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Pathways to Teaching: A Curriculum Innovation Enhancing Recognition of Students’ Career Aspirations and Expectations: Redesigning Curriculum to Acknowledge Diversity

Tess Boyle and Renata Phelps
Pathways to Teaching: A Curriculum Innovation Enhancing Recognition of Students’ Career Aspirations and Expectations: Redesigning Curriculum to Acknowledge Diversity

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Abstract: Teacher education courses have traditionally focused on preparing students for a career of full-time permanent employment. While this is in some ways a necessary assumption, it also overlooks the employment realities of many future graduates who do not move into such positions. Though teacher accreditation processes in Australia have, to some degree, acknowledged the need for alternative pathways into the profession for those who do not find themselves with full time appointments, more can be done within teacher education to prepare students for alternative careers in the profession. The paper suggests that better understanding the career aspirations and expectations of pre-service teachers can assist teacher educators to design relevant and responsive curriculum that better meets the needs of the students and their chosen profession. The paper describes an innovative approach to curriculum design and delivery in the final year of a primary education course whereby students are encouraged to pursue learning related to an identified, preferred career pathway based not only on their aspirations but also on the realities of their employment opportunities and preferences. It demonstrates how the unit draws directly on data, gathered online at the beginning of semester, thus ensuring the unit is responsive to the diverse life experiences and aspirations of teacher education graduates and how these might influence their choice of an employment pathway into the profession.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Professional Pathways, Career Aspirations, Curriculum Design

Introduction

During the latter half of the 20th century the world and work of Australian primary school teachers was predominantly the domain of white, middle class citizens who entered universities direct from secondary schools. The primary criteria for selection to teaching was a tertiary entrance score (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004). Between 1970 and 1990 teacher education recruits were most likely to be young, female and non-Indigenous, with females dominating the profession at a ratio of approximately 3:1 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1970; 1980; 1990). The majority of teachers transitioned from school to teachers’ college/university and then back to school with little, if any, other life-work experiences. Many financed their studies via a scholarship from their future employer, for example, the various state Departments of Education or Catholic Education Offices at Diocesan level. These beginning teachers were then bonded to their employer, usually for three years, and appointed to full-time tenured positions in schools of the employer’s choice, often in difficult to staff areas. For the majority of graduates in this era, teaching was seen as a lifelong career (Logan & Watson, 1992).
Recent changes in Australian society prompted by a range of factors including population
growth, an aging workforce, employment flexibility, advancements in technologies, diverse
family structures and increased litigation (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004) have had a profound
impact on the world and work of teachers and thus teacher education. “Teacher education,
formerly a haven of quiet induction into the profession, has been rudely pressed into the
public realm” (Adelman, 1986, p.175). State and Federal Australian governments have, in
response to these changes and the increasing demand for accountability, held forums to de-
velop national goals for Australian education. These goals, articulated as Declarations
(Hobart 1989, Adelaide 1999 and Melbourne 2008) have had a significant influence on the
work of teachers and teacher education. For example, the Australian Federal Government’s
recent ‘My School website’ initiative has generated much debate highlighting even further
the need for teachers and thus teacher educators to be accountable for students’ learning
outcomes and responsive to changes within society and the education system (McGaw,
2010).

Standards in both teacher education and teaching have, in recent years, been the subject
of much public debate. Legislation existing in most Australian states has mandated rigorous
teacher accreditation procedures, now the focus for the development of a national set of
standards (MCEETYA, 2003). Teacher educators have been required to embrace these
changes to firstly that curriculum meets graduate teacher standards and secondly that it is
authentically connected to the teaching profession. However, they do so in a context where
there is no clear, ready-made vision of what schools may be like for future generations of
teachers (Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth & Dobbins, 2000). As society continues to change,
so too do the factors that influence the socialisation of teacher education including their
reasons for wanting to become a teacher. This, in turn, presents challenges for teacher edu-
cators.

One of the most significant changes teacher educators have faced relates to the changing
characteristics of teacher education, students and their aspirations, and expectations as to
what a teaching career might entail. Clandinin, Downey and Huber (2009) identify that
globalisation, socialisation, geography and employment shape teachers’ ideology and influence
the recruitment of teachers from more diverse groups and ages—recruits now with a broader
range of life-work experiences and different aspirations about their work as teachers.

