

Practernship: A Theoretical Construct for Developing Professionalism in Preservice Teachers

By Jan Millwater & Allan Yarrow

Introduction

Despite the assertion by student teachers that the practicum is the most useful part of their preservice preparation, inquiries are ongoing with the "hidden agenda" question of "Can we somehow do it better?" In the current economic climate, the corollary is "Can we do it at no increase in cost or better still, at lower cost?" The current need for increased professionalism among beginning teachers in Australia and elsewhere has added to the move to establish internships. This article suggests a variation to the internship approach which involves school/university partnerships.

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The Practernship:

A Conceptualization

The term "practernship" has been coined so that it retains, in spirit, the gist of "practice teaching" and the benefits of "internship." It includes the best aspects of both worlds which should produce a "practernship." The use of this term will also define

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the difference of “internship” so as not to be confused with “induction,” the next phase of professional development.

Practice teaching comprises a critical and, to student teachers and experienced teachers alike, a valuable component of becoming a professional practitioner within the preservice phase of teacher education. Findings in support of this statement are well-documented in the literature both in Australia and internationally (e.g., Turney, 1988; Calderhead, 1988; Zeichner, 1990; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). The most recent of relevant Australian reports responsive to the current teacher education context identify the practicum as a central issue (e.g., *The Discipline Review of Teacher Education in Mathematics and Science*, 1989; *The Shape of Teacher Education*, DEET, 1990; *Australia's Teachers, An Agenda for the Next Decade*, Schools Council, 1990). Martin Haberman (1982) describes the practicum as the heart and mind of teacher education. If the best of practice teaching can be woven into the fabric of the model of an internship, a “practernship” would be generated.

The definition of internship is summed up by the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education, and Training in the report, *Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade* (1990):

By “internship” we mean the practice of placing student teachers near the completion of their training in a school for an extended period of time (six to 12 months) under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

The advantages of such a model include:

- ◆ providing intending teachers with a more realistic training setting, with attendant opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the culture of a school and to establish relationships with classes over longer periods of time.
- ◆ providing the opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills which can only be developed “on the job.”
- ◆ providing opportunities to accept a higher level of responsibility than is possible in a shorter teaching “round.”
- ◆ influencing the structure of the training institution’s program so that theory and practice can be more effectively related encouraging reflective practice.

The developers of a practernship would be cognisant of the advantages listed above but would **not** wish it to be classed as an “apprenticeship” view of teaching, which presents “role modelling” as the main process of teaching and learning within supervision or “sitting next to Nellie” as the industrial revolution termed trade training.

Principles of Practernship

The practernship engenders a number of intermeshing principles of practicum which underpin its logistical development and clearly separate it from being an

"extended practice." These, which should be regarded as being linked, each to the other, are:

- ◆ collaboration rather than separation;
- ◆ horizontal partnership rather than hierarchical supervision;
- ◆ vertical reflectivity rather than self evaluation;
- ◆ professional development rather than pre-service development;
- ◆ tripartite focus rather than a singular class focus; and
- ◆ holistic experience rather than fragmented experiences.

Collaboration Rather than Separation

In a practernship, both schools and universities should realize that a commitment to closer cooperation and collaboration will establish a genuine climate for sharing in the improvement of the professional practice. Collaboration has been recognized in schools and universities of Australia (Schools Council Report, 1990; Gaffey & Woodward, 1992; Hollingworth, 1994; Beattie, 1995) as an essential ingredient in removing obstacles for effective functioning of the participants within the systems in which they work (Zeichner, 1986). Collaboration, within the practernship, will be designed by joint-planning initiatives with representatives not only from school and university groups but also from the unions, registration bodies, and various employers. Human resource planning should be facilitated in the university through wide consultation and negotiation.

While removing the possible misunderstandings in communication of the meaning of a practernship to all participants, the problems at the school/university level should be minimized by collaboration. As long ago as 1983, Barry Dickie summarized these various practical problems relating to the traditional situation as:

The lack of rapport between student teachers and cooperating teachers (Yee, 1971); the perceived irrelevance of college and university courses to the real world of teaching (Lowe, 1982); the widespread belief that college or university faculty are aloof from the practical problems of student teaching... (Lowe, 1982); the ubiquity of misunderstandings and animosity between college or university staff, teachers' unions, education departments, university central administrators, trustees' associations and student organisations (Wideen, Hopkins & Fullan, 1980; Hopkins, 1980, 1982; Patterson, 1982). (Dickie 1983, 5)

These realities continue to be addressed and also benefit from treatment of partnership roles within supervision.

