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Chapter 13

Learning in the workplace: new forms of learning for preservice teachers

Angela Hill

Internationally and within Australia, the workplace learning or professional experience component of teacher education programs has gained renewed focus. While there is no doubt that newcomers to teaching are entering a profoundly changed profession (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000) the imperatives to address the workplace-learning component of teacher education are not often articulated. In the USA and Britain for example, there is an increased emphasis on the role of workplace or school based experiences, with a concurrent reduction or elimination in the university-based component, while in Australia, recent government reports (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003; Department of Education Science and Training 2002) forewarn of significant required changes to the workplace learning with increased emphasis on school based experiences.

This chapter argues that workplace learning in teacher education requires significant reform. A concerted effort is required by teacher educators to move away from workplace learning as ‘placement’ to workplace learning as a component that assists in the promotion of new and different professional teacher identities, prepared to engage with ‘new times’ (Blackmore 1999; Hargreaves 2003). The chapter firstly, reviews motives for changes to the workplace-learning component of teacher education. It is suggested that current trends to reduce the university component of teacher education are politically motivated and not in the best interest of the profession. Instead, it is argued, the significant reform required within the workplace learning component of teacher education should be grounded in recent research around useful workplace learning (Boud & Solomon 2001; Gonczi 2004).

Secondly, the chapter briefly presents a model of workplace learning within teacher education that attempts to nurture a reframed professional identity for teachers. This model, a project based internship, attempts to forge new partnerships between teachers, teacher education institutions, schools and their communities, potentially contributing to the development of activist professionals (Sachs 1998). Such a model requires high levels of shared expertise amongst teachers and teacher educators, actively creating strategic alliances across networks and communities or networks of professionals involved in change and renewal (Smyth 2001). It is contended that teacher educators should cautiously review calls to promote more workplace learning without considering what type of learning might contribute to the

development of a teacher identity that works to reform and redesign schools and their communities for a globalised, marketised knowledge economy.

Resisting marketised agendas

A range of agendas is apparent in urging reform in teacher education and concurrently the workplace-learning component. These agendas appear with a different focus in different international sites, but have a common theme around teacher shortage, particularly teacher shortage in disadvantaged communities, and the continued failure of teachers to ensure high quality educational outcomes for many students, including students from different language and cultural backgrounds (Zeichner 2003).

In recent decades the reforms presented by policy makers to address these and other problems have been imbued with the dominant ideology of the market. The creation of a market system to steer education policy requires four key conditions (Marginson, 1997, 2000; Morrow 1998; Ozga 2000; Thomson 1998). The first is a requirement to inscribe choice between educational institutions, allowing consumers to make decisions about the location and nature of their teacher education. The second condition required is the development of devolved autonomous institutions, institutions that can develop niche programs away from any central form of control. The third condition involves the emulation of private sector management practices such as a strong emphasis on business management, and the final condition stresses the importance of evaluation measures, particularly the specification of output measures.

Developments in teacher education, over a range of international sites over the last two decades demonstrate differential engagement with these four conditions of marketisation. Such an agenda transforms the notion of education as a public good disconnecting institutions from direct state control instead favouring audit measures to control both content and performance (Ball 1998). The economic model linked to such decoupling, public choice theory, allows the state to take ostensibly less interest in what is offered, because the consumer will make choices on the basis of what they perceive to be in their interests. Within this paradigm, the government's role then is one of deregulation, allowing a range of providers to operate and consumers to make choices with output measures being provided to support their choices.

Within teacher education in the United States for example, neo-liberal ideology shapes responses in the United States for new approaches to the recruitment and training of teachers. A great sense of urgency, a notion of crises, is often presented to appeal to those who may be attracted to noble causes of supporting disadvantaged communities where teacher shortage has reached a critical point. Potential teachers can now elect a range of routes to employment as a teacher, with programs such as *'Teach for America'*

gathering momentum. The '*Teach for America*' program dramatically shortens the time required in teacher education with an intensive "rigorous summer training institute" of 5 weeks duration and then employment in a designated school with 'ongoing support' (<http://www.teachforamerica.org/trained.html>). Yet as a recent report notes (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Vasquez Heilig 2004), such programs while far less costly to the government in the short term, are unlikely to support the disadvantaged communities they are ostensibly designed to support, and are also unlikely to develop a long term commitment to the profession. Recruits to '*Teach for America*' remain less than 3 years in the teaching profession.

