Collaborative University School Partnerships

Research Brief: The second-year practicum, 2013

Ann Harlow, Bev Cooper and Bronwen Cowie

March 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The second-year practicum, 2013 ................................................................. 2
Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2
The CUSP model ................................................................................................ 2
Background to the research ............................................................................. 3
This research brief .......................................................................................... 3
Key findings .................................................................................................... 3
Preparedness for teaching ............................................................................. 3
Pre-service teacher tasks and responsibilities .............................................. 4
Relationship with the associate teacher ......................................................... 4
Suggestions for further support for pre-service teachers before and during practicum ....................................................................................... 4
Lessons learnt from the second-year practicum ............................................. 5
Overall findings ............................................................................................. 5
Recommendations from the research ............................................................. 5
Acknowledgement .......................................................................................... 5
References ....................................................................................................... 5
INTRODUCTION

Across a number of studies, pre-service teachers have identified their practicum experience as one of the more challenging, positive and significant aspects of their initial teacher education (ITE) (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Le Cornu, 2006; Hoban, 2005; Le Cornu, 2005). It has long been acknowledged that course work and school practicum experience both influence and build pre-service teacher capability. Coherence and integration between ITE course work and practicum, together with the development during extended practicum periods of relationships, shared understandings and beliefs between schools and university faculty members that reflect the programme’s vision of good teaching, have been highlighted as essential components of exemplary teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Ziechner (2010) argued that a non-hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner and community expertise will create expanded learning opportunities for prospective teachers that will better prepare them to be successful in enacting complex teaching practices. Bringing practitioner and academic knowledge together has the potential to create, “a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152).

THE CUSP MODEL

The co-construction and implementation of the Collaborative University School Partnership (CUSP) programme for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at the University of Waikato was grounded on Wenger’s (1998) notion of communities of practice. Teacher educators, teachers and pre-service teachers were viewed as belonging to different communities with the CUSP negotiation process aimed at bringing these communities together to establish shared goals and processes to support pre-service teacher learning. A ‘sense of belonging’ and connection to a school community can influence a pre-service teacher’s ability to respond well to the challenges of the new environment and to build resilience.

Prior to 2012 student teachers in their first year of the three-year Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) programme worked with local schools in two ways - placement where they worked with children for microteaching episodes on demand from the Faculty of Education and practicum where they were in schools full time for four weeks and supervised by experienced teachers. There was no connection between the placement and the practicum as these were conducted in different schools. Placement was disruptive to schools as often class programmes need to be altered in order to accommodate Faculty demands.

Faculty of Education lecturers collaborated with teachers from the local Normal Schools1 to co-construct a more coherent and relevant placement/practicum experience for first-year pre-service teachers. The CUSP model aimed to leverage and reinforce the role school placements and practicum periods have to play in the development of teacher resilience within the shared community of practice (Macdonald, 1999).

The CUSP programme involves first-year pre-service teachers being placed in pairs in one classroom for one day a week during the first semester and in a second classroom for one day a week in the second semester, followed by a three-week practicum. The semester placements provide opportunities for practical teaching. The placement is designed to give pre-service teachers experience of day-to-day classroom programmes and to carry out required tasks and observations linked to specific papers. They provide opportunities for practical teaching. Associate lecturers in each partner school are

---

1 Normal schools in New Zealand are primary and intermediate schools mandated by government in the 1970s to have a specific role to support initial teacher education.
expected to co-teach pre-service teachers in the schools for aspects of professional practice and to oversee the CUSP programme in schools.

In their second year, pre-service teachers do not have regular placements but do carry out some microteaching in literacy and mathematics in local schools. They complete a six-week practicum in term three that includes one week of full control. This practicum can be completed at any primary school in the North Island provided there are suitable associate teachers available.

**Background to the research**

A developmental research project has run in parallel with the CUSP programme. The research question that has guided the research has probed pre-service teachers’ experiences of the CUSP programme, to understand how the CUSP programme has been implemented and with what impacts. Pre-service teachers, lecturers and school-based practitioners have been surveyed and interviewed. The main data collection in 2012 was on two case-study schools where first-year pre-service teachers spent time on placement and practicum. Overwhelmingly, the case-study school 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 the participants time in schools to build effective relationships with teachers and children (Macdonald, 1999). 2013 marked the second year of the CUSP and data have been collected from both the first and second-year pre-service teachers and school-based practitioners involved in CUSP.

Pre-service teachers in their second year of ITE are required to have practical teaching experience over six consecutive weeks in a classroom, including one week of full control. This practicum is not preceded by regular weekly placements in the school as it is in the CUSP year-one pre-service programme. The second-year practicum is an opportunity to put theory into practice and allows pre-service teachers to experience day-to-day learning and teaching for a six-week period in a selected school.

**This research brief**

This research brief focuses on the practicum experiences of second-year pre-service teachers – those who participated in CUSP as first-year pre-service teachers in 2012. Data were collected after the second-year practicum in 2013, when online surveys were completed by 64 second-year pre-service teachers, four associate lecturers and fourteen associate teachers in the practicum schools. The practicum was undertaken at the end of term three in the school calendar by 59 of the survey respondents. Five other pre-service teachers, who had failed part of their second-year coursework, had their practicum deferred until the end of the year so that they could repeat the failed paper(s) and responded to the survey at the end of term four.

