

DEVELOPING BETTER PRACTICE FOR BEGINNING PRIMARY TEACHERS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRACTICUM

Submitted by

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committee (where required).

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Date

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ABSTRACT

“Practicum” refers to the time students undertaking initial teacher education programs spend in schools during their training. Its purpose is to enable the university and accredited teachers to assist student teachers to gain experience in translating educational theory into classroom practice. It is recognised as a vital component of teacher education. In 1998 the Australian Catholic University (ACU National) Melbourne campus, introduced the ‘extended practicum’ into their teacher education program. The extended practicum, undertaken by students in their final year, is significant to student learning as it enables them to spend an extended period of time with the same group of pupils. However, to date this program has not been formally evaluated.

This study used qualitative methodology to investigate the effectiveness of the extended practicum in the Bachelor of Education course offered through the Trescowthick School of Education at ACU National Melbourne Campus. Literature pertaining to the development and current understandings of the practicum in teacher education and the partnership between the university and schools in managing the practicum was reviewed. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to gather data about the experiences and reflections of pre-service teachers, first year teachers, supervising teachers and university staff involved in the extended practicum. The data were analysed and key themes were identified and compared between groups.

The findings suggested that while all stakeholders recognised the importance and value of the extended practicum in teacher education, their ideas about its major aims and strengths differed. A number of issues were identified that could improve the quality of the extended practicum and thus enhance the learning experience for pre-service teachers. These issues included preparation of the pre-service teachers, length and timing of the practicum, supervision and assessment of pre-service teachers during the practicum, professional

development for supervising teachers and most importantly improved communication between the university and schools.

Information from this study can inform the development of the extended practicum, and as a consequence, the total practical teaching program at ACU, (National), Melbourne. This will further support the ongoing relationships between the university and schools and teachers who support the program and who provide an improved learning opportunity for pre-service teachers.