20 Teaching Internships and the Learning Community

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Recent education reforms have meant that many universities are re-examining, refining and implementing teacher education courses that are aligned with the curricular, pedagogical and organizational reforms influenced by past educational research. At the same time an increased emphasis has been on the development of university school partnerships leading to improved relations between schools and universities through the introduction of initiatives such as an internship program. Since the 1990's various Australian professional and government groups have recognised the importance of internships in the preparation of teachers (Australian Council of Deans, 1998; Queensland Board of Teacher, 1999). However there is considerable confusion over the meaning of an internship.

For the purpose of this chapter we define the internship as

...extended field based and context-responsive professional learning experiences negotiated collaboratively by stakeholders in the culminating phase of preservice teacher preparation...The intern is mentored and immersed in a broad range of teachers' professional work activities.It involves a shift in status for the preservice teacher with increased opportunities for autonomy, responsibility and accountability but with a safety net. The classroom teacher's relationship with the intern moves from evaluative to collegial.

(Board of Teacher Registration, 2003, p.7).

Internships have become a feature of a number of preservice teacher education programs offered by Australian universities since the mid 1990's. For example both the University of Western Sydney (Cameron, 2001) and Charles Sturt University (Mitchell, Murry & Dobbins, 1996) incorporate a ten week internship program into the final year of a Bachelor of Education program. Hatton (1996) writes of an internship program offered at the University of Sydney as part of a Master of Teaching program. More recently, James Cook University has introduced an internship program as part of its Bachelor of Education program (Matters, 2001). These internships share the common features of engaging TE students in a practicum that is offered in the final year of a preservice TE program over a prolonged period of time, shared or sole responsibility for the class and where the relationship changes from student/supervisor to intern/mentor.

A successful internship provides an opportunity for developing a three-way partnership between the university, school and T E students through the incorporation of classroom learning, teaching theory with real-world experience. Cole, Tomlin & Renick (1999) suggest that no partnership can exist where only one partner benefits. Therefore a successful intern partnership requires a partnership that is collaborative, mutually advantageous and shares governance and evaluation of the program. An intern partnership such as this has the opportunity to provide a number of benefits for the T E student, the supervisor/mentor, the practicum school, the university and teacher employers. T E students gain real world experience through their immersion in a sustained practical work experience within a school culture where they can

develop a range of personal and professional attributes. They are able to work in a classroom setting in which they have the opportunity to put theory into practice. Frequently the sustained period of teaching during the internship provides the connection between university course work and classroom teaching that has not often become evident in prior practicum experiences. As well they develop an awareness of a workplace culture and can appreciate the fluidity of the rapidly changing world of work. In short they learn how to be flexible. Finally they become aware of opportunities to build a strong network of collegial support that can be drawn on in the future.

Classroom teachers have the opportunity to develop professionally by giving back to their profession through mentoring. They also benefit from an injection of new ideas that enhances their own professional growth and development. In addition teachers have time to initiate new projects that will be of benefit to the school community. As well they become an extension of the university teacher education program through their role as mentor to the T E student and they participate in the management of the internship program thus entering into a three-way relationship alongside the T E student and university. The reputation of a university's academic program can be strengthened and the academic reputation of the university increases. Academics have the opportunity to see their students develop and mature as they put subject theory into practice. Finally, teacher employers benefit from having a pool of talented graduate teachers eligible for employment. Here, the added benefit of an internship to employers is that the extended period of practice in schools can provide important information related to the teaching attributes of graduate teachers that will contribute to employers making informed decisions regarding staffing needs.

The need to develop a level of understanding and cooperation with the school, the academic program and the T E student is required for a successful partnership to develop during the internship. In the past universities have usually adopted a senior role while working with schools. However this hierarchical structure can be broken down with a more cooperative structure for a successful intern partnership. Working this way has the potential to develop the type of learning community that Hough & Paine (1997) state is required for schools to prepare students to take their place in a new socio economic era marked by both rapid local and global change. Further, schools need to develop as adaptive learning organizations that operate within a wide ranging learning community whose boundaries transcend those of the immediate school environment. Similarly universities must also prepare graduate teachers who can take their place in a changing society.

