



Collaborative University and School Partnership Project

Implementation in Practice 2012

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Background to the Collaborative University School Partnership Project (CUSP)

The 2012 CUSP programme was developed in response to several national and international drivers including moves to reconceptualise the practicum and strengthen partnerships between schools and universities involved in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes (Grudnoff, 2011; Le Cornu, 2009; Furlong, Whitty, Whiting, Miles, Barton & Barrett, 1996). More importantly, the programme was designed to address concerns expressed by local Normal¹ School principals that the current school placement arrangement for micro-teaching was disruptive to their teaching programmes due to changes in timetable structures related to the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* and the introduction of numeracy and literacy standards and associated assessment.

International reviews of exemplary teacher education programmes highlight the importance of close relationships and ongoing collaboration between teacher education programmes and the schools in which student teachers teach and the critical role of well-designed extended practicum experiences. (Darling Hammond, 2010; Levine, 2006; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). Well-designed co-constructed practicum experiences develop communities of learning that assist student teachers to apply the concepts and strategies they are learning about at university within their practicum environment and to make purposeful links between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Schleicher, 2012).

The goal of the CUSP programme was to improve the experience for student teachers and children in schools by providing a negotiated school placement that integrated more seamlessly with school programmes. The programme involved student teachers being placed in pairs in school classrooms for a whole day throughout Semester A and for half a day in Semester B. They completed their end of year, three-week practicum in the same school, often in the same classroom. A staff member from the school was appointed as an honorary lecturer (associate lecturer) by the University. The Professional Practice and Inquiry (PPI) paper, delivered in the school context, was co-taught in Semester A by a PPI lecturer and the school's associate lecturer. Micro-teaching requirements for curriculum papers were completed in the student teacher's home room although schools could move students to another class level for their micro-teaching if it was deemed essential.

The Research in 2012

Research carried out during 2012 focused on two research questions.

The first question focused on the development of the CUSP programme.

1. *What is the nature of the collaborative process used by the Faculty of Education and Normal schools to develop a reframed programme of school placement and practicum to strengthen the coherency of first year student teachers' experiences in schools?*

Data collected for this question focused on the co-constructive process between the Normal schools and PPI lecturers as decisions were made relating to the roles and responsibilities of the schools and the faculty, the structure of the professional practice and inquiry paper, and student placement and practicum experience (September 2011 to December 2012, but mainly 2011). Data collected consisted of meeting notes and focus group discussions with the professional practice and inquiry PPI team, associate lecturers and principals.

Summary of findings: Over the initial 4 months (February to May) the PPI team and associate lecturers met weekly to co-construct the PPI paper. This process was led by the PPI team who provided an initial framework for the paper based on the existing learning outcomes and paper

¹ Normal schools in New Zealand are appointed by the Government and provide a major teaching practicum facility for universities.

structure. The co-construction of the implementation process for the PPI paper took place between the associate lecturers and the PPI lecturers assigned to the schools over the course of Semester A as they co-taught the paper via in-school tutorials on the placement day. Both the associate lecturers and the PPI lecturers valued this process and commented on the benefits of the shared understanding and close relationship.

In semester B the curriculum paper lecturers were responsible for clarifying tasks with the student teachers and the school. In comparison with Semester A, school staff considered there was not enough interaction between the faculty lecturers and the school and both groups found the semester challenging. The associate lecturers had established a way of working with the faculty in Semester A. In Semester B the professional practice and inquiry paper had finished and the regular visits by PPI lecturers ceased and impacted on the role of the associate lecturer in the school. Associate lecturers stated they would welcome more effective communication and support from the faculty throughout the whole of the year. Data indicates more thought needs to be given to the transition from Semester A to Semester B and, in particular, curriculum lecturers need to consider what is needed to develop a better shared understanding with the teachers working with the student teacher pairs.

The second research question probed what happened in two case study schools to understand how the programme was implemented and with what impacts.

2. *What is the nature of the faculty, Normal school and student experiences within a reframed CUSP programme?*

Data collected for this part of the research involved teacher and student surveys, student focus groups, and principal and lecturer interviews in the two case study schools. The data were collected with a view to describing the nature of local collaboration and decision-making processes and providing evidence of the nature and impacts of the revised paper and placement/practicum on faculty staff, principals/teachers and student teachers.

