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Massey University

PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING PRACTICUM
AND THEIR
PARTICULARIZATION BY ASSOCIATE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

An apparent lack of substantiated guide-lines for carrying out school based teacher education sessions was perceived by this author. This concern motivated the present investigation of those practical aspects of teacher education frequently known as practicum.

Following a review of relevant literature, commonly held principles were derived. It is argued that these principles, if followed by student-teachers, teacher educators and associate teachers, should result in effective practicum.

Forty professional educators recorded how they put the seven principles for practicum into practice. These teaching practices were analysed and grouped into generic categories each with supporting criteria. Results provided potentially useful reference material for those involved in teaching practicum.

Validity for the principles was established in terms of Ashcroft's learning determinants and Burke's model of teacher development. Results of this analysis indicated that the listed behaviours had potential to maximize student-teacher learning.

The study concluded that the seven principles, behaviour categories and criteria provide student-teachers, teacher educators and associate teachers with a valid tool for directing practical aspects of teacher education.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Sharon, Sarah and Rebecca whose support and understanding sustained my motivation to complete this project.

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Chapter 1

The Study

1:1 Introduction

Impetus for this study has been generated by several inter-related factors:

- a. The changing role and nature of education and society in New Zealand and the associated issue of preparing teachers,
- b. The accountability debate in relation to education,
- c. The nature of the practicum in the professional preparation of pre-service teachers.

This has highlighted the need for practical guidelines to assist student-teachers and teacher educators in their respective roles. Such a handbook could enable these people to apply credible literature to changing social and educational demands in the classroom. In so doing, teacher educators could be in a position to justify their behaviours which should result in relevant student-teacher learning.

In modern society, change and challenges to change are common. Questioning the values and the activities of social institutions such as the judiciary and education are part of the process of change. Society uses the process of change to improve the relevance of social institutions. Through demands for accountability, society facilitates change. Such demands lead training institutions to analyse their delivery systems, organization and structure in order to determine whether these lead to accepted attitudes, values and beliefs in the people who move through the institutions.

Recent studies of education in New Zealand (The Curriculum Review, 1987; Administering For Excellence, 1988; Tomorrow's Schools, 1988) have questioned the effectiveness of the traditional

structure and content of education. Off-shore authors such as Popkewitz (1987) and Burke (1987) have taken this accountability debate further by challenging the training institutions to re-evaluate their philosophical perspectives in order to provide more effective, efficient and equitable opportunities for children.

It is generally believed that education can assist in changing society. One way for this to occur is, through staff training and development to change the way in which teachers perceive their task. This may occur at the pre-service level. Identifying ways by which the practicum can be improved may provide teacher educators and student-teachers with practical tools with which to construct effective learning environments for pupils.

The professional environment of this author has provoked concerns about practicum. These concerns have led to questions concerning the relevance, practicality and efficiency of the practicum as a learning event in the preparation of teachers as currently practised.

Zeichner (1981/82, p5) summarizes when he states:

...it is essential that every experience in a pre-service program serves to enrich rather than impede the capacity for further growth. We should be examining all our efforts in teacher education....

1:2 Aim and Focus Questions to be Investigated

This study is directed at the derivation and synthesis of principles that could guide practicum planning. It also aims to provide guidelines as to how these principles may be expressed and demonstrated by associate teachers. The study is concerned with neither how well the student-teacher performs the various tasks during the practicum nor with stating an operational definition of effective learning or teaching.

Rather it concerns ascertaining the extent to which associate teachers perceive the derived principles as valid and express them in action.

From this aim two focal questions are generated:

- a. What principles are thought to contribute to effective practicum?
- b. How do associate teachers particularize these principles?

1:3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the belief that principles synthesized from the literature and integrated within established conceptual models can be used to derive evidence on which to plan and structure the practicum. If this can be established, then this planning structure can replace current intuitive approaches.

The study gathers data from a variety of international research studies on teacher education, especially in the field of on-site teaching or practicum. These represent a variety of philosophical views including neo-Marxist, humanist and behaviourist perspectives and are detailed in Chapter 3. These studies will be analysed to derive principles that should be used in the practicum.

Associate teachers will provide practical examples as to how they perceive each principle operating in their practicum environment. These detailed descriptions (particularizations) will then enable teacher educators to view practicum from a perspective of student-teachers as learners. In adopting this perspective founded on empirical principles, teacher educators may be enabled to structure more practical, useful practicum. In summary the study is directed at:

- a. Enabling teacher educators to use validated principles to facilitate student-teacher learning,

- b. Motivating effective evaluation of the practicum assignment,
- c. Providing a resource for student-teachers and teacher educators.

1:4 Overview of the Study

Following, in Chapter 2 operational definitions are given as reference points and used throughout the study. Chapter 3 reviews relevant literature and concludes by suggesting seven principles for the practicum. A model for the practicum is detailed in Chapter 4. A paradigm for learning and teacher development both associated with action research form the basis for this chapter. The descriptive survey approach used in the study is defined and discussed in Chapter 5. A large number of categorized associate teacher behaviours are reported in Chapter 6. Detailed discussion of the results provided in Chapter 7 and the study concludes with a number of relevant observations and implications for practical teacher education in Chapter 8.