.

Professional experience

The term *professional experience* is often used interchangeably with terms such as teaching practice, practicum, practical experience, field experience, experiential learning and work-integrated learning. Whilst these terms are often used synonymously, they are also used deliberately by some writers to portray specific conceptualisations. Their particular emphases can be traced historically. For example, the term *teaching practice* relates back to the 1970s when the process of learning to teach was conceptualized using a theory-practice dichotomy that is, when 'student teachers' were at college or university they learnt 'the theory' and when they were in schools, they 'practised teaching'. The term *practicum* was used more in the late 1980s and 1990s when it became recognised that "making it on one's own in student teaching is not the same as learning to teach or being a teacher" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 60). The practicum was seen as a site of learning for pre-service teachers and the focus was on developing reflective practitioners. The process of learning to teach, in this orientation, was reconceptualised to include an acknowledgement of "personally owned professional knowledge" which is gradually built up by integrating learning in a range of university and school sites (Meere, 1993).

The terms *professional experience* and *work-integrated learning* have been used since the new millennium to build on these understandings. Ramsey (2000) for example, defined professional experience as "workplace learning that is integrated with academic preparation and educational studies" (p. 61). Smigiel and Harris (2008) described work-integrated learning or professional experience as programs where students engage with workplaces and communities as a formal part of their studies. Such definitions acknowledge and value the professional learning opportunities provided by workplaces as well as the knowledge provided by practitioners. Billett (2008) captured the essence of the most recent interpretation of professional experience in his definition that workplace learning is designed to generate new ways of knowing *within and through* practice rather than the mere application of theoretical knowledge *to* practice.

This paper adopts the term *professional experience*, consistent with these definitions, and to emphasise the view that *both* academic and practitioner knowledge are valued in developing effective professional experiences. It is crucial to clearly define the term professional experience because doing so clarifies its purposes and this helps to ensure that a shared understanding underpins the development of high quality practices. Recent studies have illuminated disparate views amongst university-based teacher educators (Morrison & Le Cornu, 2014) and between schools and university personnel (Cohen et al, 2013). There are also contradictory purposes being promulgated in a number of key national documents, due to a variety of terms being utilised, including 'supervised teaching practice' (AITSL, 2011) and 'practical experience' (DET, 2015).

Roles

As well as a range of terms being used for the experience itself, there are different terms for the roles of the participants involved. For example, supervising teachers, mentor teachers, associate teachers, co-operating teachers and school based teacher educators are all used to describe the role of a teacher who supervises a 'student teacher' on placement. There is also a variety of terms for the university based teacher educator who visits placements including university liaison, university mentor, visiting lecturer, tertiary advisor and university based teacher educator. The term student teacher is still used but more recently has been replaced with pre-service teacher. Professional experience nomenclature is very important because it conveys important messages or aspects about the various roles.

For the purpose of this paper, the term *supervising teacher* will be used as it is congruent with AITSL's related work and website resources. The terms *university based teacher educator (UBTE)* and *pre-service teacher (PST)* will also be employed. For pragmatic reasons, the term *school* will be used to incorporate all education sites including early learning settings and *universities* will be used to incorporate all initial teacher education providers.

3. Background

We know that *teacher quality* is the single-most important in-school factor influencing student achievement (Hattie, 2003, 2012; Hayes et al, 2006). There is no doubt that high quality teaching is key to optimising student learning outcomes. The recently developed Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs), help to “make explicit the elements of “high-quality, effective teaching in 21st-century schools” (AITSL website). It is beyond the scope of this paper to expand at any length on what constitutes high quality teaching but, in brief, according to Day & Gu (2010), it is recognised by “its combination of technical and personal competencies, deep subject knowledge and empathy with the learners (Hargreaves, 1998, 2001; Palmer, 1998)” (p. 181). They also remind us, as do many writers, that high quality teaching is underpinned by teachers’ passion and commitment (McLaughlin, 2005; Nieto, 2005; Palmer, 1998). Still another perspective is provided by Groundwater-Smith et al (2015) when they note that good teaching, well done, is both hard and satisfying. They emphasise that it is intellectual, emotional and physical work and it is also socially responsible work. They explain:

It is uncontested that teachers need a considerable array of skills in identifying, analysing and assessing learning; and in designing, implementing and evaluating classroom programs. Teachers also need to be capable communicators beyond the classroom. They need to be effective colleagues, careful and sensitive in their dealings with the community, guided by precepts of equity and justice. (p. xi)

Teachers' work

Teachers’ work today is arguably more complex, challenging and difficult than at any other time (Johnson et al, 2014). Many writers have highlighted the plethora of policies, guidelines and directives that contribute to the complexity of teachers’ work and the increased expectations of teachers. These include national curriculum, teacher accountability and performance management, national professional standards for teachers, social inclusion and equity policies, national standardised testing, behaviour management, special needs and Indigenous education (eg Reid, 2005; Bloomfield, 2009; Johnson et al, 2014). Clandinin (2009) has also highlighted the impact of the ‘shifting social landscape’ on the complexity of teachers’ work, noting the influences of globalisation, refugee populations, immigration, demographics, economic disparities and environmental changes on teachers and teachers’ work. Most recently, the expanded nature of teachers’ work has been recognised in the call for capturing the collaborative and collegial dimensions of teachers’ work in any system of teacher evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Mayer, 2014).

Teacher educators’ work

Teacher educators’ work today is also more complex, challenging and difficult than at any other time. Academics’ work has become more intense with the increased foci on research and internationalisation and the ever increasing pressures on academics to produce quality research outputs. This situation has resulted in conflicting expectations for teacher educators as noted by Gallagher et al (2011); “On the one hand, we are expected to attend to... clinical aspects of practice... At the same time the academy expects teacher educators to pursue rigorous programs of research...” (p. 880). In addition, for teacher educators, there are increasing expectations concerning accountability and conformity within professional standards frameworks and the call for flexibility, diversity and innovation, financial constraints and the challenges of university and schools’ reward structures (Bloomfield, 2009; Nuttal et al, 2013; Loughran, 2014; Mayer, 2014). Santoro et al (2009) captured the impact of these demands when they wrote; “...the changing landscapes of universities as workplaces and the work of teacher educators within them is shifting, unsettled and challenging our understandings of what it is to be a teacher educator” (p. 138).

Current challenges for professional experience

There is no doubt that initial teacher education is facing a plethora of challenges currently, positioned as it is amidst the changing landscapes of both schools and universities. The situation is even more complex for those involved with professional experience as there continues to be a multiplicity of political, professional, economic and pragmatic issues that surround professional placements. These are magnified because of increased teachers' and academics' workloads, the intensification of PSTs' lives, increasing casualisation of university staff and the difficulty of finding quality placements. For many initial teacher education programs, this has resulted in a breaking down of school-university partnerships, at the very time that there is a renewed interest in how schools and universities will work together to support teacher education (AITSL, 2011; TEMAG, 2014; DET, 2015). It can be seen that professional experience remains a vexed issue amidst the current intense and challenging context for teaching and teacher education that is shaped by discourses of regulation and accountability.

The Australian Government response to the TEMAG report (2015) endorses a national approach to "drive improvement in teacher education in Australia". It is clear that many of the identified existing problems with professional experience go beyond individual state jurisdictions and are being experienced around the country (ACDE submission to TEMAG, 2014). The Australian Council of Deans of Education (2014) illuminated the following most pressing problems from a national perspective;

- a range of practical issues act as barriers to high quality practicum programmes, including a chronic shortage of placements;
- host schools must deal with the differing expectations and systems of multiple teacher education institutions;
- a lack of time for mentor teachers to meet and work with pre-service teachers and other school and university-based colleagues;
- inadequate time for this element of their work being allocated to teacher educators by their home institutions (p. 16).

Moreover there now exists a national approach to program accreditation which outlines requirements to ensure high quality initial teacher education programs (AITSL, 2011). These standards and procedures form part of a current national commitment to teacher quality and require both school based and university based teacher educators to provide evidence that graduates can demonstrate the professional knowledge, practice and engagement as outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. A key focus for teacher educators currently – both school based and university based, is authentic assessment of the professional practice of PSTs focusing on judging the impact of PSTs on student learning (Mayer, 2014). A number of university based teacher educators have begun exploring, implementing and investigating various approaches to authentic assessment of teaching (eg Qld College of Teachers, 2012; Allard, Mayer & Moss, 2013; Sim et al, 2012; Bloomfield et al, 2013). It is prudent that this work is developed and shared nationally.

