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REMAPPING THE PRACTICUM IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT *This paper argues for a reconceptualisation and restructuring of the practicum in teacher education. Changes to the practicum within teacher education have been advocated for some years now (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Groundwater-Smith, 1993; Zeichner, 1990). Zeichner (1990), for example, identified three levels of change: organisational, curricular and structural. However, it will be argued in this paper that such changes will only be worthwhile if accompanied by changes in schools' and universities' values, beliefs, habits, assumptions and ways of doing things. This paper discusses the notion of "remapping" the practicum in teacher education, drawing on a recent practicum initiative which has occurred within a new teacher education award at the Faculty of Education, University of South Australia.*

INTRODUCTION

What does "remapping" the practicum in teacher education mean? To me, it means three things. Firstly, to have an idea of the direction in which you want the practicum to be going which is in keeping with the values and beliefs you hold important. Secondly it means to engage in reform initiatives which will make a difference, by resulting in "deep change" (Gore, 1995). Finally, any reform initiatives need to take account of the current teacher education context.

Practicum reform, or ways of rethinking the practicum in order to enhance learning outcomes for student teachers and other participants, has been occurring in many teacher education programmes, both in Australia and overseas, in the last decade. In 1991 for example, Cochran-Smith wrote that institutions across the United States of America were in the process of "reinventing student teaching" by altering its duration, timing, requirements, connection to university courses and seminars, and the type and intensity of supervision. Dobbins identified similar trends in Australian programmes in 1993.

The notion of remapping or reforming the practicum in teacher education then is not new. My argument in this paper is not that remapping the practicum in teacher education is necessary, but rather that how it is done is crucial. That is, the process of practicum reform needs to be scrutinised to ensure that the changes made do indeed result in deep change.

This paper draws on learnings from school reform which have also been a feature of the 1990s. A significant finding from the school reform literature is that both restructuring and reculturing are needed for reforms to be effective. This paper takes this finding, discusses it initially in regard to a recent Australian research study and then applies it to a practicum reform initiative which has occurred in the Faculty of Education at the University of South

Australia. It is argued that for practicum reform initiatives to be successful, there needs to be a reciprocal relationship between restructuring and reculturing.

Practicum Reform in the 1990s

The changes in practicum programmes have resulted in part from a changing context for teacher education generally. Teacher education in Australia has been under close scrutiny during the current decade. Tough economic times and exceptionally high levels of unemployment, particularly in the youth sector, have resulted in a major focus by governments on education and schooling. Gore (1995) summarised the context for teacher education in both the USA and the UK as characterised by vocal public criticisms of education and teacher education, increasing government, declining and a general climate of restructuring. Again, this is also the case in Australia.

The changes in practicum programmes are also the result of widespread recognition that the traditional practicum experience does not always optimise student teacher learning. In fact, in some cases, it actually hinders it (Dobbins, 1994; Gore, 1995; Nolan & Huber, 1989; Martinez, 1990; Smyth, 1989; Zeichner, 1986).

In recent years teacher educators have been involved in reconceptualising the practicum primarily around the concepts of reflection, partnerships and collaboration. The aim has been to develop "reflective practice" where the emphasis is on reflection and viewing teaching as intellectual work rather than a set of skills to be learned. Partnerships in teacher education, where both teachers and lecturers are seen as teacher educators, have also been advocated widely (see Report of the Working Party on Partnerships in Teacher Education, 1997). Moreover, changes have been made to some of the traditional structures of the practicum and supervision, so that a more collaborative, democratic model is implemented, rather than a traditional hierarchical one. During this time, many teacher educators have engaged in dialogue with each other about the changes that have been made to their programmes and talked about the difficulties of implementing them.

Practicum reform or remapping the practicum in teacher education is very evident then in the current climate of school reform.