The politics of a learning community

Many education researchers endorse the notion of learning community. Achinstein (2002) refers to a *learning community* as the common purpose and mutual activity that unites a group towards similar interests and goals. The important components of a learning community are the tools, technologies, rituals and conventions that develop and maintain structures that foster interdependence and collaboration based on common values, norms and orientations towards teaching, students and schooling. Learning communities are related to a context of current reform efforts aimed at educational change by restructuring schools and professionalising teachers through developing cultures of learning and practice. The argument is that teachers feel more

positive about the outcomes of educational change for children and their profession if they can access teacher networks, enriched professional roles and collegial work (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Thus professional teachers become change agents and reformers of education because they take on an active research role in their daily practice thereby learning from inquiring into the nature of learning and the effects of teaching. The theme of change is repeated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) who argue that teachers in a learning community who engage in inquiry into their practice become agents for change in the classroom and the school. Here the learning community takes on a social and political stance as it becomes involved in the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated and used. At the same time the roles of participants in the community inform the type of change that results from the learning.

The importance of learning communities to teaching is that they encourage life long learning and facilitate the adaptation to change which is a critical component for success. Harvey, Geall & Moon (1998) point out that an added benefit of learning communities is that while they sustain links with higher education facilities through the provision of placement opportunities for students, they also ensure students are given support and are provided with meaningful learning experiences. Likewise, Darling-Hammond (1997) argues for schools that develop a learning community of support and professional development. A school community that participates in an internship program contributes to the professional development of experienced teachers who serve as mentors, teacher leaders and co-researchers to cohorts of T E students and beginning teachers. A learning community such as this provides richer learning experiences for teachers as well as children and T E students. King (2002) further argues for a professional school community in which inquiry into practice takes place so that teachers can work collectively toward shared understanding and commitment in order to improve student learning. Inquiry of this type frequently takes place in an internship when both the classroom teacher and T E student are challenged to reflect on the effect their practices have on classroom learning.

Learning communities and teacher isolation

Dobbins (1997), Grundy (1999) and Liebermann (2000) have explored the theme of isolation and the way in which the partnerships in learning communities can overcome this. Dobbins describes traditional school cultures as individualistic. She claims that teachers are isolated because few chances are provided for collaboration and professional interaction. Grundy (1999) argues that learning communities must accept and foster the tension between individuality and collegiality. On the one hand teachers are required to make autonomous professional decisions. On the other hand student outcomes can be maximised through teachers working collaboratively. Liebermann acknowledges teachers' isolation and recommends school development and change that supports the concept of communities of learners that challenge isolation and improve teacher practice. We argue that the internship program has the potential to challenge the culture of isolation because it promotes the notion of a learning community. This occurs through increased collaboration in school university partnerships, shared responsibility for the internship program, professional development for supervising teachers and a rich school experience for T E students. In addition teachers often become isolated because they are time poor and energy poor as a result of constant educational reform. The internship frequently provides teachers with additional time through the presence in their classroom of a TE student who

takes on the role of co-teacher. Moreover teachers often experience a renewal of energy through the development of a quality relationship and the introduction of innovative ideas and current practices introduced by the T E student. The energy and enthusiasm can be heard in the following whimsical comments made by a mentor teacher who discovers she is not alone.

My co-teacher has been brilliant. If there was a problem she would recognise it and fix it. She just fitted right in. I didn't think there were many others who taught like me but she is like my twin separated at birth - except she's tall and blonde.