The next section of the paper presents seven components of professional experience which have been identified from the literature as playing a key role in ensuring that they are of high quality.

4. Key components

The key components are presented under three categories; high quality integrated initial teacher education programs, high quality placements and high quality partnerships. It is noted that structuring this section in this way may be seen as perpetuating unhelpful binaries (ie schools/universities; practice/theory) but it was done deliberately to highlight what is needed in schools and what is needed in universities to ensure quality professional experiences. The reality is that for high quality, there needs to be an integrated approach through partnerships to develop the components across the two sites. The seven components are;

- Well *structured* integrated initial teacher education (ITE) programs
- Well *managed* integrated ITE programs
- Well *supported* integrated ITE programs
- High quality supervising teachers
- High level commitment from School Leadership
- High quality school-university partnerships
- High quality systems based partnerships.

The seven components are presented under the following three categories; A/ high quality integrated initial teacher education programs, B/ high quality placements and C/ high quality partnerships.

A. High quality integrated initial teacher education programs

A.1. Well structured integrated ITE programs

A.2. Well managed integrated ITE programs

A.3. Well supported integrated ITE programs

B. High quality placements

B.1. High quality supervising teachers

B.2. High level commitment from School Leadership

C. High quality partnerships

C.1. High quality school-university partnerships

C.2. High quality systems based partnerships

A. High quality integrated ITE programs

High quality integrated ITE programs demonstrate an explicit commitment to integrating academic and professional learning. In such programs there is an integrated approach to content, pedagogy, student learning and professional experience. Such alignment across theory and field work is considered essential to successful work integrated learning and essential to counter the theory-practice divide which is still seen to be problematic in many initial teacher education programs (Hall, 2005; Vick, 2006; Ure et al, 2009; Zeichner, 2010). There are many examples in the literature of approaches to structuring and enacting the curriculum of teacher education to enhance program coherence (eg Bullough et al, 2004; Korthagen et al, 2006; Ure, 2010).

High quality integrated programs are first and foremost focused on the ultimate outcome, that of student learning. To this end, they have an explicit commitment to the development of reflective teachers. Reflective teachers are considered “essential to building and sustaining the range of personal and interpersonal qualities and content and pedagogical competencies that are necessary components of expertise in teaching” (Gu & Day, 2010, p. 134). Two key features are regarded as necessary for the development of reflective teachers: critical reflection and reflexivity. *Critical reflection* requires PSTs to think deeply and critically about their practices and examine the social justice implications so that they learn to teach in ways which maximise learning outcomes for *all* students. These are critical features of high quality teachers we want to be teaching our students. As Zeichner (1989) stressed;

Although we have a need for intellectually capable teachers...we also have a need for culturally sensitive, compassionate and morally responsible teachers who are able to actively engage in the struggle to provide an education that helps all children to have access to decent and rewarding lives. (p. 9)

Reflexivity requires PSTs to not only identify what their values and beliefs are about a particular matter but how they came to have those values and beliefs, that is, what influenced them over time. This is a critical component of effective initial teacher education. We know that if PSTs don't reflect on their own values, beliefs and assumptions, then their teacher education program will have little impact (Wideen et al, 1998; Kelchtermans, 2009; Lovat, 2014).

A high quality integrated program is one that is:

- well structured,
- well managed and
- well supported.

A.1. Well structured integrated programs

Well structured integrated programs are those that are “sequenced coherently to reflect effective connections between theory and practice” (Standard 4, *The Accreditation Standards*, AITSL, 2011). The content of these programs includes discipline-specific curriculum and pedagogical studies, general education studies and professional experience. The developmental sequencing of units is necessary so that those considered key for preparing PSTs for effective teaching and learning in placements (eg curriculum, learning theory, classroom management) are undertaken as pre or co-requisites for the professional experience units. This ensures that PSTs are able to undertake the planning, programming and assessing tasks required of them in their placements and maximises the impact that PSTs can have on student learning outcomes.