In England, "the desperate shortage" (Halstead 2003) of teachers and continued underachievement in disadvantaged communities has led to a myriad of reforms through the nineties and the new century, all identifiably framed in neo-liberal discourses. Shortened teacher education programs, now referred to as teacher *training*, where learning to become a teacher and paid teacher employment can occur simultaneously, have proliferated. The Post-Graduate Certificate of Education, introduced in the nineties reduced the university component of teacher education to less than one third of the overall program. Tightly specified output measures, teacher competencies and on-the-job performance assessments are now the preferred method of teacher certification, with teacher training bodies required to conform to a range of performance indicators.

In Australia, parallel demographic arguments, particularly the looming shortage of teachers, predominantly secondary teachers, occupy significant space in the discourses of government reports. "Replacement demand" for teachers will continue to grow, with anticipated shortages in secondary teachers by 2005. "Supply would be only 70% of demand" nationally (Preston cited in Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003) in secondary schools.

Not only is there a shortage of teachers, but the retention of teachers once they have graduated is also described as problematic. In Australia, there is increasing evidence from a range of sources that suggest that 30% of education graduates leave teaching before completing five years employment in a school (Kalantzis & Harvey 2003). Teacher graduates are said to suffer 'reality shock' (DEST 2002) as they are described as being unprepared for the professional roles they are required to adopt. Again, teacher education institutions are targeted to explain allegedly poor preparation, while practices within schools to support beginning teachers are left unquestioned.

At the moment, despite much critique of teacher education programs in Australia, universities still govern the recruitment and education of teachers, albeit within a tightening framework of regulation of outcomes, including retention. This is likely to change in the immediate future with estimates that only 60 percent of preservice teachers complete their teacher education. The federal government has firmly

targeted teacher education institutions to act on both retention of teacher education students and their preparation. Conservative commentators are now suggesting that Australian teacher education adopt the models from the US and the UK (Buckingham 2005) and many of the actions suggested in the report “*Australia’s teacher: Australia’s Future*” make direct calls for teacher education institutions to ground their program in schools. “Teacher education must be firmly connected to the life and culture of schools” (pg 35) with increased emphasis on practical skills.

Such reports and a labour shortage establish a foundation in Australia for developments, such as those seen in the United States and Britain. The temptation to impose a market solution and deregulate teacher education in Australia is obvious. Yet, there is also a possibility for teacher educators to review their practices, particularly, in the context of retention and readiness to join the profession and to consider contemporary practices in workplace learning.

Resisting outmoded workplace learning agendas

The historical model of workplace learning in teacher education as developed by universities or teachers colleges in Australia is for preservice teachers to spend considerable periods of time allocated to one teacher in one classroom on ‘placement’. In this model, relationships between the participants, the preservice teacher, the classroom teacher and university educator are hierarchical and often isolated. The university teacher educator most often determines the curriculum for the program, the classroom teacher largely dictates how the curriculum is implemented, often with little contact with the university, and the least powerful participant, the preservice teacher works to pass through sufficient ‘hoops’ to meet the curriculum and supervising teacher requirements.

For some time now, work-based learning advocates such as Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001) have developed the notion of *workplace learning* to move well beyond the historical practicum model. Learning that takes place in workplaces or work-based learning, they argue, is “the term being used to describe a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organizations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces” (pg4). While acknowledging the spectrum of such programs that exist, such programs have key features and importantly focus not only on what the learner may need but also what the workplace needs may be. That is, the curriculum is potentially determined and shaped by the organization following the recognition of learner’s skills. Project based work, is described as a common form of learning in this model of work-based learning oriented to the needs of both the learner and the workplace.