Mentor Teacher 2001

The ambivalence of learning communities

While learning communities contribute toward the growth and development of teachers and T E students there are other aspects that can be challenging. Binnaford & Hanson (1995) and King (2002) identify the ambivalent nature of a learning community as a site of both positive and negative social conditions. On the one hand the community can represent consensus, harmony and mutual understanding. Here dynamic growth and development occur in a supportive culture that encourages critical reflection and frequent questioning and inquiry of values, goals and practices.

On the other hand the community can enforce heterogeneity through imposing strict boundaries with little allowance for negotiation or interpretation. Ambivalence of this type can occur in teacher education programs. For example a taken-for-granted assumption is that teacher education programs prepare students for entry into a school community as participant members. T E students frequently learn that they will hasten their acceptance into a school community by immediately assuming the philosophy, style, methods and practices of the supervising teacher. Here the student learns that to survive and pass the practicum or internship means adopting an apprenticeship model of teacher education where knowledge passes from expert to novice. In this case Binnaford and Hanson (1995) consider conflict and difference as a threat, with the power to exclude or silence some community members. The result is a decline in growth and development. Gallego (2001) refers to this model of enforced heterogeneity as an "apprenticeship of oppression" (p. 314) because students concentrate on survival rather than on their own development.

Achinstein (2002) argues that rather than being problematic, conflict that arises from the tensions, challenges and dilemmas of being part of a learning community are a natural and vital part of growth and renewal of the community. Further, conflict within a learning community has the potential to encourage teachers to engage in critical reflection. Such reflection frequently serves to challenge the taken-for-granted political and ideological assumptions that help shape teacher thinking and practice.

We argue that both the language and process of the internship can challenge the oppression and heterogeneity of some teacher education programs. The language of the intern program identifies the T E student as "co-teacher" rather than student. Here the message is given to the TE student that they are ready to take their place alongside the classroom teacher as a partner. The process also situates the teacher education student as a teaching partner rather than a novice with the expectation that there will

be a sharing of the workload. The role of the classroom teacher shifts perceptibly from that of supervising teacher to mentor. The expectation of this latter role is that there will develop a teaching partnership underpinned by shared power rather than an expert/novice relationship. This can be heard in the following words of mentor teachers and co-teachers.

I have enjoyed working cooperatively with another professional.

Mentor Teacher, 2002

My co-teacher knows more about learning outcomes than most of our staff and is really useful in our program.

Mentor teacher 2002

I get on with my mentor teacher really well. However she is probably the most disorganised person I have ever met. I am actually helping her to become more organised.

Co-teacher 2002

A terrific professional relationship has developed between us. We respect each other's strengths and value the learning/insight we have gained from each other's weaknesses.

Mentor Teacher 2001

In summary the process of the internship has the potential to develop a learning community that offers a school university partnership which supports teacher professional learning. As well it challenges the power dynamics of teacher education programs at both an institutional and an individual level.

The following section discusses the structure of the internship, the role of the mentor teacher and co-teacher and the governance of the internship at Griffith University Gold Coast campus. Both the Primary and Graduate Entry Bachelor of Education programs have similar structures.

The Gold Coast internship history

In 1994, the Centre for Professional Development (CFPD) in the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University Gold Coast campus offered its first internship as a voluntary program to a small cohort of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students. Since then four different models of the internship have been designed and now form a compulsory internship component of the Graduate Entry Bachelor of Education (Primary), Bachelor of Education (Primary), Bachelor of Exercise Science/Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching. Throughout the development of the internship, the Internship Management Committee, consisting of representatives from Gold Coast Primary schools (government and non-government), Education Queensland and Gold Coast campus academics, has maintained a significant role in advising the Centre for Professional Development and the Internship Convenor on internship matters. These matters include policies, procedures and issues related to matching the co-teachers (teacher education student enrolled in the internship) with mentors (an experienced classroom teacher) as well as the process

of the internship. A second committee, the Professional Studies Advisory group, also advises on matters relating to the internship. This ensures collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the partnership, so there is a sharing of common interests and goals.