This paper argues that by having a deeper understanding of students’ career aspirations,
opportunities for employment and preferred career pathways, teacher educators can better
support students’ transition from university to the profession. The paper describes an innov-
ative unit developed for final year Bachelor of Education (Primary) students that acknow-
ledges students’ prior experiences, aspirations for employment and career expectations. The
unit aims to:

…provide the opportunity for students to explore a range of professional pathways in
the transition from undergraduate to teacher. The pathways considered reflect a variety
of professional contexts including casual or part-time work, rural and remote areas,
[Australian] Indigenous communities, special education and NESB [non-English
speaking background] contexts. Through a combination of university-based studies,
working with teaching practitioners and an extended in-school teaching experience, the
unit seeks to provide context specific professional knowledge and skills and assist stu-
dents to establish support networks within these various educational contexts.

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This ‘pathways unit’, it is argued, enables a high degree of responsiveness to the realities of students’ individual circumstances, the employment environments that they will face on graduation, and the ever-evolving expectations of the teaching profession.

**Issues of Teacher Supply and Demand**

Australian census data (ABS, 2008) identified that there were 279,668 teachers employed on a full-time basis in Australian primary schools, of whom 198,085 (80.4%) were female and 81,583 (19.6%) males. This represents a ratio of 4:1, illustrating the perpetuation of the dominance of female teachers in Australian primary schools. Between 1998 and 2008 teacher numbers in government schools increased by 0.3% whilst in the non-government sector they rose by 2.6% (ABS, 2008), suggesting that the demand for employment of teacher graduates is likely to be higher in the non-government sector.

There has been much commentary in the media about the potential for a future shortage of teachers in Australia due to the aging population of teachers and hence anticipation of their retirement. This has often been presented in the media as an enticement to pursue a career in teaching, and a number of recruitment programs have been based on this premise. Personal observations and anecdotal evidence suggests that this discussion has been quite successful in encouraging a broader demographic of Australians to consider teaching as a career. To date, however, the predicted teacher shortage and subsequent increased demand for graduates has not been realised; nor is it likely to be in the immediate future. The Auditor-General’s Report into the Ageing Workforce within the NSW Department of Education and Training (Achterstraat, 2008) revealed that in 2007 the average age of teachers in that state was 45 years (median 48). Although the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) does not have a mandatory retirement age, NSWDET assume that female teachers will retire at age 55 and males at 60 (Achterstraat, 2008). However, predicted retirement patterns may be influenced by other events such as the global economic crisis and changes to legislation regarding superannuation. As such teacher shortages in primary schools, particularly in New South Wales, may not occur for ten to fifteen years and are unlikely to affect the immediate employment prospects of current or upcoming graduates.

A further consideration influencing employment prospects for graduates is the already existing surplus of qualified teachers within some regions. In 2008, the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) issued a statement identifying that in NSW alone there were (approximately) 50,000 permanently employed teachers with a further 30,000 teachers employed in casual positions. This indicates that there is already a large pool of teachers poised to take up permanent positions should predictions of teacher shortages eventuate.

There has always been, and will continue to be, issues of supply and demand related to particular ‘hard to staff’ geographical areas (for example, rural and remote areas). Graduates’ career choices are determined by their willingness to move to these areas. Such decisions are influenced by a plethora of personal factors unique to each graduating student.

For some beginning teachers, casual teaching is a viable, realistic and preferred option, especially for older graduates and those with families or other responsibilities that prohibit movement to regions with greater employment opportunities. In addition, many overlook alternative career pathways available to those with an education degree. Even within the realm of teaching occupations, graduates may become private teachers of music or dance,
It is vital that teacher education programs support students in their consideration of future employment options. This includes promoting awareness of supply and demand realities and opportunities within various employment contexts. The immediate career aspirations of individuals are inevitably influenced by their work-life circumstances. By acknowledging this, teacher educators can assist students to develop appropriate career pathways into the profession. Thus, curriculum can be designed to support students to develop confidence, knowledge and expertise in a chosen professional pathway, hence better preparing students for employment in a variety of contexts.