Structuring of professional experiences

Carefully constructed professional experiences that are co-ordinated with campus units have been shown to be more effective in supporting PST learning than traditional ‘unguided and disconnected field experiences’ (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). Standard 5 of *The Accreditation Standards*, (AITSL, 2011) provides some direction for how the professional experience component of programs must be structured and supported. Providers are expected to be able to describe the nature and length of placements, the planned experiences, related assessment criteria and the supervisory support arrangements. They are also required to provide PSTs with a diversity of experiences including a range of school year levels and attention to the diversity of students and communities which schools serve. It is important that PSTs experience a range of educational settings that are different from their own and are diverse with respect to gender, culture, social, location, economic and educational resources. It is also important, when structuring professional experiences, to give due consideration to PSTs with special needs. Orrell (2011), highlighted this point in her review of literature on work integrated learning, and identified students with particular backgrounds, including students who are indigenous, students with disabilities, students from low SES backgrounds, international students and students who are the first in their family to attend university.

The Accreditation Standards, (AITSL, 2011) also mandate the minimum number of days that teacher education programs must allocate to students’ professional experiences. The allocation is 80 days for undergraduate and double degree programs and 60 days in graduate entry programs.

The provision of experiences of appropriate timing, length and frequency is very necessary to ensure high quality. Research evidence suggests that early timing of the first professional experience enables prospective teachers to determine whether they are committed to a teaching career and enables PSTs to gain confidence in the classroom (Gomez et al, 2009; Invargsen et al, 2014). Similarly, extended professional experience is a feature of education programs that prepare high-quality teachers for the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2012, Ure, 2010). Extended lengths of practice particularly towards the end of a program allow deeper connections to classrooms and schools and to enable visible impact on students’ learning.

An explicit professional experience curriculum

An explicit professional experience curriculum spans a number of learning spaces including on-campus and/or on-line and in schools, in order to maximise connectedness of the learning that occurs in the different spaces for PSTs. It has a number of components. Firstly it provides clear requirements for the classroom/school/community experiences to be undertaken during placements. All three dimensions need to be planned for, so that PSTs can appreciate the complex, diverse and multi-faceted nature of teachers' work. It has been acknowledged that a focus on community is particularly important for PSTs undertaking rural and remote placements (White & Reid, 2008). The requirements for PSTs must be organised in a gradual, staged engagement with the setting, commensurate with their level in the program.

A second component of an explicit professional experience curriculum is the implementation of specific structures in schools that support PSTs' reflection and reflexivity processes. For example, time for reflection, reflection learning conversations, collaborative teaching and peer observations. The third component is an on-campus/online component which ensures that PSTs are well prepared for their role. Carefully structured preparation for PSTs prior to them attending placements is necessary to enable them to be rigorous and productive learning experiences (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Sim, 2006; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Orrell, 2011). The on-campus/on-line components need to prepare PSTs for the intense and collaborative nature of working in a classroom and the relational and emotional dimensions of teachers' work. The curriculum needs to include the explicit teaching of skills and attitudes that enable pre-service teachers to engage more productively in collegial relationships and learning conversations, to manage the complexity of the learning process in schools and to manage the demands and challenges of being on placement.

Role of UBTEs

Well structured integrated programs not only carefully plan course content and learning experiences for placements but they also provide clarity around the roles of the participants involved in professional experience. One of the perennial issues in professional experience is related to the quality of supervision of PSTs and the ways in which universities work with schools within professional experience programs (see Parliament of Australia, 2007; Cohen et al, 2013; TEMAG, 2014). The role of the UBTE has been a recurring theme in the last decades and we have seen myriad responses in Australia as to how they are involved in professional experience. A range of practices has consequently been implemented, ranging from a complete withdrawal of school visits from a UBTE, to a 'trouble shooting' role only, to regular planned visits to schools throughout the duration of the placement. Other practices include the implementation of on-campus or on-line workshops facilitated by UBTEs for supervising teachers to support them in their role. Regardless of the model adopted, the UBTE has an essential role to play in high quality professional experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2009; White et al, 2010; Zeichner et al, 2015). Universities need to be clear about the role of the UBTE and convey this to their placement schools. If visits are employed, there needs to be clarity around the purpose of these visits.