With a few notable exceptions, a model of workplace learning such as the one advocated by Boud, Solomon and Symes has not infiltrated teacher education programs widely. The ‘knowledge building

communities' model from the University of Wollongong, for example, made strong attempts to reposition the participants of teacher education, but such models have worked with small cohorts of preservice teachers for fixed periods, and are often not sustainable due to funding restrictions (Kiggins & Ferry 2000).

Aside from funding limitations, Australian workplace learning models in teacher education relate to two historical influences. Historical tensions between theory and practice and the relationship between the academy and schools are the first area of intransigence. The second area links to the focus on individual performance within a master/apprentice framework.

Teacher education along with a range of other professions has traditionally sited their students in the professional context on 'placement'. The work of academics completed, preservice teachers endured their placement and returned to the university to continue their learning. Although a range of forces in Australian universities has lifted the "moratorium on [...] practical life" (Symes, Boud, McIntyre, J, Solomon, & Tennant 2000), the tensions remain. Many academics in teacher education have limited engagement with the 'practical' completed in schools, and a significant pedagogical shift is required for academics to integrate school based experiences with university based learning (Boud & Solomon, 2001).

While on placement, and away from the academy, "[...] prospective teachers typically learn a great deal about how to go it alone within the classroom [...]"(Goodlad 1990 cited in Zeichner 1996, pg 216). No matter how many placements occur within a program, the most common experience of workplace learning is that of 'going it alone'. The assessment of the success of the placement, usually by the classroom teacher or university based lecturer compounds the isolative nature of the experience, as most often preservice teachers and their performance is measured against a range of increasingly prescriptive competency based indicators.

Not only does this format of workplace learning potentially lead to isolation of all participants, teaching in a classroom is only one aspect of teachers' work. It is here that the logic for examining different models of workplace learning becomes clearer and the work of contemporary workplace learning theorists (Gonczi 2004) more potent.

If a separated and isolated placement model of teacher education is not desirable, then what other alternatives exist? Gonczi (2004) urges an examination of the intersection of a range of disciplines including philosophy, neuroscience and learning theory, which converge to provide insight into workplace learning models. Remaining at the heart of workplace learning is still the notion of an

apprenticeship type experience, but not an apprenticeship as is developed in the current teacher education model of placement. Rather, an apprenticeship that

“postulates that knowledge is built through participating in a group that already has competence and are willing to allow the learner to become, progressively, part of the core of their community. This progressive participation involves the learner developing an identity as a member of the group” (Gonczi 2004, p 28).

It appears that this apprenticeship is founded on a quite different premise to the current model of workplace learning in teacher education. It is based on a foundation of learning as a social not an individual enterprise, framed by long term relationships and shared goals.

Zeichner (1996) has called for such a collaborative model to guide teacher education generally -“for collaborative work in schools as part of learning communities, and for developing positive relationships with the external communities served by schools” (p 224). In Australia, there is evidence that attempts have been made to move outside the classroom, (Butcher, Howard, McMeniman, & Thom 2003) with many teacher education institutions promoting a range of varied professional experiences, including community service activities and action research projects. But sustaining long term and outward looking workplace learning projects in teacher education requires more significant shifts in the structural relations inherent in current teacher education models.

Project-based internships- shifting the structural relations of field experience.

An example of the realignment required to move towards a collaborative work-based project learning model has recently been attempted in the final year of the James Cook University Townsville undergraduate teacher education program. In this internship preservice teachers complete 35 days in schools in supervised professional experience and are then eligible for an internship.

While internships can take a variety of formats, the JCU model focussed on the development of a tangible project, a real work-based priority that can be completed within a four week period. The internship was developed during 2002 by a working party over a period of four months– a partnership between JCU staff, the Queensland Teachers’ Union, the Queensland Independent Teachers’ Union, employer representatives and practising teachers. The negotiations resulted in an agreement setting out the parameters of the program and the roles and responsibilities of each participant.

Fundamental to the internship program is a requirement for the intern to work collaboratively with a designated mentor teacher, over a four-week period, on a nominated project related to the school’s future direction. All participants in the process are voluntary – there are no mandated payments to the school, mentor teacher, or intern. In 2003, 51 preservice teachers nominated to participate in the

internship program, approximately 25% of the final year cohort. Table 1 summarises the key roles and responsibilities of each partner.