Since the inception of the internship more than 700 graduate teachers have benefited from the sustained classroom practice that is offered by the internship in the final year of their teacher education program. The following comments are evaluations of the internship by co-teachers that indicate the perceived value of the internship.

My internship has been a time of tremendous learning but incredibly fulfilling as well. I feel in some ways like I have climbed Mt Everest: lots of hard work, blood, sweat and tears, but what a thing to have achieved! I could not have done it without Sue's support and encouragement, modeling and guidance. It has been a real team effort and I am thankful that Sue chose to share this journey with me.

Co-Teacher 2002

I am able to see the "big picture" much better now. My focus has grown from preparing one good lesson to planning a whole day to planing the week and the unit. As I've grown I'm able to see and think further ahead about the needs of the students and where I'd like to take them.

Co-Teacher 2002

I have grown professionally during this internship - very much so (am actually amazed at how much) - really feel like a teacher now!

Co-Teacher 2002

The following section describes the dynamics of the internship as a shift takes place in not only the teaching responsibility of both co-teacher and mentor teacher but also in the roles of supervisor and student to mentor and co-teacher respectively.

The internship process

In the internship a co-teacher and a mentor share a class for one school term. Mentors play a crucial role in helping the co-teacher take on the responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching. The mentor teacher needs to know how and when to let go of their responsibility and transfer it to their co-teacher. For some mentors this can be most challenging. The challenge in a small number of cases arises when there is evidence that the co-teacher is not confident and is not coping well with the class. The urge to take back the responsibility for some is difficult for some mentors to resist.

My only concern is it is a long time for children to have instruction from a student teacher if they have difficulty teaching a particular concept.

Mentor Teacher 2002

It is during the extended classroom based experience, that students shift from the role of teacher education student to that of a co-teacher (see Figure 20.1). In a small number of internships, co-teachers are ready almost immediately to take full responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching at the beginning of the internship.

In most cases at the beginning of the internship, the co-teacher and the mentor teacher generally start collaborative planning, teaching and assessing with the mentor teacher taking the lead (see Figure 20.1 - Phase 1). The ultimate aim is for the co-teacher to have complete responsibility for the whole class program in the last few weeks of the term (See Figure 20.1 - Phase 4). In the intervening period a collaborative teaching phase occurs in the first weeks of the Internship (Phase2). In week 4 an interim report is collaboratively written by the mentor teacher and the co-teacher to identify goals that both recognises are important for the co-teacher's development. The interim report evaluates the following areas: Preparation and Planning; Approaches to Teaching; Relationships with Students; Working Collaboratively; and Professional Qualities.

Figure 20.1 about here

Following this report the co-teacher takes on the role of a beginning teacher (Phase 3). It is here that the shift in responsibility becomes apparent. This movement is dependent upon the skills and confidence of the co-teacher and reflects their professional maturity as a developing teacher. The following comment indicates the growth and shift in responsibility that a co-teacher experiences during the different internship phases.

Looking back, I can see how much I have developed in my skills as a teacher since the start of term. The more you teach, the faster you learn... For me, the first few days I was mostly focusing on settling into the daily routine, and concentrating on preparing good lessons. By the second week I was teaching half days and then full days soon afterwards, but with Sue there to support the aspects I was unsure of, like the process of going through the homework. By the end of 4 weeks I was ready to take over the planning and majority of the teaching.

Term Two Co-teacher 2002

Before beginning an internship co-teachers receive a document titled *Authorisation to Teach* from the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. This document allows them to assume full responsibility for the class following the completion of "safety audit" by the school coordinator and the mentor teacher. The audit assesses the coteachers' competence in the areas of preparation and planning, approaches to teaching, relationships with students, working collaboratively and professional qualities. Hence co-teachers can be left alone in the classroom for significant time giving them the opportunity to experience the full load of the internship. The school and the university act collaboratively to publicly acknowledge the significant shift in role of the co-teacher from T E student to co-teacher. Schools frequently present the *Authorisation to Teach* document at a staff meeting to symbolise and the co-teacher's growth and development and their changing role. The Centre for Professional Development provides a Griffith University 2002 Internship badge with the co-teacher's name and school.