Summary of findings: Overwhelmingly, the case study schools' participants reported a positive impact of CUSP. The most important factor that enabled the success of CUSP for all participants was the way the programme allowed time to build effective relationships. Findings are now described in more depth from the perspective of the student teachers, associate teachers, associate lecturers and professional practice and inquiry lecturers.

The Case Study School Research Participants

The student teachers

Effective communication and networking between university and school, and continuity of placement and practicum were key factors that facilitated the building of relationships and development of a purposeful learning community. This resulted in student teachers building good relationships within the school, relating theory to teaching practice in the classroom and starting to discover a teacher identity in the context of the classroom.

The challenges student teachers reported included classroom withdrawal for PPI in-school tutorials that could disrupt/interrupt their classroom experience; difficulties in building a relationship with a new classroom teacher and children at the start of Semester B; the number of tasks to be completed in the half-day placement in Semester B; not being prepared for planning a unit for a whole week in the three-week practicum; and, in a very small number of cases, working in a dysfunctional pairing.

The associate teachers

Associate teachers felt well supported by the university-school partnership. In particular, they appreciated the way the associate lecturer worked together with the PPI lecturer to provide clarity

about expectations of the associate teacher role and student teacher tasks. A good relationship between the associate teacher and the student pair facilitated the rapport between the student teachers and the children, and helped student teachers to establish a teacher presence in the classroom.

Associate teachers found that full and half-day placements had helped to prepare students for their three-week practicum. Placements enabled student teachers to establish relationships within the school and with children prior to the practicum, to see more connections between the theory and practice of teaching, to engage in learning conversations with the teacher, to be more reflective about how children learn, and to take on a more intensive teaching role during the practicum.

Some associate teachers said they benefitted from being able to watch the children learning from others and to share ideas with the student teachers. They appreciated being able to teach a small group because their student teachers were working capably with their class. The combination of full, followed by half-day placements, helped new associate teachers to feel more confident in working with first-year student teachers.

Associate teachers commented that having the student teachers on a regular basis made them more aware of the role of the University and of the students' prior knowledge. They also noted that they were conscious of being more explicit in articulating their thinking and rationales for choosing particular approaches.

Associate teachers were prepared to be flexible with their classroom timetable to allow for student teaching opportunities, but found they needed to allocate extra time to have learning conversations with student teachers, to review their own reflections, and to unpack reasons for student-teacher thinking and rationales in teaching.

The challenges for associate teachers included student teacher absences; issues with required tasks not being suited to what was happening in their classroom, too many lessons to teach on the placement day or students not being well prepared for teaching tasks; issues within the student pair; and similarly only having one student teacher in the classroom. Finding time to spend with the student pair at the end of the year when the school was conducting achievement testing was a challenge for teachers in the case study schools.

The associate lecturers

The associate lecturers, in both schools, were released from teaching to take on the role. In one school the associate lecturer prepared an information pack for associate teachers that included expectations of associate teachers and information on student tasks. The associate lecturers considered they had built an effective relationship with the PPI lecturer to co-construct the in-school tutorials and manage the students' full-day placement experience throughout Semester A.

The challenges for associate lecturers included the inconsistency of student teachers' classroom presence during full-day placement due to in-school tutorial timing; insufficient school space available for student teachers to join in staff meetings; teachers in one school feeling over-burdened during the second term with additional student teachers in the school from other programmes; students on half-day placement becoming stressed about curriculum tasks that could not be completed; recently appointed associate teachers lacking confidence to develop their student teachers in curriculum areas; concerns about the nature of the associate lecturer role and curriculum lecturer roles in Semester B; and concerns that school requirements for achievement testing disrupted the practicum at the end of the year.

The professional practice and inquiry lecturers

CUSP engendered partnership support for, and communication between, the associate lecturer and the PPI lecturer as they met together each week to plan placement day activities. The PPI lecturers in the case study schools ensured that the associate lecturers they were working with understood and were

comfortable in their role. They focused on sharing ideas and agreeing on expectations to ensure that consistent messages were communicated to student teachers. They also gained from being able to collaborate with other PPI lecturers to ensure similar experiences for all students. Their role extended to encouraging school staff to read the PPI textbook (McGee & Fraser, 2012) and organising learning conversations with their student pair. Both PPI lecturers in the case study schools noted they felt an obligation to continue a presence in the school after the PPI paper had finished and to be available to students at the university during the second semester.