Horizontal Partnership Rather than Hierarchical Supervision

Within a climate of school/university collaboration and of economic rationalism, it is not difficult to understand how and why roles and responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees are in a state of flux, and that the forming of partnerships engenders changes in attitudes and procedures for the major stakeholders.

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Within the practernship, the roles of all personnel in schools and universities are seen as being unilaterally supportive of each other with equal status, but with different responsibilities. A **horizontal** partnership implies that we are aware that often collaboration is pushed aside by the demands of lack of time, energy expended in the realities of work, and the culture of the school. This therefore foreshortens the attempt at horizontal partnerships—the establishment of collegiality. “Few schools maintain strong norms of collegiality and experimentation” (Bird & Little 1986, 498) and the practernship will seek to reinforce the collective efforts of all towards this commitment to individual endeavour.

The partnership concept relies on the initiation of support and guidance through the practernship by any of the role players. But who are these role players? To find the role players one must examine the important area of change within the literature which has highlighted the hidden agenda of “language.” In a climate of collaboration and a school-based practernship, it is deemed necessary to term supervisory teachers as “school-based teacher educators” and the university supervisors as “university-based teacher educators.” Student teachers, too, are named (within the practernship) “preservice teachers.” Jim Walker (1992) argued that the new terms are necessary to emphasize the meaning of the “partnership” concept.

Within a practernship there will be many partnerships and re-adjusted role alignments. According to the current working arrangements, the trend is towards the university-based teacher educator providing support, facilitation, and in-service for school-based teacher educators. The literature differentiates the roles in that the “academic” role of the university supervisor is expressed by Donald McIntyre (1991, 127):

What university tutors can offer is a wide knowledge of differing practices, a thorough understanding of relevant theoretical and research literature, considered analyses of the assumptions and values implicit in different practices and skills in relating different kinds of knowledge and concerns.

This role differentiation does not create the well-worn theory/practice schism if the school-based teacher educator and preservice teacher see the support in terms of relevance to the teaching/learning context of the classroom. If the school-based educator is best placed to induct novices into the world of teaching and to share in the dialogue of what they do and why, extending the students’ thinking, encouraging them to make informed decisions and to review these activities—what better role befits the school-based teacher educator? For school-based teacher educators to work in this way, they require the support of the university-based teacher educator to set up a network of dialogue and professional development for their own critical reflectivity. (One program already catering for Professional Development of teacher supervisors at this University is the S.I.S.T.E.R. program, *i.e.*, Supervision in Schools to Enhance Reflectivity [Yarrow, 1992]. This program was specifically designed to prepare supervisors for practice teaching.)

The student teachers'/pre-service teachers' role is also changing. They are being encouraged to adopt a more active role in their teaching experiences where they are encouraged to directly participate in decision-making and to set their own goals. In a partnership where the teaching is shared with a school-based teacher educator, preservice teachers would be expected to focus on more than management/survival levels and not to become "disempowered" (Turney, 1988; Zeichner, 1986). Preservice teachers need to give "voice" just as teachers do to create "empowerment" through expression of their feelings and dialoguing their personal theories (Gitlin & Price, 1992).

In projecting the partnership model of supervision the alliances betwixt the major members of the supervision triad (university-based teacher-educator, school-based teacher-educator and pre-service teachers) suggests the fostering of professional growth and demand of self-improvement as a natural offspring.

Critical Reflectivity Rather than Self-Evaluation

An emphasis on critical reflectivity ensures that the preservice teacher critically monitors, reflects, and modifies his/her own teaching in terms of his/her "practical theory of teaching" (Handal & Lanvas, 1987; Korthagen & Wubbels, 1990, 1995). This process is extended through dialogue with the school-based and university-based teacher educators and other peers. In this way the technical, practical aspects are linked to a more theoretical base before proceeding to articulate and to support a view of education that addresses the issue of social justice and equity in schooling (Groundwater-Smith, 1991). If critical reflectivity is articulated within the practernship in these terms, critical pedagogy will result.

The 1990 Schools Council Report states in outright terms that teacher education has been too narrow and restrictive. In analysis, the report reveals that a close association between practice and reflection would bear better fruits for teacher education than the technical and simplistic views of the 1980s. Researchers (Calderhead, 1987; Knowles, Cole, and Presswood, 1994) maintained that teacher education within a school setting would have to change via support mechanisms before reflective teacher education programs could exist. Professional development must be sought and provided. Within the concept of the practernship these criticisms have been borne in mind, and plans to adopt the strategies suggested by John Goodman (1986) and Max van Manen (1995) will support the development of reflection in both novice and experienced teachers through supervisory conferences and seminar meetings.