The mentor teacher

Since the first internship in 1994, the supply of mentor teachers has often outnumbered the number of co-teachers. Interns have been sought both by schools

and by individual teachers. The popularity of this program is in part because of the recognition of the benefits to the school, classroom and mentor teacher that result from taking on interns. These benefits are acknowledged in the following comments.

As a mentor teacher I was able to grow and learn during the internship. It was a rewarding experience.

Mentor Teacher 2002

Children benefited by having another person, personality and model in the classroom.

Mentor Teacher 2002

I have enjoyed working cooperatively with another teaching professional. Great for both parties in my case as our philosophies are similar and we had strengths in varying areas. So both of us were able to learn from each other.

Mentor Teacher 2002

The co-teacher was excellent. I really enjoyed working with her and learnt heaps. I hope one day to teach with her.

Mentor Teacher 2001

The matching process

The matching of the co-teacher and mentor teacher is one that is carefully and thoughtfully done to ensure a quality working partnership between the two. At the end of their third year, students complete a *Co-teacher Application* form for placement. This form allows the students to nominate the year level, class type, school type, and characteristics of the mentor teacher they hope to be matched with during their internship. These applications are sent to the School Coordinator of Professional Field Studies in the schools selected. The School Coordinator uses this information to identify suitable mentors. The nominated teachers are then consulted regarding their willingness to mentor an intern. The list of the mentor teachers, matched with their co-teachers, is sent back to the Centre for Professional Development for processing and final approval by the Internship Management Committee.

Cluster workshops

Gaffey and Porter (1990) discuss the necessity of mutually desired outcomes and shared understandings of the goal of the internship for ensuring quality mentoring. The shared vision and goals are integral to the success of the internship. Structures need to be set up to ensure shared dialogue and communication prior to and during the internship. Most importantly the communication needs to be three way, between academics, the mentor and the co-teacher for sharing the vision and goal setting processes. By doing this all stakeholders are able to contribute to the success of the program. For this to occur prior to the internship an academic facilitates several cluster workshops for both co-teachers and mentor teachers. These cluster workshops make use of the internship as a vehicle for promoting and sharing the common

interests, values and goals of the community of practice of both the school and the university.

The main aims of the cluster workshops during the internship are for the Centre of Professional Development to maintain contact with both co-teachers and mentors to encourage active reflection. During reflection participants articulate what has been learned through focussing on the objectives of their school community experience and critically reviewing their own progress as mentor or intern. In this case reflection becomes the method by which self-directed learning can occur. Participants critically reflect on their practice, reach reasoned conclusions and modify their practice to enable further opportunity for learning and development. The consequence of this reflection is that individual and collective confidence is enhanced.

The cluster workshops also become a time for information giving, problem solving and goal setting. Thus the outcomes of the cluster workshops include increased collegiality and collaboration. Many of the features of a learning community are outlined by Hough & Paine (1997) and can be identified in cluster workshops. For example, they suggest that a learning community consists of a shared vision, shared beliefs, personal mastery and team learning. These can be heard in the following comments.

Great to hear other teachers' experiences problems/successes etc and go back to launch into the next section of the internship

Mentor teacher 2001

It has been great to network with other mentor teachers and form common agreements about the internship program

Mentor teacher 2001

During the internship period a three-day mentor workshop is provided to all mentor teachers by the CFPD to further develop their skills of mentoring. The cost neutral aspect of the workshop is a significant feature. This can occur because the co-teacher takes responsibility for the class while the mentor teacher attends the workshop. A recent further development of this concept is to offer four days of workshops throughout the year to build on the reflective abilities of mentors. The outcome of the workshops is for mentors to become active professionals through developing a deeper understanding of themselves as reflective practitioners.