One PPI lecturer found that gathering students at the end of the day to share experiences and start them off on their reflections was valuable. The other lecturer had teaching commitments and could not do this. Both lecturers felt that the whole and half day placements had prepared the students well for their practicum and found that interviewing the student pairs after the first full-day placement had been most useful for placing them in a different class for the second semester

Challenges for the PPI lecturers included: associate teachers' concerns about workload; insufficient clarity of faculty expectations for associate teachers about their role during placements; the timing of in-school tutorials disrupting student teachers' participation in classroom activities; expecting too much of student reflections at the start of year; students becoming stressed during the second semester; and students not being introduced to classes properly at the start of the second placement which impacted on their interactions with the children.

Implications

As the policy and practice context and expectations for the preparation of teachers becomes more complex and challenging, it is unlikely that either university-based initial teacher education lecturers or school-based professionals, on their own, will be able to provide the breadth of opportunities, experiences and insights that student teachers require to develop the adaptive expertise they need to meet the demands of today's children and curriculum. The collaborative partnership model being developed and explored in this study offers opportunities for all parties within the triadic partnerships to learn from and with each other. There is evidence from the initial research that the CUSP programme has been a positive experience for all parties. A great deal of mutual respect has been developed between the faculty PPI lectures and the associate lecturers in schools. Student teachers perceive their school placement as an embedded part of their ITE experience. A deeper understanding of each context by each partner has improved the experience for student teachers. More work however needs to be done in developing the partnership between other faculty staff and the partnership schools.

Caveat

This report is based on the analysis of the data from the two case study schools where the principal, associate lecturer and PPI lecturer, plus 27/33 associate teachers, and 30/63 student teachers took part in the research. Data from 50 survey responses from students in other CUSP schools are not reported. However, student teacher cohort data is similar to the data from the case study schools. Examples of the student survey results are given in Table 1.

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Student Cohort Survey Results	All students n=80	Case A School n=14	Case B School n=16
Q: How easy is it for you to engage in learning conversations with your associate teacher, your classroom partner – very easy/easy?			
Easy to engage in learning conversations with AT	81%	86%	81%
Easy to engage in learning conversations with partner	91%	86%	94%
Q: To what extent are the PPI paper task, requirements and expectations clearly communicated – very clearly/clearly?			
PPI tasks/requirements/expectations clearly communicated	90%	93%	94%
Q: Placement has been very useful in helping me relate the theory to the practice of learning and teaching - agree/strongly agree			
Full-day placement helped me relate theory to practice	93%	71%	88%
Q: Full-day placement helped me to have a better understanding of what it is to be a teacher - yes			
Full-day placement helped me to have a better understanding of what it is to be a teacher	95%	93%	94%
Q: What are the two best aspects of the weekly full-day school placement – mentioned getting to know the children (relationships)			
One of the best aspects of full-day placement was getting to know and understand the children	49%	57%	44%
Q: Name one strategy that your university-based lecturer has used on placement days that you found helpful – mentioned covering chapter work, clarification * 5/16 students at School B mentioned 'help with questioning' and 'running group discussions'			
The most helpful strategy used by the PPI lecturer was covering the chapter work	15%	14%	0%*
The most helpful strategy used by the PPI lecturer was clarifying expectations of the paper, the school/placement	13%	14%	0%*
Q: Name one strategy that your school-based associate lecturer has used on placement days that you found helpful – mentioned observations, school culture ** 4/14 students at School A referred to their associate teacher			
The most helpful strategy used by the associate lecturer was advising on observations, school organisation /culture	21%	7%**	19%
Q: What was the most challenging thing for you about full-day placement – mentioned being unsure, reflections *** 8/16 students at School B mentioned difficult travel to school, time management			
The most challenging aspect of full-day placement was being unsure, or a lack of confidence	17%	21%	25%
The most challenging aspect of full-day placement was difficulties with reflections	17%	21%	0%***