Role of PSTs

Another role which needs to be reconceptualized, based on recent research findings on PST and early career teachers' learning and wellbeing, is that of the PST. PSTs need to be positioned as being responsible for their own professional learning *and* making a contribution to their peers and others in their professional learning community. This is a very different position to the passive, individualistic role adopted in more traditionally designed professional experiences. The expectation of graduate teachers being able to engage with their colleagues is conveyed in Standard 7 of the APSTs. A number of effective professional experience models are capitalising on the benefits of peer learning by clustering PSTs in schools, pairing PSTs in classrooms and engaging with online learning communities (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Ure et al, 2009; Boulton & Hramiak, 2012; Tang & Lam, 2014). Participation in online learning communities is particularly relevant for rural and remote placements.

Peer mentoring has been shown to have benefits for pre-service teachers during professional experience, including providing support and enhancing resilience (Le Cornu, 2009); inducing a disposition of collaboration (Britton & Anderson, 2010), (which the authors argue, is essential for meaningful collaboration in teaching); enabling collaborative problem solving and collaborative reflection resulting in professional growth (Jenkins et al, 2009; Krutka et al, 2014); sharing of resources and ideas (Krutka et al, 2014); enhancing reflective thinking (Nicholson & Bond, 2003) and helping the development of their professional identity (Sutherland et al, 2010). It has also been argued that these benefits extend into their early years of teaching. In a recent study, Fox & Wilson (2015) found that the social capital developed by beginning teachers through their networking that occurred during their initial teacher education program helped them cope with the challenges presented when they started teaching. Papatraianou (2012) and Johnson et al (2014) reached a similar conclusion in their studies on early career teachers. These are important findings given what we know about the problem of early career teacher attrition.

Well structured integrated programs are evidenced by:

- Careful sequencing of units across the program;
- Clearly articulated underlying principles for quality professional experiences;
- The provision of diverse, rigorous and carefully planned professional experiences;
- An explicit curriculum for professional experience;
- Clear role statements for PSTs, supervising teachers, UBTEs and Co-ordinators;
- Clear assessment guidelines and reports which are evidence based;
- Quality assurance processes such as milestones or benchmarks to ensure that PSTs are moving towards the Graduate Standards.

A.2. Well managed integrated programs

The work involved in *managing* professional experience is very different from that highlighted in the previous section in regard to *structuring* an effective integrated program. However it underpins successful professional experiences. The University's role in effective management of professional experience must not be underestimated. This work includes organising the placements of students and managing all of the associated processes. It is often viewed as the hidden work of professional experience in that it takes a lot of time and resources and when done efficiently it is often taken for granted and goes unrecognised. When professional experience isn't well managed, the problems are endless, including impacting negatively on placement availability. This problem was identified in a study by Sinclair et al (2006) who found that 'perceived poor practicum management' was a contributing factor that dissuaded teachers from taking on the role of supervising teacher. Another negative impact of poor management practices is that it encroaches on UBTEs' teaching and research time. This is particularly the case for Professional Experience Directors (PEDs), who already have a very full workload co-ordinating all of the professional experiences across programs. The result is that they often become so caught up in the administrative side of professional experience that they have little or no time for the pedagogical and scholarship side, which is crucial for their ongoing professional development and evaluation and sustainability of programs (Le Cornu, 2012; Southgate et al, 2013).

Well managed integrated programs are evidenced by:

- A highly skilled Team Leader who can liaise with administration staff, the PED, UBTEs, academics, school based staff and various stakeholders;
- A collaborative approach to sourcing and managing placements (ie ECE, primary, secondary);
- Timely placement notification to PSTs and sites;
- Efficient processing of PSTs' evidence of all compulsory placement conditions;
- Proficient handling of responses to PSTs' queries about their placements;
- Timely processing of payment claims and reports;
- Provision of copies of relevant documentation to schools (including explicit processes for the management of PSTs who do not perform well on placement).