The Context of this Research

The North Coast region of the Australian state of NSW is home to a growing and ageing population. Attracted by the climate and lifestyle, many older citizens perceive this region as an attractive retirement destination. The teacher profiles for this region reflect this general trend. Data provided by the Catholic Education Office Lismore, the region’s second largest employer, reveal that within the sample of 1608 teachers, 1210 are female and 398 male. Of these teachers, 553 are aged 50 years or older, 756 are employed full-time and 852 part-time. Moreover, 280 of the 756 full-time teachers have been employed for 15 years or more (Hoare, 2010).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant number of teachers transfer into this region of NSW after teaching in rural, remote or difficult-to-staff regions. Both the data above, and this anecdotal evidence, imply that subsequent to securing a teaching position on the North Coast, few teachers transfer out again, thus creating a relatively static full-time employment environment and an abundance of casual staff.

In addition, interactions with local teachers over a period of many years suggests that a significant number have never been, nor are ever likely to be, employed on a full-time permanent basis. These ‘casual’ teachers usually seek opportunities for day-to-day employment, or engage in periods of temporary teaching—that is, they fill in for permanent staff absent from their classes.

Southern Cross University services a geographical area that includes the Mid and Far North Coasts of NSW and the southern ‘Gold Coast’ region of the adjoining state of Queensland. The School of Education at Southern Cross University offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in primary, secondary and early childhood education across the University’s three campuses. The total number of students enrolled in its courses in early 2010 was 1549; 1096 of these being female and 453 male. The Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree had a total enrolment of 794, 619 being female and 175 male. Thus, the ratio of females to males across the entire group is 2.4:1 representing a significantly higher male ratio than National levels, which were 4:1 in 2008 (ABS, 2008). A large number of students who enter teacher education degrees at Southern Cross University are mature aged (i.e. not straight from school). In 2010, enrolment data showed that more than half (961 of the total 1549) were 25 or over and that, of these, 255 (16%) were over 35.

Staff interactions with students suggest that many mature aged students have young families and/or elderly relatives in the area and that many also hold quite stable jobs which they maintain while they undertake their studies. That said, the primary teacher education program
tended to assume that students were being prepared for full-time employment. Anecdotal discussions with students, however, revealed that many did not expect nor even particularly wish to be employed as a teacher on a permanent basis. Some students felt that they were being prepared as a homogenous group and voiced frustration that their course did little to prepare them for varied employment contexts which were more consistent with their career aspirations. Acknowledging these concerns the first author sought to re-develop a unit in the fourth year of the Bachelor of Education (Primary) program.

Data Collection and Unit Design

In order to best inform this unit’s development and delivery, each year (2008–2010) a survey was employed to gather information on students’ work-life experiences, immediate employment opportunities and career aspirations. This became an important source of data for the unit development and delivery and provided a springboard for students to begin reflecting on these issues themselves.

The survey was developed using the online survey software, Qualtrix, enabling expeditious collection, analysis and reporting of data at the beginning of each semester. Because of the reporting capabilities of the survey software it was possible to administer the survey with students in week 1 of semester and produce a report on findings by week 2. In this way the survey not only provided data to inform each semester’s development and refinement of the unit, but it also provided immediate feedback to the student cohort.

The survey consisted of a series of questions seeking both quantitative (Likert scale, multiple choice and ranking) and qualitative responses. In addition to standard demographic data the survey included questions related to students’ academic and employment background, employment preferences and aspirations, and topics/areas which students would like to know more about before they graduate.

In the following section data from the most recent cohort of students is presented (semester 1, 2010). What follows is a description of how the unit was developed and how it enables students to focus on specific ‘professional pathways’ into the world and work of teachers.

Characteristics of the 2010 Student Cohort

In 2010, the survey was completed voluntarily by 108 of the 151 students enrolled in the unit. Sixty-nine percent (69%) were from the Lismore campus, 31% from the Coffs Harbour campus and 22% of respondents were male. Three percent (3%) of the respondents identified as Aboriginal Australian and 3% as having other non-Australian ethnicity. The data in Table 1 reflects a cohort of whom 43% were mature-aged upon entry into the degree that is, they were older than 22 when they commenced their studies.
When asked about prior qualifications, 89% had completed a Higher School Certificate, 35% had completed a Technical (TAFE) certificate and 12% a TAFE diploma. None had completed previous undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. The majority of respondents came from the North Coast region with 69% indicating that they had lived in the region for more than 11 years (see Table 2). Only 14% resided in the region for less than 5 years this was probably the proportion of the cohort who had moved to the area to study.