Table 1 Internship roles

| Participant | Role |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Intern | Attend pre-internship workshop Contribute to the work of the school identified project Teach up to 50% of mentor teacher's load Present internship experience at culminating conference |
| Mentor | Attend pre-internship workshop Work collaboratively with intern on school project Share teaching load with intern |
| School Internship coordinator | Nominate a school project Secure a willing mentor teacher Release mentor teacher to attend workshop Provide a statement of service to the intern |
| University internship coordinator | Promote internship experience to schools and interns Conduct workshop for interns and mentors prior to internship Visit schools during internship where possible |
| University subject coordinator | Develop and support a reflective process for intern's work Assess intern's project work |

The nature of this project-based internship embeds several distinctions from other workplace learning experiences within the JCU Bachelor of Education degree program and teacher education more generally. Firstly, schools or preservice teachers identify a future goal and develop a project that has the support and presumably interest of at least one teacher. Unlike a regular practicum, the project has been designated as a priority within the school. The preservice teacher's enthusiasm for the project based nature of the internship is clear in the following interview excerpts.

My internship was just something that I was interested in and something that I had a passion about and something that I wanted to learn more for myself and you know, perhaps help the school, same sort of thing

I'm getting very excited because I have been given a budget and a date when everything has to be in at the publisher and it all has to be done professionally and very efficiently, so that is all very exciting too.

A further recognition of the priority attached to the project is the requirement for schools to release the mentor teacher to attend a pre-internship workshop of one half-day's duration with the intern at the university. This workshop permits the university, mentor teacher and intern to come to a shared agreement about the parameters of the program. It enables negotiation between the intern and mentor as to the allocation of work and the nature of the project. It also, precipitates a change in participant relationships in this form of field experience, shifting the role of supervisor to mentor, and the role of preservice teacher to intern.

Fundamental to the change in pedagogy is the shift in power in assessment. In other practicums within the degree program, the assessor is the teacher – the supervisor. In this model, the assessment of the preservice teacher (intern) rests with the university. This requires engagement with the school-based project, the work of the intern and teacher, potentially engaging or re-engaging university staff in school based experiences.

This project-based internship model, also, allows preservice teachers to expand their understanding of the repertoire involved in teachers' work beyond the classroom to curriculum writer, presenter of policy implications, or whatever else was involved in the internship. These reflective comments made by interns following the internship are indicative of this broader understanding:

internship helped me with writing curriculum and that sort of stuff because I got thrown in the deep end and sort of did [.....] and that helped me hugely, going to teachers at X school, and when I worked with [the Head of Department] last year, like that really helped me significantly, and if I hadn't had that experience I think I'd be sinking a bit further this year. So, I think maybe that yeah . . . has helped.

After doing the Internship, I realised that I knew all the kids, I knew all the teachers.... But, because we are a Middle School, I think learning about that adolescence and everything that went with it and then the resources that we built. We've actually been asked to present that at other forums and conferences and it really has been a valued tool. We've had feedback from teachers using it at that school that have actually rung us and said "the day you presented it we just went 'yeah, great', now we're using it we're just.... "

Although the internship program is in its infancy, the model described above shows in a number of small and significant ways how the workplace-learning component of teacher education can be recast. Such recasting requires sustained conversations with the participants in the process, and a focus on the 'broader educational enterprise' (Sachs 2003) which in this case is the future direction of the school and certainly life beyond the classroom. Communities of practice are forged through the development of partners rather than traditional master/apprentice isolated models and there is the potential to differently shape the alliance between universities and schools.

As Sachs (2003) argues the teaching profession is reaching a critical moment where trust, a shared vision and a focus on collective action are ensured. At the moment most teacher education programs in Australia, through their placement model of workplace learning ensure a focus on individual survival in a classroom. Developing different workplace learning models may well position teacher education to survive the neo liberal onslaught and prepare the profession for a more collectivist future.

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