The internship launch

The launch of the internship has become an important event that symbolises the significance of the internship for the university, school and T E students. The launch involves a large group meeting of academics, the internship management committee, school coordinators, mentor teachers and co-teachers. This meeting is particularly relevant as it serves as a time for discussing with all mentors philosophical change from teacher education student to co-teacher. It also is one where mentor teachers, co-teachers and school coordinators from past internships speak of the highs and lows of their experiences.

The tension of the internship

Earlier in the chapter we referred to the tensions that can present in a learning community. In particular these tensions can be observed in the Gold Coast internship when the shift occurs in the final stage of the internship when the role of mentor teacher changes to that of evaluator. This role change takes place because the internship is used by employers as a process for ranking the teaching ability of prospective employees. The role of the mentor is to assign a numerical to the coteacher based mainly on their teaching performance during the internship. The problem here is that the role of the supportive mentor as critical evaluator is paradoxical in nature. Future plans by employing authorities to utilise independent evaluators will overcome this role conflict.

Predictors of internship success

In evaluating the success of internships in general, Beard & Morton (1999) indicate the following criteria as essential: intern (co-teacher) academic preparedness, initiative, positive attitude, quality of school supervision and employers practices and policies. The academic preparedness occurs through the university courses that have close links to the six practicums prior to the internship occurring throughout the degree program. Some of the assessment for the courses frequently depends on work undertaken in the practicum. This acknowledges Gaffey & Porter's (1990) observation that the reason for the gap between university theory and teaching practice is the lack of communication and collaboration between stakeholders. In particular the internship overcomes this through its emphasis on effective communication between schools and the university.

Frequently the co-teachers' initiative and positive attitude are enhanced through spending their final practicum prior to the internship in their internship classroom. This allows them to become familiar with the classroom and have a good knowledge of the students and the mentor teachers teaching and mentoring style. This prior experience allows the internship to begin relatively smoothly. The quality of the school supervision is ensured when the mentor teachers are offered mentoring workshops to further develop their skills. In addition the cluster workshops provide opportunities for networking and sharing skills and expertise with other mentors. Employers' practices and policies are communicated to co-teacher throughout the duration of the degree program. A particular emphasis is provided prior to the internship when an information day is held for co-teachers. On this day representatives from BTR and prospective employers such as Education Qld and Catholic Education present students with relevant information regarding teacher registration requirements and the process of applying for teaching positions.

Evaluation

The internship is evaluated through the use of an evaluation form that is completed by co-teachers and mentor teachers in the last cluster workshop. The evaluation form provides teachers with the opportunity to comment on areas such as initiative in planning and teaching, ability to plan and teach independently, assessing student learning outcomes, implementing classroom and student management plans as well as becoming part of the school and overall rating for the internship. The information is

collated and presented as data graphs (Figures 20.2 & 20.3) within a written report. The report goes to all schools, and is presented to Gold Coast campus school committee. The findings of the report are presented at a meeting of the Internship Management Committee who use these results to further refine the internship for the following year. This ensures that the governance of the internship remains as a partnership between the university and the schools.

Figures 20.2 and 20.3 about here

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that education reforms have led to many Australian universities introducing internships as part of their teacher education programs. In many cases the internship has encouraged the development of a learning community between schools and the university. Since its inception in 1994, the internship offered by Griffith University, Gold Coast campus has contributed to the development of a learning community that involves a three way partnership between the university, schools and TE students. Such a partnership provides professional growth and development for all stakeholders by providing opportunities for teachers to become mentors, for schools to be exposed to new ideas and innovative practice, for TE students to put theory into practice in a supportive learning context and university academics to witness the outcome of their teaching. As well the internship encourages shared governance of the teacher education program by legitimising the voice of TE student, mentor and academic. At the same time we acknowledge the impact that the tensions that exist within the internship have on the learning community. It is this acknowledgment that assists us to continuously reflect and improve the internship thus offering an experience that will continue to develop a quality learning community.

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