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# Springboard to teaching: a partnership in practice

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In New South Wales in 2001-2002, twenty-nine Higher School Certificate students completed two units of an undergraduate teaching degree as part of their final-year school studies. Eighteen students are currently doing the same in 2002-2003. The initiative, **Springboard into Teaching**, is a University Developed Board Endorsed Course which not only provides for expanded curriculum choice for HSC students but also attempts to attract bright and committed students into teaching. **Springboard into Teaching** is a collaborative regional initiative between the Catholic Education Office and the School of Education at Southern Cross University, both located at Lismore on the NSW north coast. What are the benefits of such an initiative, and what role can such collaborative ventures between universities and schools play in recruiting quality teachers into teaching? Those behind the project explain.



*From left: Brother Peter Pemble, Principal at Trinity Catholic College, Lismore; Dr Anne Graham, Southern Cross University; Lee MacMaster, Catholic Education Office, Lismore Diocese; and Renata Phelps, Southern Cross University; with Elizabeth McMahon, participant in the Springboard into Teaching program 2001-2002, at back.*

# Springboard to teaching

## A partnership in practice

By ANNE GRAHAM, RENATA PHELPS, BERENICE KERR and LEE MACMASTER

**T**he role of the teacher has changed significantly in recent years along with the status of teaching as a profession and the demands and expectations the community places on teachers and schools. (Vick, 1998) It has, however, been noted that there has been a 'lack of genuine, sustained collaboration between employers of teachers and universities in the provision of initial teacher education and ongoing professional development.' (McMorrow, 2001, 17) A recent review of teacher education in NSW (Ramsey, 2000) expressed concern regarding teacher quality and highlighted a number of proposed policy

directions for teacher education that will impact on the work of universities, employers and schools. Like the recent Vinson report (Esson, Johnson and Vinson, 2002), Ramsey highlighted the need to implement creative strategies to address both teacher supply and quality issues. One example of how such partnerships can be forged to attract quality and committed students into teaching can be found in the program we describe here.

**Springboard into Teaching** is the result of a collaborative regional initiative between the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the School of Education at Southern Cross University, both located at Lismore on the north coast of NSW. The initiative emerged from a shared concern about the declining

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status of teaching as a career option for school leavers and the need to encourage bright and committed young people into the profession.

### What is Springboard into Teaching?

**Springboard into Teaching** is a University Developed Board Endorsed Course (UDBEC) and, as such, supplements the new HSC curriculum. UDBECs may be included in a student's pattern of HSC study but results are not considered for inclusion in the calculation of the Universities Admission Index (UAI). The NSW Board of Studies (2002, 4) requires that university-developed courses will:

- assist in providing for the needs of high ability students in Stage 6 of their secondary schooling
- extend the new HSC curriculum and not overlap significantly in content with other Board Developed Courses
- provide an opportunity for high-ability students to undertake a university level course while still at school
- provide students with a study opportu-

nity that they may not otherwise have through the Board's Stage 6 curriculum

- ensure that students experience tertiary study in a supportive environment
- add to the existing flexible pathways to the HSC and university
- contribute to the articulation of the Stage 6 curriculum and first year courses at university
- encourage students' independent, reflective and ongoing learning through engagement with high level, challenging university level courses
- give the students a taste of university course content, university course delivery and university life in general
- be accredited for the HSC, satisfy part of the university's requirements for the first year of a university degree and attract advanced standing and credit as appropriate
- recognise the school/university or school system/university partnership in developing and delivering the courses.

**Springboard into Teaching** comprises two modules of study, each of approximately thirteen weeks duration. These

modules each represent a university-level undergraduate unit from the Bachelor of Education (primary) and double degree (secondary) programs at Southern Cross University. Each module is delivered *via* two weekend workshops supported by print materials and online interaction.

The first module, *Introduction to Teaching*, provides students with an overview of the teaching profession whilst exploring the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required throughout a teaching career. This module involves students spending three days in classrooms in the capacity of a practicum teacher. Through this module students:

- reflect critically on their motivation for 'being a teacher'
- consider the complex and diverse role of the teacher in responding to social issues and imperatives, understanding and working in a school system, teaching across a broad curriculum, creating a climate for learning and negotiating theory and practice
- evaluate effective teaching and learning through structured observation

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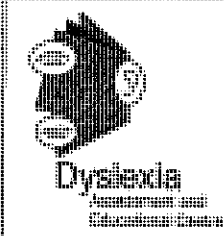
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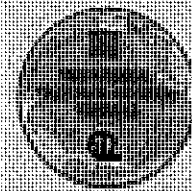
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- reflect on their practice
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The second module, *Educational Information Technology*, seeks to develop knowledge of, and skills and confidence in, the use of computers and network technology for teaching and learning in primary or secondary school settings. This module involves students designing and developing an instructionally sound web-based learning and teaching resource. Through this module students consider:

- their own approaches to learning about and with technology
- the role of ICT in the school curriculum
- the usefulness and the limitations of ICT as a pedagogical tool
- pedagogical approaches required to use ICT successfully in the classroom, and
- social and ethical issues surrounding the use of ICT.