A.3. Well supported integrated programs

Institutional support is critical for high quality integrated programs. For universities, this includes the support of Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors and Deans of Education and for schools, the support of Chief Executives of Education Authorities and their senior staff. In regard to universities, there needs to be a commitment from universities to firstly value teacher education and secondly value the work of teacher educators (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Martin et al, 2011). A significant contextual issue is that teacher education in general is still seen as a low-status field of study in many research universities (Zeichner, 2010; Nuttal et al, 2013; Loughran, 2014). Moreover, as Gallagher et al (2011) have noted, "...the culture of education colleges and the promotion criteria and other reward systems within universities privileges scholarship over clinical practice" (p. 880). These factors have resulted in a disturbing trend where initial teacher education is largely taught by sessional and post-graduate students and a decreasing involvement of tenured university staff in professional experience work (Clandinin, 2009; Zeichner, 2005; Loughran, 2014). These trends are not conducive to the sustainability of high quality integrated programs.

In regard to schools, there needs to be a commitment from Education Authorities to firstly value the role of professional experience in initial teacher education and secondly value the work of supervising teachers. A change in perception is needed. A step towards this, as noted by the ACDE submission to TEMAG (2014), is to "modernise the notion of professional experience, away from an old style voluntary/goodwill or 'extra burden' view to one which values the engagement of pre-service teachers in the active work of teaching to enhance student learning" (p. 16). To this end, there needs to be an explicit valuing of the role of supervising teacher and a commitment to enhancing their status through recognition of the critical role they play in supporting less experienced teachers. One way to do this is to fund professional learning for supervising teachers and/or time release. Teachers assume their supervisory role in addition to fully carrying out the responsibilities of classroom teaching and often are not provided with the kind of preparation and support they need (Valencia et al, 2009). Nor are they provided with time release and yet we know that adequate time is one of the major reported hindrances to supervising teachers conducting their role more effectively (Graves, 2010; Levine, 2011; Peters, 2011).

Well supported integrated programs are evidenced by:

- The inclusion of full credit bearing units for professional experience in initial teacher education programs;
- Appointment of the role of Professional Experience Director at a senior academic position;
- Appointment of a senior staff member in schools to the role of Professional Experience Co-ordinator;
- Acknowledgement of UBTE work in an academic's workload;
- Allocation of additional time for supervising teachers to conduct their role;
- Provision of mentoring and professional development support for new academics, sessional staff and supervising teachers involved in professional experience;
- Universities' and Education Authorities' reward and promotion structures prioritising professional experience and partnership work;
- Universities' and Education Authorities' support for scholarship and research/development opportunities in professional experience.

B. High quality placements

High quality placements are those that are committed to an integrated ITE program and producing a high quality graduate. They are welcoming to PSTs and prioritise their learning alongside the learning of students and other members of staff. That is, they operate as professional learning communities. Cohen et al (2013) identified three key features of professional communities that promote learning and improved practice: norms promoting collaboration and collective responsibility; joint activity promoting access to practice, and trust, morale and interpersonal familiarity. They argue that for many teachers, norms of privacy, autonomy and congeniality militate against teacher learning and suggest that these need to be replaced by norms promoting collaboration, help-seeking and deprivatised practice. There is little doubt that collegial cultures that promote these norms impact positively on PSTs' learning in their placement (Ewing, 2002; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Lee & Feng, 2007) and indeed, on early career teachers (Johnson et al, 2014; Peters & Pearce, 2011). The notion of whole schools being viewed as placement sites, rather than individual classrooms, is an element which is being increasingly acknowledged in the literature (Ewing, 2002; Zeichner, 2002; Ure, 2010). There are two central elements that pertain to high quality PST placements: high quality supervising teachers and high level commitment from school leaders.

B.1. High quality supervising teachers

We have known for a long time that supervising teachers have a substantial impact on PSTs' learning in professional experience (McIntyre, 1991; Zeichner, 1990). We also know that their role is complex. When a teacher commits to supervising a PST, they immediately adopt a second role, that of teacher educator. The complexity of the school based teacher educator role is exacerbated because it is also twofold, being that of both mentor and assessor. Supervising teachers are expected to provide support (and challenge) for PSTs' learning as well as assessing their classroom teaching performance. Both roles are necessary for a high quality learning experience for PSTs but they can create ambiguity and cause tension for supervising teachers particularly when trying to find a balance between the two roles (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2012). Orland-Barak (2014) captures the complexity of mentoring when she notes; "mentoring is not just about mentors' competencies and behaviours, it is also about their reasoning, beliefs and identity formation and the place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring" (p.180). In regard to assessment, this role is critical in the current context, as noted earlier. There is no doubt that for supervising teachers, the effectiveness of PSTs in the classroom is a major focus of their feedback and assessment. Research into mentoring of PSTs and early career teachers have identified some key characteristics of effective supervising teachers (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Hammel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011; Sim, 2011).