As a regional university, Southern Cross University has a particular objective to take a constructive role in the intellectual, economic, environmental, social and cultural development of its region (Southern Cross University, 2005). As such, it provides opportunities for students who may not otherwise attend university due to socio-economic and/or financial constraints. This objective is reflected in the data that shows a large portion of teacher education students in the fourth year of the program for whom neither parent had previously attended university (63% - see Table 3).
Students were asked to list any full time or part time jobs they had held prior to commencing their degree. The results (see Table 4) reveal a range of prior experience, predominantly in retail, business and clerical work. Only 16 of the respondents indicated no prior full-time work experience.

### Table 3: Parental Involvement in University Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drawing from the data above, it is possible to conclude that much like teacher education students of the last century, the 2010 cohort are predominately white, female and non-Indigenous. However, unlike their predecessors, they have come to teacher education with a wealth of previous work-life experiences. Many are first generation university attendees and as such are likely to have had little or no first hand experience of, or support for, learning at a tertiary level.

### Aspirations for Employment of the 2010 Student Cohort

A section of the survey instrument was designed to collect data about and gain an insight into students’ aspirations for immediate employment, specifically, how these were impacted upon by their current work-life circumstances. As indicated in Table 5, 93% would consider seeking full-time employment in regional Australia on completion of their degree, while somewhat less (89%) would stay on the North Coast of NSW for part-time work. The number willing to move to a major city varied little, regardless of whether the opportunities were part-time or full-time (i.e. 41-42%). The proportion who would consider full-time employment in remote Australia was quite high (45%), although considerably lower (28%) for part-time work. Interestingly, only 5% indicated that they would not consider part-time employment.

### Table 4: Previous Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Retail</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>Childcare</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>ICT</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked whether they would consider leaving the North Coast to gain employment as a teacher 59% indicated they would, 16% they would not, and 25% were unsure. A considerable number however, indicated that they would consider seeking overseas appointments (52% if full-time and 32% part-time). When asked, via an open-ended question, to explain the factors impacting on their employment opportunities and career aspirations upon completion of their degree, most identified the limitations of employment in the local area. Quite a number acknowledged that because they were not able or willing to leave the area, they hoped to obtain casual or part-time work. As indicated in Table 6, the most significant factor prohibiting graduates from leaving the North Coast to seek employment was their partner’s employment, closely followed by their children’s schooling.

Table 5: Aspirations for Employment Full Time and Part Time by Geographical Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Would consider seeking full time employment</th>
<th>Would consider seeking part time employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia - Remote</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia - Major City</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia - Regional</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None - not seeking full time/part time employment</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (two of the three respondents specified local area)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked whether they would consider leaving the North Coast to gain employment as a teacher 59% indicated they would, 16% they would not, and 25% were unsure. A considerable number however, indicated that they would consider seeking overseas appointments (52% if full-time and 32% part-time). When asked, via an open-ended question, to explain the factors impacting on their employment opportunities and career aspirations upon completion of their degree, most identified the limitations of employment in the local area. Quite a number acknowledged that because they were not able or willing to leave the area, they hoped to obtain casual or part-time work. As indicated in Table 6, the most significant factor prohibiting graduates from leaving the North Coast to seek employment was their partner’s employment, closely followed by their children’s schooling.

Table 6: Factors Influencing Employment Options Beyond the North Coast (with 1 = Highest Priority and 7 = Lowest Priority)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s employment</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s schooling</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of relocation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work environment (e.g. support, leadership)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle (e.g. access to social and cultural activities)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children, or family commitments, can be seen to significantly influence the employment options taken by the cohort. When asked to identify reasons why they would or would not seek employment beyond the North Coast region some respondents mentioned wanting to stay in the area until their children were older or finished school. Access and custody arrangements were also mentioned: “I would be more than happy to gain full-time work in a rural or remote area although my children have regular contact with their father on the North Coast and I would like this to continue”. In contrast, a small number of students indicated that it was for family reasons that they wanted to move, including to be closer to family or to provide a unique experience for their children. This data highlights the contrast between
this cohort and that of their predecessors many of whom upon graduation would have been single and mobile without the encumbrance of a spouse or children.