If a practernship within "teacher education" is to replace the practice teaching of "teacher training," then reflectivity must be articulated clearly and defined in practical terms for all participants in the partnership. Ray Martinez (1990) has warned of the "all-encompassing" and unclear nature of the term "reflectivity," so that to date reflectivity has done little to produce teachers who are able to improve themselves and their schools.

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The inquiry-centered method of the practernship sets in train the reflective orientation that uses approaches that make problematic the knowledge and skills that teachers have and promote the all-round development that teachers exhibit over time, cognitively, technically, and socially (Zimpher, 1988, 58). Three levels of reflectivity are outlined by van Manen (1977), who was the first to clearly delineate significant levels of distinction. Simply stated they are:

- 1) technical rationality (How can I do this best?);
- 2) practical reflection (Why is this the best way of doing this?);
- 3) critical reflection (What forces are at work upon my decisions to decide what is the best way?)

The practernship encourages the partnerships to weigh these considerations as a unit and individually. The “praxis” orientation which underlies the course in which the practernship is embedded is transparently obvious as there is genuine opportunity for reflection in action in Donald Schon’s (1988) terms where authentic transformations of understanding theory through practice and vice versa result. Such a process can be put into action through in-service or guided professional development.

“Professional” Development Rather than “Preservice” Development

A greater continuity of professional development must be recognized by demonstrating that an integrated set of experiences will smooth the transition from preservice to beginning teacher to inservice (Glanz, 1992; Glickman, 1992; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). The emphasis should be seen as developing the “professional” teacher, rather than the beginning teacher who requires “induction.”

Within a partnership involving preservice teachers, school-based teacher educators, and university-based teacher educators with structured organization of information and communication of common goals, a learning community can be created at the work face. The focus on the learning continuum for all will perpetuate a life-long process, *i.e.*, the thoughtful inquiry into the teaching and learning process is but a springboard for further research, reflection, and inquiry of the professional, within a practernship.

The practernship has to address the concept of **professional**. The “professional” in education, who has a commitment to critical reflection and to a vocation where the knowledge, skills, and understandings must be adjusted on a day-to-day basis to cater for its complexity, must also be aware of the ethical nature of teachers’ work. It has been advocated (Rogers & Webb, 1991; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993) that teaching must be seen as a moral activity requiring teachers to weigh the ethical implications of their teaching. Zeichner’s writings (1990, 1992) acknowledge that teacher educators should learn how to sensitise teachers to these differences and generate a respect for human diversity. Professional development of teachers who need to be responsive within contexts to a range of children whose characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and values are different from their own, is a real necessity.

The professional within the practernship is one who can confront inequalities and implement educational programs that are socially just. Cochran-Smith (1991, 280) puts it positively as "prospective teachers need to know from the start that...they have a responsibility to reform, not just, replicate standard school practices." In this respect the professional within the practernship will be seen as the learner, the researcher, and the reformer and, not just the teacher, the mentor, or the maintainer.

***Tripartite Focus on Class and School and Community
Rather than a Singular-Class Focus***

Ken Eltis (1992, 8-9) sets this principle in motion from the framework of the practicum curriculum (adapted):

The preservice teachers observe, experience and reflect on the various roles of a teacher through experiences graduated through classroom, school, and community domains. Within classroom experiences, the focus is on a wide range of teaching tasks. Within the school, student teachers may participate in school based curriculum development, inservice, or school wide activities. At the community level, there is a need for students to develop a greater understanding and awareness of community involvement in schools and parent expectations for the children they teach. The model proposes four broad teacher roles in the community domain:

- ◆ promoting information exchange;
- ◆ opening the school and class to parents and the community;
- ◆ sharing resources with the community; and
- ◆ involving parents and the community in school and class policy and practice.

It should be noted by involving preservice teachers in the tripartite focus that teachers' work has changed, and that their practice teaching must involve them in the whole life of the school rather than in the four walls of a single classroom. The changes have resulted from "changes to the make-up of the student population", "an expansion of professional tasks," the adoption or assignment of more responsibility for individual or broader social problems" (School's Council Report, 1990, 1).

The need for field experiences to develop skills that enable preservice teachers to adapt to both the traditional and emerging roles they must play, is crucial to quality teaching and learning from future graduates (Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994). Within the classroom, new processes in which teachers are involved encompass implementing negotiated curriculum plans, child-centered methodologies, student involvement in decision-making, and pro-active behavior management strategies, to mention but a few. While engaged in the practernship, preservice teachers will be appraised of these or similar workface problems, in a context supported by dialogue with school-based and university-based teacher educators.