Common to both modules is a metacognitive approach to learning, with a focus on 'learning how to learn' so that students can 'learn how to teach.' Both *Introduction to Teaching* and *Educational Information Technology* take into account Biggs's (1988) notion that students need to be aware of their motives, task demands and their own cognitive resources to exert control over learning (and teaching) strategies used. Both units incorporate an emphasis on elements such as time-management, practice, mastery of learning methods, goal-directedness, help-seeking and a sense of self-efficacy. The value of a metacognitive approach in facilitating self-directed learning was viewed by the partners as essential to quality teaching and lifelong learning. Exposing this particular cohort of students, with their anxieties and concerns about performing in a university environment, to learning based on such foundations would best position them for success and assist them to clarify their decision regarding their career choice in teaching.

The target group for *Springboard into Teaching* is those high achieving students

who are sufficiently motivated to 'carry' an extra HSC course and who have a commitment to pursuing teaching as a career. As part of the application process students are required to:

- attend an information session about the course
- complete an extensive application form including a statement on why they wish to pursue teaching as a career
- submit two recent school reports
- provide a supporting reference from their principal, and
- attend an interview with personnel from CEO Lismore and, in 2002, the university.

The development and implementation of the program has represented a true partnership at the conceptualisation, design, development, implementation and evaluation stages. The CEO Lismore and the School of Education at Southern Cross University consulted closely with schools and with the Board of Studies in determining the interest and support for such a course.

The first course commenced in October 2001 and of the twenty-nine students who

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originally started the program twenty-three 'graduated' in April 2002 at a ceremony presided over by the chancellor, vice-chancellor and other senior university staff. In 2002-2003 a group of twenty students were offered places in the second intake to **Springboard into Teaching** and eighteen of these students took up places. Students who successfully complete both modules and who qualify for entry and enrolment into either the primary or secondary teacher education programs at Southern Cross University receive advanced standing for the two equivalent units. Involvement in the program also provides students with additional support for their applications for early entry and in 2002 several of the participants in the first **Springboard into Teaching** course received early offers.

### What has made **Springboard into Teaching** a success?

The NSW Board of Studies requires a formal evaluation of **Springboard into Teaching**. Associate Professor Geoff Riordan, Director of Teacher Education at the University of Technology Sydney, and Rosalie Nott, Coordinator of Equity Policy and Programs for the NSW Catholic Education Commission, conducted this last year. Students who completed the course felt the program had confirmed their interest in teaching and were more inclined to consider teaching as a career. The course was seen as opening up 'a different understanding' and 'a great insight into the world of teaching' and a clearer conception of 'the role of a teacher.'

The program was also seen as highly positive in providing participants with a better understanding of university expectations and requirements. Students 'liked being treated as a university student and not as a school student' and were more 'confident to commence university studies because of the experience.' Data received from students who withdrew from the course suggests it was still successful in clarifying their career direction, even if this were not in teaching. It was seen as positive that these students had the opportunity to reach these decisions before making their university course decisions. The majority of school principals agreed that the course provided students with an understanding of

the key influences on the profession of teaching and 'enabled them to make a more informed career choice.' (Riordan and Nott, 2002. 21) One parent remarked 'the course was a great challenge as (the students) had to stop thinking as students and think as teachers.'

A key focus of the evaluation was on the timing of the course and its impact on students' other HSC commitments. Whilst some responses indicated the additional workload was a challenge in terms of time management there was overall consensus from principals, students and parents that these were not insurmountable.

## Students who completed the course felt the program had confirmed their interest in teaching and were more inclined to consider teaching as a career.

It is too early to project the longer-term outcomes of the **Springboard into Teaching** course in terms of its contribution to enhanced quality within the profession. Ongoing research will monitor the medium- to longer-term outcomes, such as future study choices, initial transition to university, effects of acceleration on study patterns, personal development in terms of increased self-confidence, as well as longer-term career outcomes, particularly regarding quality teaching.

A major finding of the evaluation was that a key to the success of **Springboard into Teaching** was the nature and degree of collaboration between the university and the school system. A strong partnership is critical because of the detailed planning required for the development and delivery of a UDBEC. Decisions concerning recruitment, selection, in-school mentoring and support, ongoing evaluation and pastoral care of the students require the input and support of both partners.

In determining the suitability of applicants for a potential career in teaching it seems critical that engagement by each stakeholder – university, CEO, participating schools, parents and students – will significantly increase the chances of attracting the most suitable candidates. The evaluation indicated the excellent communication, cooperation and collaboration involved in

this project: 'Clearly, both parties value the collaboration and judge it to be mutually beneficial.' (Riordan and Nott, 2002. 2) These views were echoed by principals and parents. The above findings would suggest that the cornerstone of a successful UDBEC is the nature and degree of collaboration between the university and the school system or community.

A number of recommendations were also made by the evaluators regarding selection processes. As a result, these were modified in 2002 to better determine the readiness of students. A sample of the students' written work was included in the application, and a

university staff member was involved in the interview process, enabling students to be better informed regarding work commitments so as to balance their workload during the program.

### Conclusion

The **Springboard into Teaching** program has demonstrated the potential for partnerships between universities and school systems in supporting quality and committed students considering a career in teaching. The success of such an initiative requires close collaboration and commitment from university staff, teacher employers, principals, teachers and mentors, parents and, of course, students. The benefits for all involved, however, are great and it is clear that such a program can support students to make informed and supported decisions about their career and ultimately play a role in recruiting quality teachers into schools. ■

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