The Terms of Educational Reform

The notions of "restructuring", "reculturing" and "reciprocity" are prevalent in research literature on the process of educational change (Akin, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Lee & Smith, 1994; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Hargreaves (1994) defined restructuring as "a fundamental redefinition of rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships for the students, teachers and leaders in our schools" (p. 242). Advocates of school restructuring argue that many of the structures in traditionally organised schools impede effective teaching and learning. They argue that there is a need to move from bureaucratically organised schools to more democratic environments. For structural change to be effective, there must be a corresponding change in the "cultural base" of the

school. Akin (1991) defined the culture of a school as "the social organisation of the school staff which represents shared beliefs, customs, attitudes and expectations" (p. 3). The traditional culture in schools, argue many researchers in this field, (Hargreaves, 1992; Lee & Smith, 1994), is an individualistic culture, characterised by classroom isolation and few opportunities for collaboration and professional interaction. They argue that there is a need to move to more collaborative cultures based on shared responsibility for decision-making and student learning. "Reculturing" is the term used to signify this move.

Researchers in this field have further determined that there needs to be a reciprocal relationship between restructuring and cultural change. That is, schools looking to maximise reform need to focus on both aspects to create an environment in which learning outcomes are improved for teachers and students. Reciprocity, then, can be defined as a mutual relationship - in this case, between restructuring and reculturing.

An Australian School Reform Research Project

An influential reform organisation in Australia has been the National Schools Network (NSN) - a cooperative project between teacher employing authorities and teacher unions in both government and non-government sectors in all states and territories, as well as in cooperation with university colleagues and the broader education community. The NSN recently undertook an investigation into the impact of restructuring on school organisational culture, decision-making processes and teacher learning and professional development outcomes. The project used mainly qualitative methodology with a strong emphasis on the inclusion of teachers' voices in the final research report.

One aspect of the study, the relationship between restructuring and organisational culture, confirmed a key finding from earlier-mentioned overseas studies; that the relationship between these two dimensions is reciprocal rather than linear. The research schools had paid equal attention to changing structures and school culture in ways that developed a collaborative learning environment for students and staff. The final report included the following findings:

- The terms "restructuring" and "organisational culture" were unfamiliar to many of the participants in the research. Once these terms had been clarified, the majority of staff considered that there had been profound changes in both structures and culture.

- The respondents varied in their views about whether structural change or cultural change was more important, and about which needed to occur first.

- While many staff believed that the changes to structures had been primarily responsible for the changes to culture, it was evident from the data that the development of collaborative cultures had not resulted solely from structural change, but also from deliberate and concerted efforts to

professionally develop staff in ways that enabled them to respond positively to the structural changes. (Peters, Dobbins & Johnson, 1996, pp. 51 - 53)

Implications for Practicum Reform

The key finding to be applied to practicum reform is that for practicum reforms to be successful there needs to be a reciprocal relationship between restructuring and changes to practicum. That is, teacher educators looking to maximise reform need to focus on both aspects to create an environment in which learning outcomes are improved for student teachers and teacher educators. Restructuring on its own is not enough, nor is reculturing on its own.

Before this point is elaborated, it is necessary to take the definitions of restructuring and reculturing and apply them to the practicum. Restructuring involves redefining the rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships for the student teachers and teacher educators involved in the practicum and reculturing involves changing the shared beliefs, customs, attitudes and expectations of the practicum.

As noted earlier in this paper many teacher educators have been actively involved in restructuring the roles and responsibilities of the various participants in the practicum. However, if the changes to the way the practicum is structured are to result in "deep change" rather than superficial change, they must be accompanied by cultural change in schools' and universities' values, beliefs, habits, assumptions and ways of doing things. For, as Gore (1995) noted, while some schemes may appear innovative, "in reality, deep change does not occur" (p. 16).

Reculturing is a great challenge. In developing a reflective practicum, a partnership approach, and a more collaborative experience, there needs to be a shift in power and control (Dobbins, 1996). The traditional hierarchies are broken down. Student teachers are encouraged to take more control of their learning, teachers are encouraged to take more responsibility in facilitating that learning and university staff are encouraged to work with schools and student teachers in ways which support both the student teachers and the teachers. This presents many challenges given what we know about the politics of the practicum (Dobbins, 1996; Groundwater-Smith, 1993). For example, student teachers have traditionally held low-status positions in schools, and university staff have traditionally been perceived as having different status than teachers.

