Making Professional Experience a positive experience for all stakeholders

Exploring the role of the In-school mentor at Barker College

PROJECT REPORT, February 2016

Project Team
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Project Title  Making Professional Experience a positive experience for all stakeholders: Exploring the role of the In-school mentor at Barker College

Participants  Barker College teachers
Preservice Education students (Primary and Secondary) UTS School of Education

Project Aims

(i) To address the Great Teaching, Inspired Learning outcomes and actions 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.7 in the section on Initial teacher education and 16.1 and 16.2 in the section, Recognise and share outstanding practice.

(ii) To implement strategies in independent schools to develop a school culture that recognises the value of providing professional experience to the school, supervisors, professional experience students and school students.

(iii) To implement collaborative structures within schools that will provide a rich professional learning experience for supervisors and professional experience students.

(iv) To promote ongoing, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships between schools and universities.

Project Summary

In early 2015, six preservice teacher education students from UTS School of Education were selected to complete their 2015 Professional Experience placement at Barker College. The preservice teachers included 4 secondary and 2 primary students. The two Primary teacher education students were recommended by the Professional Experience Office on the basis of successful previous professional experience placements and their geographical proximity to Barker College. As this was the first professional experience for the four Secondary teacher education students they were selected on the basis of recommendations from their subject discipline course co-ordinators.

The supervising teachers were selected on the basis of their ability and desire to provide a high quality professional experience (4.3). They came from the College’s Junior school and the Senior school in the following departments: English, Mathematics, Business Studies and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (16.1). Prior to the placement, the supervisors participated in a registered professional learning course (Proficient Level) called Mentoring and supporting teacher education students for a high quality professional experience delivered by UTS (4.4).

A feature of this project was that instead of Education students being supervised by a Tertiary Supervisor from the UTS School of Education, an in-house model of supervision, mentorship and support was trialled. A team from Barker College led by Mr Len Nixon in the role of Teacher Coach ensured that in addition to their assigned classroom supervising teacher, UTS Education students were also supported by a cross-curricular and multi-stage professional learning team. The team met with the UTS students regularly during the Professional Experience placement to conduct collegial discussion and reflect on feedback and experiences of the students (4.4). The students also offered peer support to one another.
Research summary

Before the Professional Experience: UTS students and Barker supervising teachers completed an online survey in the months before the Professional Experience. The survey was specific to each group. Using issues highlighted in the online survey responses 6 face-to-face interviews were conducted with UTS students and 5 with Barker teachers.

After the Professional Experience: After the conclusion of the Professional Experience, interviews were held with 6 students and 5 teachers.

A debriefing meeting was conducted with Len Nixon by Kerry Poole and Sarah Loch in November 2015.

Data collection during the professional experience in the form of teacher journals had been planned but turned out to be impractical for the participants and data from this source has not been collected.

Data collection instruments are included in Appendix 1.

Executive Summary

This report examines one model of supporting and developing teacher education students, the In-school Mentor Model. The aim of the model is for all Education students to confidently and consistently demonstrate achievement of the Graduate Teaching Standards (4.7). A concurrent aim is to develop in supervising teachers the skills of mentoring and coaching and providing teachers with opportunities to demonstrate achievement of teaching standards at Proficient level (4.4). For the In-school Mentor, the role provides scope to demonstrate achievement of teaching standards at Highly Accomplished Level (4.5).

The research project suggests the In-school Mentor Model to be an effective way to approach pre-service professional placements. Whilst involving a relatively small sample and trialled only in one school, the more holistic nature of the professional experience was reported as highly valuable for the preservice students. There were notable occasions when students facing personal and professional challenges gained support from a wider network within the school. It was also significant that students did not have to face assessment by an external Tertiary Supervisor at a single visit; an event students noted that on past experience was very stressful and leading to a potentially inaccurate picture of their progress. The In-school mentor model allowed UTS students to more freely work through their challenges with feedback readily incorporated and growth and improvement continually observed. Teachers and the In-school mentor benefited from the coaching offered prior to the placement. The process of mentoring a preservice student was not a 1:1 relationship, but a shared placement for the student within the whole school.

In summary, the In-school mentor model appears an effective approach for Education students as it spreads opportunities for feedback and growth over the entire placement and opens students’ eyes to the whole school environment and a collegial support team. There may be important positive impacts on Education students’ learning which are beyond the scope of this study.
BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Context of the project

The aim of the project was to research an innovative approach to an important aspect of teacher education; the professional experience placement. It is recognised that the placement can sometimes be unsatisfactory for a number of stakeholders including the education student, the supervising teacher and school, as well as the university. The Teacher Education Advisory Group (2014) identified that schools and universities often fail to deliver professional experiences that provide adequate support for pre-service teachers, which prevents them from integrating theory into practice.