At the school level, the wider responsibilities bestowed by the devolution of authority and accountability pressures that involve teachers as members of a staff

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include such duties as chairing and facilitating meetings, writing reviews and reports, disseminating ideas and programs for effective practice, and working with school or community-based support. These duties would be seen to be within the realm of their practice by all participants during a practernship.

The practernship will be piloted in schools that have different populations of students and a different socio-economic status from each other. Volunteer preservice teachers should choose a school situation that is different from previous practice situations they have had to satisfy their knowledge and understanding of the world of work of teachers in different contexts. In this way quality learning for future graduates will be extended.

Holistic Experience rather than Fragmented Experiences

With a longer practice period in a particular learning community, it is believed that preservice teachers' responsiveness and adaptability to the context will show growth on a steeper learning curve. The practernship accepts in theory the notion that "making it on one's own in student teaching is not the same as learning to teach or being a teacher" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, 60). Thus the preservice teacher's behaviour needs initially to be regarded as learning behavior rather than teaching behavior (Haberman, in Howey & Gardner, 1983) and that it is necessary to focus on the preservice teachers' learning, not just the children's learning.

Recognition of individual differences in areas of professional needs, interests, and abilities within the preservice teachers should regulate the experiences articulated within the course parameters. A longer adjustment to a situation during a practernship will show accumulative growth rather than interrupted growth. The experience will be holistic not fragmented—a real experience. It is worthwhile to quote from the recent New South Wales Ministry Report on teacher education (1990,16) in which was said:

Essential to any real improvement in the overall levels of teaching skills is the inclusion with preservice programs of a more extensive and intensive period of practice teaching. Teacher education students must be able to recognise and understand the realities of the profession in which they intend to practice.

In spite of this reflection, during an holistic experience based on a supportive partnership within supervision, preservice teachers should encounter a reduction in the area of stress. No longer should practice teaching be perceived as a personal test (Sinclair & Nicol, 1981). Students should focus on the expertise in terms of what they are learning as a coherent whole not as whether they are failing or succeeding. The need to be well prepared, to be familiar with content matter, to be well resourced and to be in control, should be of a secondary importance in the "learning" sphere. To become a collaborative but an autonomous decision-maker should be stimulated as a primary goal and rests for its success on the quality of the teaching/learning partnership established between school-based teacher educator and preservice

teacher, and the underlying teacher education course.

Such arguments as posited in the operational principles point to positive outcomes, but also to much preliminary preparation to ground the practernship in environments where levels of affirmation and support are high.

Processes of Teaching and Learning

Learning at the workplace within schools includes the informal but professional learning that preservice teachers experience as they teach a particular class of children under the guidance of school-based teachers, and in the case of the practernship, formal learning through weekly seminars with university-based teachers to support and to facilitate understandings of the problems that rise within the context of teaching.

It cannot be denied that the processes of guided apprenticeship are the mainstay of "learning to teach" for the first half of the involvement. The processes of modelling, coaching, and scaffolding would be the concentration during this time. Modelling refers to the process whereby the preservice teacher observes the actions of the teacher closely so that her or his own teaching will be informed. In that the teacher verbalises his or her thought processes behind the actions, the preservice teacher is assisted in learning about processes that operate successfully within the specific classroom environment. Within the next phase—coaching—active assistance is rendered to the preservice teacher by the classroom teacher/school-based teacher educator/expert through feedback and monitoring of activity. Coaching serves to direct the learning to aspects of the preservice teacher's teaching that are overlooked. The phase of scaffolding emphasises the help of the expert at a distance; however, cooperative teaching can be of enormous importance help here. During the second half of the involvement there is a withdrawal of teacher direction, referred to as "fading," and an acceptance of autonomy by the learner/teacher.

When the final process of fading is in ascendancy, action research would be the main process of encouraging learning by both preservice teachers and school-based teacher educators. Action research would focus on problems within the preservice teacher's teaching and their imminent resolution. Action research at the school level encourages the participation of experts other than the classroom teacher, *e.g.*, the principal of the school, and the professional development of the preservice teacher is also emphasized at this level.