The added complexity of reculturing the practicum is that the cultures of university and schools are so different. Sirotnik (1991, cited in Goodlad, 1994) wrote:

> The norms, roles, and expectations of educators in each of these educational realms could not be more different - e.g. the regimen of time and space in schools vs. the relative freedom of these precious commodities in the university setting; an ethic of inquiry in the university vs. an ethic of action and meeting immediate needs in the schools; a merit system with promotion and tenure in the university vs. an egalitarian work ethic in the schools . . . These two cultures are

very different, and it is hard to fit them together in productive long-term, useful ways. (p. 109)

There is growing evidence to suggest that teachers and academics are beginning to work together in ways which are starting to break down some of the traditional barriers between the two groups (Hollingsworth and Murray, 1998; Johnson, 1998; Sachs, 1996). However, attention needs now to be given to how the practicum can benefit from such alliances. This is particularly challenging in the current context when "both schools and universities are places in great flux, where teachers and academics are constantly being enjoined to work harder, work smarter and work differently" (Groundwater-Smith, 1997, p. 11).

The challenge to work simultaneously on both restructuring and reculturing simultaneously is time-consuming and demanding. With new partnerships, new roles, new responsibilities and new expectations come many questions, dilemmas and anxieties. However, the situation is further exacerbated by the need to be aware that the processes are difficult to define at times and in fact, may be defined differently by the various participants. For example, making changes in how practicum is supervised, may be viewed as restructuring by teachers, but reculturing by university-based teacher educators. This mismatch in perception may lead to difficulties with how the change is received and how it is implemented. Fullan & Miles (1992) also make this point. They claim that having "faulty maps of change", where everyone involved in the reform process has a different personal map of how change proceeds, may severely interfere with the reform process.

Thus, it is crucial to reassert a point that we all know, that is, that educational change takes time. The process of practicum reform needs to be constantly questioned. Are the changes worthwhile? How do we know? Who is benefiting from them? The answers to these questions will provide direction. At times, this may mean pulling back from a change in structure until some professional development work is conducted with both teachers and university staff to explore people's views and assumptions. At other times, a change in structure may be needed to accommodate people's beliefs.

Practicum Reform at the University of South Australia

To illustrate the importance of the reciprocal relationship that is needed between restructuring and reculturing, a brief description is given of the practicum component of a new Graduate Entry Bachelor of Education course for early childhood, primary, secondary and adult educators at the University of South Australia. This course was introduced in 1998 as a two-year course which sometimes can be completed in 18 months of full-time study. Students undertaking this course are located in one school for their first year, and supervised by a teacher mentor. The student teacher is expected to use this connection in three ways. First, each student must negotiate involvement in a regular school activity, such as coaching a sporting team, helping with the production of the school magazine or designing a unit or work which uses the expertise gained from their first degree and so on. Second students must negotiate a schedule of meetings with their mentor, the aim of which is simply

to talk about general issues associated with the life of a teacher. Third, at irregular times as required by their various university subjects, student teachers must observe their mentor, looking at particular aspects of practice. They then undertake two block practica, one of two weeks which is mainly for observation purposes and familiarisation with the teacher role and schools as learning communities, and the second of four weeks where they are involved in much more teaching.

There have been the inevitable "teething problems" in implementing this practicum programme, particularly relating to participants' roles. The student teachers, for example, are expected to play a much greater role in negotiating their commitments at the school setting. This has presented some problems, such as miscommunication between the university and school as a result of student teachers not being able to explain what they needed to do and in one case, the student teacher being given a task which resulted in feelings of overload and pressure. However, in designing this practicum it was considered important that rhetoric be matched with practice (see Reid, McCallum & Dobbins, 1998). Thus, it was no use saying that we wanted students to accept more responsibility for their learning. We needed to give them the power to do it. Needless to say, some did not want this, and just wanted to be told what to do. Similarly, some of the mentors did not want to be negotiated with (particularly by a student teacher). They just wanted to be told "what the university wanted". Some mentors also experienced difficulty in understanding their role in regard to "facilitating student teacher learning" which is very different to the more traditional apprenticeship model of "practice teaching". There has also been an issue for some of the university lecturers involved in supervision with regard to how they would operate in schools so that they could best support the underlying principles of the programme.

