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Case Study - Development of a Professional Experience Rubric

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OVERVIEW

This Case study, representative of a design for assessment, describes a Professional Experience Assessment rubric in the Bachelor of Teaching at the University of Tasmania, Australia. The rubric has been constructed to provide indicators that articulate the sequential development expected of pre-service teachers from the orientation practicum through to the Internship. The rationale behind this format is to provide a common framework and shared language for mapping pre-service teachers' progress across their two years of pre-service professional development. The rubric has been developed to assist colleague teachers with both formative and summative assessment processes and assist them to make decisions about the stage of development of pre-service teachers, in concert with their level of experience. Concurrently, it provides pre-service teachers with a clarification of expectations for each practicum and allows greater opportunity for self-assessment. It also aims to make explicit the goals for development of sophisticated practice.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLASS, MODULE OR PROGRAMME

This Case Study describes an assessment rubric used for the Professional Experience component of the post-graduate Bachelor of Teaching (B.Tch) degree at the University of Tasmania (UTas), Tasmania, Australia. The rubric is used for pre-service teachers in all specialisations (Primary, Middle Years and Secondary), for all of the Professional Experience modules (four in total, over a two year course). Currently this involves approximately 300 students each year.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

Professional (school-based) Experience is a critical component of teacher preparation programs. In the B.Tch program, Pre-service teachers complete four practicum placements, totalling 90 days. These placements are structured to assist development of teaching practice - from initial orientation to the profession through to the complex demands of an internship. Assessment of pre-service teachers is predominantly the responsibility of the colleague teacher in school, in consultation with an academic supervisor.

Clearly, explicit expectations of pre-service teachers are key to the successful completion of practicum. Not only can students understand what is required of them and monitor how they are tracking, but colleague teachers can assign appropriate responsibilities and give useful feedback. Provision of feedback that is focussed, supportive and sensitively delivered to assist development has been identified as very important (Caires & Almeida, 2005) and connects with assessment for learning principles.

The rubric (Appendix A) contains explicit indicators and attempts to use a shared discourse, accessible to pre-service teachers, colleague teachers and university lecturers. Five criteria, based on the National Beginning Teacher Competencies (Australian Teaching Council, 1996), were used as a framework due to their wide recognition by colleague teachers and usage by other Australian teacher education institutions (Haigh & Tuck, 1999). Unpacking each of the five criteria to articulate indicators that would be expected in each of the four Professional Experiences was taken as a starting point.



The indicators for satisfactory performance for each successive practicum are listed, with a sliding scale allowing for differential development of individual pre-service teachers. An example can be seen in the criterion, *Using and developing professional knowledge, practice and values.*

Indicators given for Professional Experience 1 (Orientation practicum);

- Complies with professional standards in relation to hours of attendance and presentation
- Work is well presented and prepared in a timely manner

contrast with the much more demanding expectations for Professional Experience 3;

- Participates in collegial activities and professional learning opportunities
- Shows familiarity with typical stages of physical, social and intellectual development of students

Instead of teachers needing to make a professional judgement against non-specific criteria, they can now make an on-balance judgement against specific indicators - pre-service teachers needing to fall into the designated band for the majority of the criteria. It is also possible for the recognition of pre-service teachers working beyond the level expected - areas of strength are easier to identify. Similarly areas where pre-service teachers need further development can be more clearly seen. In all cases a specific starting point to give feedback to pre-service teachers is now upfront, providing quality formative assessment and mentoring more supported.

In practice, the assessment process is ongoing. Pre-service teachers and colleague teachers can refer to the indicators on the rubric to guide formative assessment. Summative assessment is a tri-partite process involving pre-service teachers, colleague teachers and academic supervisors, with a focus on attainment of the indicators in the rubric - and recognising that pre-service teachers may have achieved above the required level

The use of the indicators to describe development through the course was also meant to assist in integrating colleague teachers into the expectations of the Faculty and the construction of the course, anecdotally a previous source of confusion in the assessment process. This is illustrated in the *Planning and managing the teaching and learning process* criterion, where pre-service teachers progress from recognising the features of the colleague teachers lesson plans and begin to develop their own (Professional Experience 1) moving on to planning for individual students to achieve differentiated outcomes (Professional Experience 4). The explicit defining of expectations and the ability to see sequential development that is supported by coursework was also seen as being beneficial to the pre-service teachers.

The rubric is written with five levels of attainment. The first four correspond to each of the four practicums. In order to be successful, students need to meet the criteria at the corresponding level (1-4). The final level provides 'aspirational' goals for high achieving pre-service teachers. They allow for recognition of pre-service teachers who are performing beyond the required competency level and send a clear message that quality is encouraged.

RATIONALE IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

Teacher education institutions are continually working to improve this assessment process. This current work has attempted to tie together the requirements of shared understanding of expectations (Connor & Killmer, 1995; Haigh & Tuck, 1999) pre-service teacher agency (Ortlipp, 2003; Turnbull, 2003), and clarity of goals, and structured developmental experiences leading to sophisticated practice (Darling Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005).

Research and development in the area of professional standards for teachers has gained international momentum in recent years (National Board of Professional Teaching



Standards, 1999; Haigh & Tuck, 1999; NSW Institute of Teachers, 2005; Department of Education, Tasmania, 2006). Work in Australia has been both curriculum specific (for example, Australian Science Teachers' Association, 2000) and generic, incorporating standards for beginning, accomplished teachers and teacher-leaders. Currently Teaching Australia is engaging in a consultation process with respect to National standards for graduating teachers. Nevertheless, it is recognised that there is some difficulty in describing what contributes to competence or quality in a complex profession such as teaching (Berliner, 2005).

Despite attention being given to graduating teachers, developmental frameworks, covering a pre-service teachers' expected progress through their pre-service course have not yet become widely used. The advantage of using a rubric outlining successive developmental stages include; explicit and shared understanding of goals and purposes of the practicum, clarity of assessment expectations, a starting point for feedback and mentoring, the ability to embed competencies that need to be demonstrated in the classroom situation and a vehicle ensure coursework is framed around practicum requirements (Brown, 2006).

EVALUATION

The rubric was introduced to students, colleague teachers and University staff in March 2006. Pre-service teachers were introduced to the rubric in a lecture and given the opportunity to examine it and give feedback. Colleague teachers were invited to a series of information sessions given in the three regions of the state, and introduced personally to the rubric by the academic supervisors of their pre-service teachers. It was extremely well received by all parties.

The rubric was then implemented into the formal assessment processes of the B.Tch program. It was presented to colleague teachers and pre-service teachers as a work in progress and they have been invited to give feedback. A formal evaluation of the rubric is to be undertaken in 2007. The results from this study will be used for further refinement of the rubric and of the assessment process.

The links between theory and practice contained in the rubric have provided a catalyst for review of coursework to ensure that content and sequencing is in synergy with what is expected during the practicum. This has enhanced the academic quality of the program and has made clear connections between the program strands for the students. A particular example of how strands of the program are linked together is the incorporation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) competencies, a core component of the B.Tch program, into the rubric. This encourages the embedding of their use into teaching practice.

Reflection on use of the rubric for broader purposes is currently occurring. In terms of Teacher Education, the potential for adoption by all pre-service programs at UTas is being examined, together with the possibility of using the rubric to describe the sophisticated practice required to be demonstrated by fast-tracked students..

Finally, with workplace assessment becoming more widely applicable to the tertiary sector, this model has attracted interest in the broader University context. Key issues for professional preparation: systematic integration of theory and practice, explicit connections between University coursework and what is experienced in the field setting; quality of supervision and mentoring can be addressed through use of this type of rubric.

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