In this way, the practernship would be better classified under the inquiry-oriented model for the practicum which Kenneth Zeichner (1986, 24) explains as having an orientation that:

seeks to foster greater reflectivity on the part of prospective teachers about the processes of their own socialisation, their teaching practice and the various contexts (classroom, school and society) in which teaching is carried out. This model is characterised by:

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- ◆ student teachers analysing and reflecting and modifying their own beliefs about teaching and practice based on their own experiences.
- ◆ the professional development of teachers being viewed as a career long process where the pre-service phase is seen as sufficient to prepare teachers to begin teaching.
- ◆ schools as social laboratories for study rather than places to model good practice, *i.e.*, students engage in action research projects, ethnographic studies, and case studies as part of student teaching in schools.

The practernship can also benefit from Zeichner's hindsightful arguments (1992, 24) which show that effectiveness may be defeated because:

- ◆ inarticulation of reflectivity;
- ◆ the placement of one student teacher with one experienced teacher in a practicum that focuses on the classroom context almost exclusively reinforces teaching as a solitary activity and seriously limits the opportunities to share in the diversity of teaching in a school;
- ◆ the uneven quality of supervision means that the quality of the "inquiry" rests in the hands of one teacher who may still support the apprenticeship view of teaching;
- ◆ there is little exposure of student teachers to the culturally diverse learning environments in which many teachers ultimately have to teach. Student teachers graduate with their ethical and moral frameworks unchallenged by the lack of social justice and equality evidenced in school systems catering for the poor and disadvantaged.

The new "practernship" will not be separated from the traditional theoretical components of the preservice course—it will be directly embedded in its context. The intention is that both the experienced school-based teacher educators and the novice, preservice teachers should appreciate how the other subjects of the course dove-tail into the practernship. Zeichner (1992, 30) upheld that "the purpose is to ground these theoretical studies in the context of the practice of teaching and to engage both experienced and beginning teachers as well as university faculty in the reflective analysis of their work."

The Practernship in Practice

The practernship is to be trialed in the fourth year of the preservice B.Ed. (primary strand) from a large Queensland University. The course has five periods of teaching practice, each equivalent to three weeks, and an introductory five-day experience in schools. All the practice periods are accompanied by weekly on-campus seminars. In the fourth year, the relevant "professional practices" are: "Teachers as Responsive Practitioners" in semester one, and "Teachers as Reflec-

tive Practitioners" in semester two. These two subjects, when combined, provided the framework for the practernship.

In total then, 30 days of school experience are available and spread over 10 weeks of the semester at three days per week. Two introductory weeks and two culminating weeks on campus complete the arrangement. (Students undertaking the practernship study, in addition to the two subjects mentioned, a curriculum elective and an education elective.)

As a culminating feature of the Bachelor of Education degree, the practernship is designed to ensure that students gain extended experience in schools at a time when they are best prepared to benefit from this and seek to integrate these experiences with studies at the university (McNally, 1992). It is also planned that as well as affirming their teaching competence during this period, students experience in depth the culture of the context/school in which they are practicing. The anticipation is that, through active involvement in all aspects of school life during this extended time, an appreciation of the total world of the work of teachers will be gained and that their movement into the role of beginning teacher will be a smoother transition.

A move to "practernship" is one that will favor not only the essential level of skills, techniques, and methods that is demanded by the competency movement but also the elevated level of fairness, equality, and democratization suggested by a reflective approach. Such a change within practicum has been initiated in response to inquiries into teacher education over the last decade which have instigated the need for teachers to integrate theory and practice, to become more scholarly and professional in their roles, to become more reflective in their teaching, and to be better able to make the transition to their first years of teaching (Queensland Board of Teacher Education, 1987, 1994; Schools Council, 1990).

Goals for the practernship, therefore, have been identified with the outcomes necessary to produce beginning teachers who are to:

1. Enhance the growth of autonomous decision-making to improve the quality of applicants to the profession;
2. Increase access of knowledge and appreciation of the total world of work of teachers in school communities;
3. Emphasize critical reflectivity in order to enable greater blending of theory/ practice;
4. Create a smoother transition from the preservice to induction phases of career development;
5. Encourage closer collaboration between universities, schools, employers, and unions;
6. Foster a partnership model of supervision as an underpinning for further professional growth and development of teachers and preservice teachers.

These outcomes/goals result from an investigation of extant "internship" programs and a review of the practicum literature which identify, when the separate parts are united, a holistic push towards professionalism.

Conclusion

In that the umbrella term of professional development refers to all activities undertaken as a teacher, it is both necessary and expedient to "get it right." The practernship is one effort that seeks to establish in a context factors that will enable all teachers (preservice, school, and university) to respond to common problems in a focussed way and to enhance professional development. An evaluation to reveal conditions and generic practices that corroborate such development is envisaged at the conclusion of the program, through case studies of the teaching partners.

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