This programme has presented some real challenges for the co-ordinator of the practicum and in terms of restructuring and reculturing. She attended to both which took inordinate amounts of time, energy and creativity. She co-ordinated meetings with the lecturers teaching in the practicum subjects to plan the content of on-campus workshops and she met with them to discuss expectations regarding the practicum and the assessment requirements. This, of course, brought in people's values, habits, assumptions and ways of doing things and not everyone agreed. She communicated with lecturers teaching in other university subjects, as the practicum was seen as integral to the award, but not necessarily by everyone. She co-ordinated meetings of mentor teachers which some attended and some did not. She wrote regular newsletters to the mentors to keep them up-to-date and informed and invited contributions from teachers and student teachers (needless to say she was not swamped with many contributions). Meetings of "liaison lecturers" were held to discuss their role, but not all wanted or were able to give the time needed for these meetings. Meetings were also held for the student teachers and a website designed for better communication. Email was used, although not all students read their emails. She also did the inevitable trouble-shooting! Finally, she put up with the complaints from students, teachers and lecturers, which are inevitable when implementing a new practicum programme.

Designing and implementing this programme has certainly demonstrated the non-linear relationship in remapping the practicum. It was not easy, and at times, it felt like one step forward and two steps backward. There was a constant fluctuation between practices and beliefs, ideals and realities and optimism and pessimism. Sachs (1998) refers to the "uncertainty, ambiguity and fluidity" as the premillennial challenges for education research. This statement can certainly be applied to practicum reform in teacher education.

Maximising Success when Remapping the Practicum

I have argued in this paper that if successful remapping of the practicum in teacher education is to occur we need to work together on reculturing and restructuring. In order to this, we need to:

- select school sites carefully;

- work collaboratively and engage in research;

- be political; and

- acknowledge that it will be difficult.

Site Selection

Selection of schools for practica has always been an issue for those involved in the placement of student teachers. It is more important than ever that when implementing practicum reform, schools which are used for practicum placements need to have a commitment to principles of reflection, collaboration and partnerships. The importance of a supportive school culture which values collegiality, enquiry and on-going professional learning cannot be over-emphasised. For example, teachers who themselves are reflective practitioners and work collaboratively, are more in tune with the philosophies underpinning practicum reform than are those who view learning to teach as the acquisition of skills and do not themselves work in teams. A number of schools with whom I work in the practicum are also involved in school reform, making my work easier and more satisfying, because of the parallels between how I work with the student teachers and the teachers and how the staff of the school work with one another. This also had very positive effects on the partnership concept between schools and universities and helped break down the "ivory tower" myth which many teachers still hold about university staff. The finding that school culture is crucial is consistent with recent reports of successful mentoring experiences in the UK. Campbell & Kane (1996) wrote:

> The impact of the culture of the school, the norms of behaviour, accepted work practices, expectations of "inhabitants" and visitors to the environment, and the language used in schools - all of these contributed to and shaped the mentoring experiences of teachers and students. (p. 25)

A way forward seems to be to centre the placement of student teachers in "reforming" schools. Recent moves in the US link school reform and practicum reform together. These moves are based on the belief that educational renewal cannot successfully take place unless there is simultaneous reform in schooling, teacher education and universities. A major aspect of the restructuring movement in the US, as noted by Gore (1995), is the attempt to develop sites which are ideal settings or "centres of excellence" where partnerships between schools and universities exist and function in "symbiotic" relationship and offer the possibility of simultaneously restructuring schools and teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Collaboration and Research

Changes in the practicum in schools need support from academics. In Australia, as in other parts of the world, the trend has been the withdrawal of intensive supervision based on a clinical supervision model. Unfortunately however, in some cases, the role of the university lecturer has been reduced to liaison only. This is not adequate as it does nothing more than maintain the status quo, with teachers continuing to supervise as they have always done and student teachers likely to continue to have a traditional student teaching experience. University staff need to work with both teachers and student teachers, discussing the learning experience and providing both support and challenge in the process of learning to be a teacher.

Support for university staff is also a very real issue when it comes to practicum reform. They, too, will tend to supervise as they have always supervised unless they have opportunities to critique their own practices. Traditionally university staff have conducted their practicum supervisory work in isolation, and given the high workloads which have traditionally been associated with the practicum (Ebbeck, 1991), they have had little opportunity to work together and critique their own practices. The situation has worsened in the last few years with the continuing decline in Government funding, the consequent financial pressures and the escalating demands on academics to become more entrepreneurial as well as more productive (Sumsion, 1998). The value of collaborative work for university staff needs to be acknowledged. Too often the benefits of collaboration are projected towards student teachers and teachers and yet academics need to engage with each other in these processes also. Groundwater-Smith, Deer, Sharp & March (1996) describe the learning that resulted for each of them, through "learning conversations", as they came together to write about a new practicum curriculum. In the current climate of job uncertainty, increased workloads, and heightened dissatisfaction and frustration, it seems imperative that university staff work together.