Students offered a range of responses with regard to gaining sustained employment in the region. The perception that working on a casual basis would better position a graduate was expressed frequently: “Wherever I have done a practicum a teacher has expressed an interest in employing me”. A number described strategies they were employing to increase their chances of securing a local position such as working as a Teachers’ Aide, completing an additional Diploma of Children’s Services, or sharing resources with local schools. Some students identified gender, specifically being male, as an advantage, as was being prepared to work in the more remote areas of the North Coast.

Only seven respondents explicitly indicated that they were prepared to teach anywhere in the state of NSW or beyond. Two of these wrote of their eagerness to pursue more challenging positions: “I look forward to working in environments other teachers may consider to be too remote, or too difficult”; “I want to be challenged highly while I am young and enthusiastic and fresh”. Eleven students expressed their aspiration to teach overseas in either a paid or voluntary capacity–some immediately on graduation, others after earning money for a year or gaining initial experience.

Significantly, five of the seven students willing to be placed anywhere indicated that they would like to return to the North Coast eventually: “I would like to one day return to the coast and potentially take up a role with more responsibility (e.g. Assistant Principal, Principal) as I gain more experience”. This reinforces the aforementioned perception of ‘time served’ being rewarded with an appointment in the region.

In terms of preferred school sectors, 76% of respondents saw public schools as their first preference for employment and 21% preferred to seek employment in the Catholic sector (see Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Preferences for Employment in Various School Sectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent / Non Religious Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers selecting ‘Other’ were small, but none-the-less interesting—these included: Christian schools, Steiner schools, as well as tutoring in non-school based settings: private tutoring, sport and recreation, children’s hospital and undergraduate university tutoring. Some students mentioned non-teaching roles including work in Department of Child Services, sports development officer, writing and childcare or after school care. Finally, students were asked to list any preferred areas of career specialisation that they would like to know more about and/or pursue for future employment. These are summarised in Table 8 (note that some students listed more than one preference, which is included in the tally).
This data demonstrates that the 2010 cohort of 4th year primary education students, like those in previous years (2007-2009), contained a significant number of mature aged students. The majority are long-time residents of the North Coast of NSW and more than 60% are from families where neither parent has a university degree. Most had held full and/or part-time jobs both prior to and during their time at University. While more than half indicated that they would consider moving from the region to seek employment, 16% indicated that they would not and a quarter were unsure about whether they would leave the region. Such decisions were influenced by a range of factors particularly partner’s employment, family commitments and lifestyle. Students recognised the limitations of employment in the local area and the need to formulate strategies to enhance their prospects. One such strategy was gaining further in-depth knowledge and expertise in topics or specialist areas that might be relevant to their likely employment pathway.

### Acknowledging Diversity through Curriculum Design

*Pedagogy in Practice IV: Professional Pathways* is a unit offered in session one of the final year of the Bachelor of Education (Primary) at Southern Cross University. Students are required to be on campus for one full day a fortnight (i.e. five days over a ten week period) to attend workshops. The five off campus weeks are spent researching and developing support networks and compiling associated resources in students’ selected “pathway/s” (of which they can choose more than one). These “pathways” include contexts such as rural, remote and small schools, casual teaching, Catholic, Christian, Steiner, and Indigenous education, teaching interstate and overseas as well as specialist teaching areas such as gifted and talented, non-English speaking, music and technology. The Unit then culminates in a six-week practicum, most often in the context of the professional pathway selected.

The Unit has been structured to emulate the type and format of professional development which graduates will be required to undertake to maintain accreditation as a teacher in NSW, as mandated by the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT). Thus, students are required to set personal and professional goals accompanied by an action plan to guide their professional development throughout the unit. Then in consideration of their preferred pathway and their self-identified goals students engage in two forms of professional development, namely...
Targeted Professional Development workshops (TPD) which are delivered on campus by practitioners and other professionals and Self Identified Professional Development (SIPD) off campus. Engagement in both of these activities is logged online via an electronic journal (blog) and community wiki, providing evidence against the following criteria: i) NSWIT Professional Competence teaching standards; ii) contribution to the learning community; and iii) reflection on their professional and or pedagogical goals. Students must log a minimum of five (5) hours TPD and ten (10) hours SIPD to satisfy the requirements of this task.