**Key findings**

*Preparedness for teaching*

Second-year pre-service teachers, who had experienced CUSP placements in 2012, reported that the placements had impacted their second-year practicum experience positively. In particular the CUSP experience in their first year helped them to feel confident about building relationships with children in the classroom (98%) and to be reflective about how children learn (97%), to make connections between theory and the practice of teaching and learning (95%) and to develop a good understanding of what it means to be a teacher (94%). Many were also confident to engage in learning conversations with their associate teacher and ready to take on a teaching role (89%). Examples of second-year pre-service teachers who were prepared, professional, reflective, punctual and who took the initiative,
were given by associate teachers as evidence that they had developed an understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

Around three quarters of pre-service teachers (73%) reported that their CUSP experience in 2012 had built their confidence for the second-year practicum and they felt well prepared. Associate teachers found that the second-year pre-service teachers generally ‘actively implemented their advice and guidance’. They suggested that pre-service teachers who had confidence in their ability as a teacher were those who were also well prepared through planning, had clear expectations, sought advice and were able to be reflective.

Pre-service teacher tasks and responsibilities

The majority of second-year pre-service teachers were engaged in teaching tasks on practicum that involved working with small groups of children at once in literacy (89%) and numeracy (86%), teaching the whole class a unit of work (95%) and one week of full control (95%). Associate teachers gave examples of effective teaching strategies they had observed and reported that pre-service teachers had participated in school-wide activities. There were several comments that second-year pre-service teachers were more prepared than in previous years.

More experience in schools as year ones has contributed to a better understanding of ‘school life’ and what it means to be a part of a school. The year twos get off to a better and quicker start now. Many tend to be doing longer periods of full control now. (Associate teacher)

My year two pre-service teacher looked for opportunities across the school well above and beyond what I expected, including supervising sports events, attending the school dance and parent meetings and all staff meetings. (Associate teacher)

Relationship with the associate teacher

Pre-service teachers generally found it easier (‘very easy’ or ‘easy’) to build a relationship with and engage in learning conversations with their second-year practicum associate teacher (84%) than they had in their first year (75%). The main factor that enabled a good relationship with the associate teacher selected by 81% of pre-service teachers was having an ‘approachable’ associate teacher. Over three quarters (77%) selected three other factors: ‘my associate teacher treated me as a teacher in the classroom’; ‘I had a positive relationship with my associate teacher’; and ‘my associate teacher provided constructive feedback and encouragement’. A factor that constrained this relationship for 8% of pre-service teachers was the difficulty that some associate teachers had in finding time to have learning conversations. Associate teachers commented on the self-confidence of pre-service teachers who had built effective relationships with them.

Suggestions for further support for pre-service teachers before and during practicum

Around half of the pre-service teachers (52%), who had experienced CUSP in their first year of ITE, had concerns about the second-year practicum. These concerns were about their own levels of confidence (20%), insufficient support from the associate teacher (17%) and a lack of clarity around practicum requirements (11%).

Suggestions for further support for second-year pre-service teachers came from 46% of pre-service teachers. There were nine suggestions for various kinds of support from the university lecturers, such as more frequent visits during the practicum, especially when there were issues arising in the practicum. Eight of the suggestions were for more clarity around practicum requirements. Seven suggestions related to better associate teacher support. Six pre-service teachers would have appreciated some time in the school before the practicum. Looking across these suggestions for further support it appeared that second-year pre-service teachers had developed a better idea of what their own professional needs were in relation to becoming effective teachers.
Lessons learnt from the second-year practicum

The two aspects of teaching that second-year pre-service teachers commented on most frequently were that they had learned the importance of building relationships in the school with children and teachers (33% of 42 comments) and had developed a sense of what it means to be a teacher (29% of 42 comments).

Overall findings

The majority of pre-service teachers who had experienced CUSP placements and practicum in their first year felt this experience had helped them to feel confident about building relationships with children in the classroom, to be reflective about how children learn, to make connections between theory and the practice of teaching and learning and to develop a good understanding of what it means to be a teacher. It is clear that the CUSP year-one full-day placements and practicum experience had benefits for pre-service teachers on into their second year of teacher education, however, as a result of their experience they were more critical of their own professional needs.

Perceptions of success of the second-year practicum for the pre-service teachers depended on their levels of confidence, the support of the associate teacher and the clarity of the practicum requirements. The associate teachers also felt that success depended on pre-service teachers’ being confident enough to seek advice, but also on being well prepared through planning, with clear expectations being reflective. Pre-service teachers who struggled or who were unfamiliar with building relationships with teachers and the children in their classroom needed greater levels of support.

Findings from the pre-service teachers’ survey revealed that further support would be appreciated in the form of clarity around practicum expectations and that this may help associate teachers to provide support and feedback for pre-service teachers as they undertake their practicum requirements.

Recommendations from the research

- The CUSP programme is providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to develop an early sense of teacher identity through the placement/practicum experience in their first and second years of initial teacher education and should be continued.
- Since confidence and self-efficacy are key dispositions required for a successful second-year practicum it may be necessary to provide some pre-service teachers with greater support in the form of feedback and advice into their second year of initial teacher education.
- Greater clarity around practicum requirements and better communication of responsibilities and expectations within the partnership should benefit all participants in the CUSP partnership.

Acknowledgement

The research team would like to acknowledge the leaders and staff of the schools and the pre-service teachers who took part in the CUSP research during 2013, without whom this work would not have been possible.

References