A way forward is for academics to create opportunities to enable them to investigate their practices, asking questions such as: How do we cope with the change in roles? How do we handle the shift in power and control? What are the implications for our work? Why do I do what I do? At a time when academics' involvement in the practicum is under increasing threat, it is crucial that academics not only stay actively involved, but they make the

practicum a focus for research. As Martinez (1998) stressed ". . . practicum presents a rich site for investigation of the lived out impact of our work as teacher educators" (p. 104).

Darling-Hammond (1994) made the point that existing university culture values research over practical work and hence funding and career opportunities are reduced for those academics heavily involved in practical work. It is therefore important that academics use the opportunities provided by the partnership approach and linking practicum and school reform, to be involved also in research. In this way, not only will they ensure quality research-based outcomes for the practicum, but by securing research funds, they will meet the criteria by which they are judged in the current university culture.

Political Issues

Changes to practicum, including teacher educators' practices, do not just happen. Time and support need to be provided. Practicum reform, like other educational reform, requires additional resources and funding. This is problematic given the current context of insufficient or declining resources in universities, and in teacher education in particular. It is widely acknowledged that teacher education receives low levels of funding which is related to its relatively low status in universities (Goodlad, 1994; Ebmeier, Twombly & Teeter, 1991, cited in Darling Hammond, 1994; Gore, 1996).

Moreover, the practicum has even lower status within teacher education. This point was made by Zeichner, nearly a decade ago, and it is still the case today. He noted that in the US, Canada, UK and Australia, "the practicum has marginal status within tertiary institutions. Even within education faculties, the closer one's involvement to the practicum, schools and teachers, the lower one's status in the academy" (1990, p. 122). Zeichner stressed the need for teacher educators to be more proactive in challenging this position. He advocated teacher educators collectively asserting themselves in pursuing a set of environmental conditions more supportive of clinical teacher education, forming alliances with teachers and speaking up on their own campuses for more financial resources to support the practicum and for the initiation of promotion and merit systems that do not penalise faculty for their involvement with the practicum. These strategies are as relevant today as they were at the beginning of the decade. In fact Martinez (1998) only recently echoed the call that a great deal of political activity needed to occur to give rightful status to the practicum within teacher education.

Acknowledging Difficulties

It is helpful to recognise from the outset that any reform or change is difficult. As Fullan & Miles (1992) highlighted, "anxiety, difficulties and uncertainty are intrinsic to all successful change" (p. 749). Too often people concentrate on the changes that are occurring at the cognitive level only. We need to acknowledge the affective domain as well. The affective dimension of teachers' learning and its effects was illuminated in the school reform study by Peters, Dobbins &

Johnson (1996) mentioned earlier. They found that many teachers reported feeling frustrated, vulnerable and uncertain during the restructuring process and that these feelings influenced how teachers interpreted events and how they interacted with their colleagues. It is important to highlight this aspect because, as Brookfield (1990) noted, "the emotional dimensions of learning receive scant attention in formal research . . ." (p. 58). He argues that when people speak about learning, it is often in highly emotional terms. This emotional dimension is important in practicum reform, and should be acknowledged when introducing changes, particularly given the different participants involved. When people are aware of the affective dimension, they are often more prepared to cope with the various feelings they encounter along the journey and to persevere with the reform attempts. Similarly, when they encounter problems, they may look at them differently; as opportunities for learning, rather than as negative situations to be avoided.

CONCLUSION

It has not been my intention in this paper to provide a blueprint of remapped practicum in teacher education, for, as Fullan & Miles (1992) emphasised, "there can be no blueprints for change" (p. 749). Rather, I have acknowledged that teacher educators everywhere are in the process of reforming or remapping their practicum programmes, and that what is necessary at this stage, is to review the process. Educational change is not easy. It is filled with challenges and dilemmas, and how they are approached that will decide whether our attempts to remap the practicum are successful or not. Values, beliefs and assumption need continual revisiting. There needs to be a reciprocal and on-going relationship between restructuring and reculturing of the practicum.

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