The relationships between people are important elements of the professional experience in Education, especially when people encounter difficult situations or need to address complex or unsatisfactory matters of professionalism and performance. The imperative to assess a preservice student’s skills is an area likely to raise challenges. Ure et al. (2009) and Hawe (2002) emphasise the need to more closely understand the position of assessment in professional placements and the support supervising teachers need in order to effectively fulfil this task. This project explores the different possibilities of extending support to teachers and students beyond the role of the Tertiary Supervisor through the examination of an In-school mentor model.

The project replaced the university’s Tertiary Supervisor model with an In-school, school-led model of supervision and support. Barker College was able to provide a staff member to fulfil the role of Teacher Coach/In-school Mentor. This meant that the UTS students at Barker College in 2015 were not allocated a Tertiary Supervisor who would make contact with the school and visit their allocated students which has been the traditional model of supervision. Instead, participating UTS students were supervised by their classroom teacher and the In-school mentor, Len Nixon, who oversaw all UTS/Barker placement students. A feature of this project was Len’s prior experience as a sessional academic with UTS in the area of Business Studies through which he also fulfilled the role of Tertiary Supervisor. In this position, Len recognised deficiencies with the traditional model and became interested in trialling a new approach.

The project itself signifies a move towards ‘co-learning’ by all participants as the aim was for all involved to enhance their understanding of and skills in professional learning. As outlined by Renshaw (2012, p.9), this included ‘the preservice teachers, the university staff, the mentors and the practicum coordinators’. Renshaw notes the dissemination of power amongst all participants in this relationship which allows ‘other members of the community [to] learn from and with [the students] as well as mentor and guide them’ (original emphasis).

The project was supported by Mr Philip Heath, Headmaster of Barker College.

It was funded by a grant from the Association of Independent Schools, New South Wales.

Research was conducted by staff from the International Research Centre for Youth Futures and the School of Education at the University of Technology Sydney.

Participants, Privacy and Placements

Privacy of the participating students and teachers is an important feature of this report and all efforts have been made to maintain privacy, especially for students who are at the beginning of their career. Identifying
The 4 UTS secondary students completed a 6 week placement from 21st August to 16th October 2015. The 2 primary students’ placement was from 24th August to 4th September 2015, 2 weeks in duration.

Six supervising teachers participated in a registered professional learning course (Proficient Level) called *Mentoring and supporting teacher education students for a high quality professional experience* delivered by UTS before the placements commenced.

**The In-school Mentor Model**

This model trials an innovation which other schools and universities may also consider implementing. By offering an alternative to the traditional external Tertiary Supervisor model, the In-school Mentor model references reforms promulgated by the *Great Teaching Inspired Learning Blueprint* (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, 2016) including the strengthening of professional experience through school-university partnerships and the provision of better support for beginning teachers.

Outcome 4 of GTIL states:

> All teacher education students will receive high quality professional experience as part of their teacher education programs.

> 4.4 Teachers supervising professional experience placements will be required to undertake professional learning.

The supervising teachers at Barker College undertook a BOSTES registered course at Proficient level as a key component of their preparation to supervise teacher education students. This course helped to develop knowledge of mentoring and coaching strategies as well as developing understanding of the Professional Experience Framework (GTIL 4.1 A new framework will be developed that sets out the expectations for high quality professional experience placements in NSW schools).

Providing registered professional learning to teachers emphasised the professional importance of the supervisory role. This enhanced the teachers’ professional status in supporting teacher education students and reinforced the belief that supporting and mentoring undergraduates is an important part of their role as experienced professionals. The teachers participating in this project formed a community of learners who were striving to achieve “excellence in teaching and professional learning … through professional collaboration and learning” (GTIL 16.1).

Len Nixon, in his position as Teacher Coach/In-school mentor, undertook professional learning with Growth Coaching with the aim of developing skills not only to support the teacher education students, but also the teachers who were to be supervising the teacher education students. Adequate support for supervising teachers is frequently overlooked as a determining factor in successful placements. Parsell (2013, p.36) notes that the role of supervisor ‘is central to training and inducting the next cohort of employees for schools, and as such, should be recognised as a necessary activity in all schools’. Len’s role allowed for support which included collegial discussion, joint class observation, paired approaches to difficult conversations and timely facilitation of contact with the university. Through participation in these aspects of supporting teacher education students and through undertaking their own professional learning to facilitate the process,
supervising teachers joined a network of preservice teacher education which welcomed their input and insights. Supervising teachers were able to work collaboratively with university colleagues, other supervising teachers and the In-school mentor to contribute to an important professional network.