The TPD workshops delivered by classroom practitioners and other professionals provide an opportunity for recent graduates to return and share their experiences as beginning teachers. The workshop topics were planned in response to students’ comments via the survey about topics that they would like to learn more about. In 2009 these workshops included topics such as managing student behaviours, criterion referenced assessment, establishing effective literacy groups, my first year out, developing a professional portfolio, identifying quality evidence for teacher accreditation, working with parents and school communities, casual teaching and preparing for interviews. Student feedback on these workshops has been consistently enthusiastic and positive.

In addition to the contacts made with professionals through the TPD Workshops, students were supported in this unit by online mentors, all of whom are past or present classroom practitioners. These mentors read the students’ journal entries, provide feedback on the quality of their evidence against the criteria and, where possible, offer suggestions to deepen the students’ confidence, understanding and knowledge of their chosen pathway/s. Importantly, mentors assist students to build a support network within the profession – one specifically related to their preferred pathway/s - encouraging them to visit schools, interview teachers working in the pathway or assisting students to locate online resources, which they then post on the wiki for others within the learning community (student cohort) to access. In this way the mentors assist the students to view the profession as both collaborative and accountable.

Where possible, students are placed in their pathway context to complete their final six-week practicum, thus extending their knowledge, expertise and confidence working within that area. Students are required to program, teach and assess the students in their class with the support of the classroom teacher and though not a full internship, students generally report that the final practicum does serve as a good transition. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many students gain part time work in their placement school upon completion of this final practicum.

Discussion and Reflections on the Model

The Pathways model outlined in this paper provides teacher educators with an opportunity to assist students to establish realistic and achievable goals for their immediate futures. It supports them to strengthen their collaborative learning community, make authentic connections within the profession and build confidence and competence in a niche area.

Acknowledging their life-work experiences has assisted each student to form realistic career goals for the immediate future. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of seeking work, students report a renewed excitement for teaching and exit the course confident that they have much to offer the profession. This transition experience contrasts with previous years of the program (pre 2008) where some students reported a sense of hopelessness and
despair when they faced the realities of their chances of gaining full time employment, especially on the North Coast.

The professional development model adopted in this unit reinforces the notion of lifelong learning and sets these beginning teachers on the pathway of effective professional development guided by clear and achievable goals. It also models the gathering of quality evidence against teacher standards which students will need to practice for accreditation purposes.

The Pathways model has definitely assisted me in preparing for independent professional learning in the future. It has shown me just how much it can set you up for success and really extend you as a teacher to try new and exciting ideas. The pathways model... has helped me set up some contacts and hopefully pick up some work in the near future, which is a very exciting prospect (Student, 2009).

Conclusion

Teacher education in the 21st century needs to be dynamic, relevant and authentically connected to the profession it serves. Teacher education curriculum should be designed to acknowledge and embrace the career aspirations, expectations and realities of its students. The curriculum innovation described in this paper provides one example of how this might be achieved, providing students in their final year with an opportunity to specialise in a particular “pathway” they are likely to choose as they move into the profession. By extending the learning environment to include expert teachers, professionals and most importantly the students themselves, the transition from student to teacher has been characterised by collaboration, excitement and anticipation.

References


**About the Authors**

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With over twenty years of teaching experience in a variety of contexts spanning the early years of school and tertiary education, Tess has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in curriculum and pedagogy. Her recent work at a tertiary level has focused on the development and delivery of curriculum in professional experience that reflects 21st century trends in teacher education. This work has been influenced strongly by research and experience, both of which are firmly grounded in the realities of the world and work of teachers. Graduating initially with a Diploma of Teaching (Infants) Tess has maintained her strong interest in the Early Years of education, in particular the transition phase between pre and primary school curriculum. She currently teaches in both Primary and Early Childhood Bachelor of Education programs at Southern Cross University, Australia.

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