High quality supervising teachers are evidenced by:

- the demonstration of highly developed teaching practices and relational capacities;
- supporting PSTs to build constructive learning relationships with themselves, students, colleagues and members of the school community;
- helping PSTs to interpret and respond to events by sharing their expertise and local knowledge, including discussions about their own teaching practices;
- supporting PSTs to plan and implement an appropriate learning program for students;
- building PSTs' understandings of student data and assisting them to interpret and draw on data and student feedback to effectively plan and modify their teaching;
- the provision of authentic and continuous feedback on PSTs' effectiveness in the classroom;
- assisting PSTs to collect sources of evidence for their portfolios and to reflect on this evidence to assess their impact on student learning;
- making evidence based professional judgements on PSTs' performance against the Graduate level of the Professional Standards;
- the provision of a clearly written, evidence-based summative report.

B.2. High level commitment from school leadership

School leadership refers to the principal and senior staff members who together, make up the leadership team of a school. Research has shown that teachers are more willing to accept PSTs into the school community if there is explicit commitment from school leadership (Peters, 2011; Le Cornu, 2012). Leaders have been found to play a key role in beginning teachers' learning and resilience (Johnson et al, 2014; Gu & Day, 2013; Gallant & Riley, 2014). They do this *directly* by providing professional and emotional support to beginning teachers. They do this *indirectly* by developing their school as a professional learning community, which impacts positively on both students' and teachers' learning.

Another way that they demonstrate a high level commitment to an integrated initial teacher education program is in the allocation of a member of the leadership team to the role of Professional Experience Co-ordinator (PEC). The PEC role is emerging as a key component of quality professional experiences. Traditionally, where the role has been reported in the literature, it has been the managerial and administrative responsibilities of the Co-ordinator that have been highlighted (eg allocation of PSTs, distributing university guidelines and forms, etc). However, where the role has been found to have a real impact on PST and supervising teacher learning, a far wider range of responsibilities has been evident in a variety of pedagogical, assessment and partnership practices (Martinez & Coombs, 2001; Utlej et al, 2003; Mutton & Butcher, 2007; Peters, 2011; Le Cornu, 2012). In a small study of exemplary PECs, it was found that they assisted in the induction, professional learning and assessment of PSTs (Le Cornu, 2012). They did this by providing support for both PSTs and supervising teachers and actively committed to building constructive relationships with the university. Moreover, as well as supporting both PSTs and supervising teachers to ensure that, as graduates, they were 'classroom ready', they also emphasised the importance of them being 'school ready'. To this end, they focused on the learning for PSTs beyond the classroom so that the PSTs would learn about the multifaceted role of a teacher.

There is no doubt that commitment from school leadership is demonstrated in a multitude of different ways.

High level commitment from school leadership is evidenced by:

- developing their school as a professional learning community that includes PSTs;
- having an active role in integrating PSTs into the activities of the school;
- working at obtaining a commitment from the whole staff to initial teacher education;
- allocating a member of the leadership team to the PEC role;
- assisting PSTs to negotiate multiple and complex workplace relationships;
- encouraging reflective and evidence based practice by providing explicit feedback;
- prioritising opportunities for collaboration and critical dialogue;
- providing additional support for 'at risk' PSTs and their supervising teachers.

C. High quality partnerships

High quality partnerships are those that involve a shared responsibility by the stakeholders for initial teacher education and a willingness to work together with other partners (Parliament of Australia, 2007). They are also seen to have an ‘enduring’ quality to them (AITSL, 2011). We know that underpinning successful partnerships are relationships based on trust, respect and reciprocity (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Kruger et al, 2009). We also know that much time and commitment must be invested by all partners in developing and maintaining such relationships. The two key partnerships involved in quality professional experiences are school-university partnerships and systems based partnerships. Whilst there has been a long established call for school-university partnerships, there appears to be an increasing commitment to the view that sustaining high quality partnerships requires a ‘whole of systems’ response. The TEMAG report (2014) stated; “Initial teacher education needs to be delivered through close integration of higher education providers, school systems, teacher employers and schools across all sectors” (p. 11). The Government response to the report endorsed this approach, identifying universities, schools and education authorities as the partners.