The model acknowledges that being a teacher does not stop at the classroom door. An important feature of the In-school Mentor model was the strategic integration of a broad range of school activities to provide a 360 degree view of the work of a teacher. Hence, Len Nixon in his In-school Mentor role organised for the teacher education students to experience the full range of activities that Barker College offers its students including other classrooms and programs, excursions, camps and assemblies.

**Teacher Coach Perspective on the In-school Mentor Model**

Len Nixon found much merit and professional satisfaction in the role of coach. He saw coaching as being non directive as opposed to informing, giving advice or just plain telling. Using the “GROWTH Model” approach to coaching, added another dimension to the student teachers’ professional experience. It was not about suggesting or providing answers to a specific issue the coach observed. It revolved about the student teacher discovering for themselves a solution to a problem or query they may have.

The coach’s role was to ask a series of questions that finally led to the student themselves coming up with a solution or realisation of an issue and or a problem. The role of the coach was to listen, clarify, ask deep and focussed questions with an overarching focus on exercising empathy. In essence, coaching was about creating a one to one conversation that was solution focused.

Len was able to go into classes with broad pedagogical expectations and sit and view the lessons with a high degree of objectivity. And in conjunction with the respective class teacher, the feedback and coaching provided the student teacher provided a much more in depth experience. It provided the student with another avenue for feedback and counsel and a sounding board.
RESEARCH PROJECT

Research question

The following question guided the research;

In what ways can an In-school mentor model of preservice professional experience supervision contribute to high quality experiences which benefit teacher education students, the host school and the school community in general?

Significance of the research

It is important for schools and universities to work together to develop new models of professional experience as the professional experience placement is a key element of induction into teaching in Australian schools. The successful transition from graduate to early career teacher can be enhanced by professional experience placements which broaden the pre-service teacher’s skills and understanding of the complexity of schools. It is also vital that early career teachers recognise the support available to them from their peers and colleagues, and that experienced teachers feel well equipped to take on mentoring and support roles for early career educators. When supervising teachers feel under-equipped to deal with the needs of preservice teachers or when they do not receive the support they need from their school or the university to offer the required support, the teacher may become less likely to volunteer to take students in the future and reluctant to support new colleagues. This situation is neither desirable for the individuals experiencing the placement, nor sustainable in terms of the provision of future placements and early career transition.

This research project aims to make a contribution to the field of teacher retention, job satisfaction and workplace readiness of teacher education students through examining how professional experience placements can be restructured to be more responsive to the needs of education students, supervising teachers, schools, school students and universities. It also tests the relevance of broadening the professional experience beyond the classroom and subject disciplines to experience a more complete view of the work of a teacher in a school.

By responding to the insights and interests of Barker College in this area, the School of Education UTS worked with Barker to develop an alternative pre-service professional experience placement to trial with a small group of Education students in 2015. It is recognised that this research project is highly specific to Barker College, their organisational structure and the way they are able to offer professional experience places. It is hoped that other schools, from all sectors and universities around Australia will find significance in the report’s findings and transference to other areas of teacher education and professional learning.

Research team

The research team consisted of faculty from the International Research Centre for Youth Futures and from the School of Education at the University of Technology Sydney. The School of Education is responsible for professional experience placements. Len Nixon from Barker College was also part of the research team. Len has previously worked for UTS School of Education as a tertiary supervisor and sessional academic.
Mentoring course intervention and teacher professional learning

Len Nixon participated in a three day course with Growth Coaching International. Growth Coaching is a well-respected company that has provided courses to educational institutions for many years. The course undertaken allowed the In-school mentor to develop and refine skills that he could use to support both teachers supervising students as well as the teacher education students.

The course undertaken by supervising teachers has been developed at Proficient level in order to support teachers who will be supporting preservice teachers during professional experience. It acknowledges that mentoring and coaching are specific skills and that professional learning about those skills are an important component in teacher development. See Appendix 2.

The goals of the mentoring course were as follows:

a) Apply processes of critical self-reflection to enhance their own classroom practice;
b) Demonstrate understanding of the role of mentoring in developing teacher education students;
c) Select a range of suitable teaching experiences and guide and support the teacher education student in all phases of their professional experience;
d) Provide high quality, formative and constructive advice both informally and as written feedback to the teacher education student; and,
e) Apply the Graduate Teaching Standards to the professional experience report.
METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Data collected for this project included written online surveys and face-to-face, individual interviews. The aim was to build a multidimensional perspective on the role of the In-school mentor by asking those involved in the professional experience for reflections on various elements of the innovation both before and after the placement.

Attempts were made to adhere to the planned outline but limited teacher availability and time to complete online surveys led to uneven rates of completion and to changes in scheduled plans. A post-placement online survey, for instance, was not administered due to the high quality of data collected via interview in the first session. Upon review of the pre-placement survey and interview data, the research team decided not to send out the second survey. There was also a degree of data saturation observed when teacher interviews post-placement were conducted. The short length of the Primary placement also impacted upon decisions to interview the teachers post-placement and this, as well as restricted teacher time, led to some interviews not being pursued.

Two interviews were held with Len Nixon and members of the research team in late 2015, as well as a written reflection completed by Len in February 2016.

The range of data that were collected included

- Online surveys completed by 5 Barker teachers and 6 UTS students before the placement
- Interviews held prior to the placement with 5 Barker teachers and 6 UTS students
- Interviews held after the placement with 5 Barker teachers and 6 UTS students

Limitations

In addition to the aforementioned limitation about differing amounts of data being collected from participants and alterations to intended plans, the most important limitation was the uneven length of the professional experience period and varying numbers of professional experiences completed by UTS primary and secondary students.

Students in the four year Primary program at UTS complete two placements per year, including an internship at one single school over two blocks in 4th year. This meant that the Primary participants were completing their 5th placement. This placement went for two weeks, from 24th August to 4th September 2015. The Secondary students were completing the first professional placement of their course at Barker. This went for six weeks, from 21st August to 16th October 2015. The placement was broken by two weeks of school holidays.

When reviewing these data it is important to take into account the uneven length in placement and the fact that this was the first teaching placement for the 4 secondary students. Obviously this meant the Secondary students could not compare past experiences and this impacted their ability to comment on their preference for supervision models. The Primary students, while having quite extensive prior experience with ‘conventional’ supervision models had a much shorter time to experience the In-School model.
FINDINGS

The following section provides a summary of findings into the impact of the In-school mentor model of supervision. It explains Barker’s approach where students engage in a broad range of extra-curricular activities and access ‘in-house’ support through an In-school mentor.

1. The needs of pre-service teachers

Although this was the first teaching experience for the secondary pre-service teachers, both primary and secondary pre-service teachers expressed relatively similar understandings about their teaching placement. Students’ concerns and worries, as well as their goals and plans, underscore the value of providing a supportive and responsive environment for pre-service teachers. Students related the need for explicit support from teachers to the ways they could perform to their best in their placement.

1.1 Student perceptions before the placement

Students listed varied concerns relating to managing their workload, content area knowledge and classroom management. These comments remind practicing teachers and administrators of the personal challenge inherent in gaining classroom experience and the benefits for preservice students of having supervising teachers who are well prepared and confident. The UTS students reveal they are ready to learn in a busy, professional environment and they anticipate many opportunities to apply what they have been learning in their course. Students’ goals are diverse and range from the technical skills of teaching to catering for the needs of diverse learners.

Student concerns and worries

Overcoming nervousness will be the biggest challenge for me!

To get the students to respect me as someone who is going to become a teacher, instead of a prac teacher who they don’t need to really listen to.

A Stage 3 class presents as a challenge to me, as I am a little nervous about not knowing all the content I have to teach. ... I will have to revise and teach myself the information I need to know prior to the lesson.

To manage the students effectively during class.

I will be in an all-boys classroom as a young female teacher.

Keeping up with the workload and reaching my goals and expectations when teaching.

Student goals

I’d love to experiment and go outside my comfort zone especially with maths because this would be the perfect environment to take risks and see if they work or not.

Draw a better connection between the conceptual coursework at uni to the practical participation and lesson construction of professional experience. I imagine it will be extremely beneficial to interact with the students and discover what they like, dislike, what they’re interested in at school, in which
areas they excel, where they struggle. And then from all this information to formulate lesson plans and activities and then watch the students engage with it will be incredibly enlightening.

General classroom management tips from various lecturers.

Use knowledge from Professional Experience 5 [UTS Education course] which looked at students with special needs and being able to cater a lesson for students with all different academic abilities.

These concerns suggest the importance of the In-school mentor’s role in enhancing support provided by supervising teachers. Students sought assistance with both teaching skills and developing self-confidence and efficacy as a beginner teacher. Pre-service teachers raised issues of nervousness, respect, being able to manage well, take risks and to develop interpersonal relationships with their students, indicating that they desired guidance from a mentor who could provide a caring and supportive environment for them to grow as a teacher.