C.1. High quality school-university partnerships

Given the longstanding recognition in the literature and government reports that the ‘student teaching’ experience is improved if schools and universities are ‘in partnership’, there has been much work done in Australia and overseas in the implementation of good practices in developing and sustaining partnerships between schools and education providers. For example the Professional Development Schools in the United States were designed to promote high quality practice and to provide higher levels of support for new teachers (Grossman, 2010). In Australia, the government initiative *Improving Teacher Quality National Partnerships (2009-2013)* enabled the establishment of *Centres of Excellence* to provide high quality professional experiences for PSTs and professional development for teachers. Whilst there are many examples of high quality school-university partnerships currently in Australia, there are also examples where no responsibility is taken by any of the parties to establish a partnership. This variability is of concern. Another concern is that some of the positive examples are not reflective of a broader system-based approach as noted in the TEMAG report (2014), but rather depend on individual connections between faculties and schools. Such partnerships are neither sustainable, nor equitable for PSTs.

High quality school-university partnerships are evidenced by:

- an expressed commitment from schools to deliver quality placements;
- high visibility of UBTEs and PECs supporting both PSTs and supervising teachers during placements;
- university and school staff engaging in ongoing shared professional dialogue to develop and reinforce a shared view of teaching and learning to teach;
- collective support for innovative professional experience practices;
- collaborative initiatives occurring between universities and their partner schools;
- innovative use of online technologies for supporting learning to teach, particularly in geographically challenging settings;
- the development of formalised partnership agreements between universities and clusters of schools.

C.2. High quality systems based partnerships

This is a critical time for teacher education in Australia. The myriad challenges surrounding professional experience in Australia currently are beyond the capabilities of individual schools and universities. There must be a high level commitment of the Australian Government, together with state and territories' Government, Catholic and Independent education systems to address the challenges and develop new forms of shared responsibility for preparing future teachers. It will require a determined effort from all parties. As Bullock & Russell (2010) explained; "it will take massive efforts to transform the deeply entrenched culture of existing field experience arrangements and practices" (p. 93). This point was reiterated most recently by Zeichner et al (2015) when they wrote;

Given the labor-intensive nature of building inter-institutional collaborations in teacher education, the habits of those from schools and universities, and the low status of teacher education in many research universities, it is going to be difficult to achieve this cultural shift in teacher education. (p. 131)

The importance of reculturing must not be underestimated. We know that both reculturing *and* restructuring are needed for successful 'prac reform' (Le Cornu, 1999). Any changes or innovations which are implemented in regard to 'how prac is done', that is, changes in structures (rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships), must be accompanied by attention to reculturing (changing the shared beliefs, customs, attitudes and expectations) amongst the various stakeholders involved in professional experience.

High quality systems based partnerships are evidenced by:

- shared responsibility for sourcing professional experience placements;
- the provision of ongoing professional learning for school based and university based teacher educators;
- a collective approach to ensuring rigorous and consistent assessment of PSTs which could include the development of assessment rubrics, evidence guides and common reporting templates;
- a commitment to ongoing research in professional experience (eg impact of professional experience on PSTs' learning and impact of PSTs on student learning);
- support for ongoing Roundtables of multiple stakeholders (eg PECs, supervising teachers, school leaders, teacher union representatives, system leaders, and UBTEs) to engage in critical dialogue around professional experience practices and policies;
- promotion of national guidelines developed by AITSL to enhance the quality of professional experiences in initial teacher education.

5. Conclusion

To ensure high quality professional experiences it has been argued that there needs to be consistency in key elements of professional experience policy and practice across all universities in Australia offering initial teacher education. To this end, there is a need for the development of national guidelines. This paper makes a contribution to the process. It has identified seven key components of effective professional experience programs. For each component, indicators of high quality practice have been proposed.

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