1.2 What do pre-service teachers want from their supervising teachers?

There were notably high expectations amongst UTS students regarding expectations of their supervising teachers. There was recognition of the teacher as the holder of information about the school and the school’s students, and the teacher as the conduit of information the preservice student needed to know;

Providing information about the students, their prior knowledge, and any differentiation strategies taken previously.

Providing information about the school and the subject, resources available at school, lesson sequence and timetables, assessments, what worked well/did not work well in the past.

Providing general tips and guidelines on classroom management. Making it clear to their class that they must respect the prac student and show them the same behaviour that they show their own teacher PRIOR to meeting the prac student.

UTS students also showed awareness of the role of mentoring and coaching in relation to their potential growth as a teacher. While expecting to be appraised and critiqued, students expected a level of dialogue to accompany feedback which would guide their reflection and improvement;

Providing detailed and constructive feedback for improvement.

To evaluate the prac student based on how he/she teaches the class and discuss how to improve teaching points and methods.

Feedback.

Critical analysis and help me with my area of weakness.

The quality of the relationship between student teacher and supervisor was also noted, with students expecting their supervisor to be skilled in this domain of mentoring;

Open communication of expectations and responsibilities of the professional experience student.
Full support of and confidence in the professional experience student; support, supportive, encouraging.

Flexibility and ability to hear all suggestions and questions from the professional experience student.

Creation of a balance between challenging the professional experience teacher to move outside of their comfort zone and taking a more observatory roll.

Today’s tertiary students have considerable experience with mentoring and coaching as many work or have worked in environments where this model of training and development is well established. One student defined her relationship with her supervising teacher as a mentor rather than a colleague. She mentioned her appreciation of his expertise in teaching and his ability to guide her learning through a flexible but supportive approach that involved regular constructive feedback. Her teacher, however, saw himself as more of a coach than a mentor and mentoring as more as a directive approach by outlining what actions needed to be taken;

I think I coached in terms of asking - instead of mentoring and saying, you should do this, my question was coming from around about - round the back in saying, why did you do it? Why do you think they were sometimes not receptive? Sometimes the noise was level up. Sometimes they were slightly disengaged. Why was that in that case?

It was evident that students desired their supervising teachers to take on a mentoring role so that they could acquire relevant teaching skills and content area knowledge, in addition to accessing to the personal connections that supported them in their professional learning. These characteristics were closely mirrored by the In-school mentor, who took on a more relational and developmental approach to working with preservice students. The student comments illustrate how students expressed needs that could be effectively addressed by the In-school mentor, which was both compatible to and enhanced the pre-service student and supervising teacher relationship.

2. Barker teacher expectations and concerns

The Barker teachers aimed to address student concerns and expectations by acting as mentors within the supervisory relationship. They responded very positively to the opportunity to complete a mentoring course as part of this initiative, seeing it as an opportunity to develop their skills. They highlighted the responsibility to ‘give back’ and ‘make a contribution’;

Through my own experience I had as a prac teacher, I understand the need for quality teachers to be supervisors. I am looking forward to mentoring and coaching the prac teachers and passing on the advice that I received myself.

I want to make a contribution to the teaching profession. Teaching is the preeminent profession. And given my experience, I believe I can mentor and coach new scheme teachers contributing to raising their awareness of their roles and responsibilities both in and outside the classroom.

Being able to support the development of new teachers is an important part of being a teacher. It will also teach me a lot about my own teaching style. I also see the link between tertiary and secondary education very important.
They identified a number of responsibilities of the supervising teacher which they planned to fulfil. These range from the more pragmatic to their goals to mentor their student’

- Developing the prac teacher’s understanding of programming and lesson development.
- Introducing the prac teacher to the extended environment of teaching (i.e. the extra-curricular components as well).
- Identifying areas of improvement.
- Providing the prac teacher with honest, supportive feedback.
- Support and build confidence.
- Providing a safe learning environment for my prac student.
- Supporting the development of the prac teacher. Identifying the positive.
- Provide ideas for their future teaching
- To foster an insightful understanding of “how do you know, they know.”
- Inspiring the student teacher to engage in the profession.

2.1 Barker’s approach to professional experience

Barker aimed to provide a strong model for effective teaching placements by providing student teachers with the best possible support. Len explained that Barker believes that assisting pre-service teachers is a way the school contributes to society’s human capital. He also mentioned the “intrinsic benefits” of supporting pre-service teachers and working with the university. One point of difference in Barker’s approach was to actively engage students in teaching experiences that lay beyond the classroom. Students highlighted the range of opportunities available in a K-12 school such as Barker. It is evident that many students had opportunities to experience new and different activities that take place across a school like Barker;

So we got the opportunity to also go up and experience a Year 11 I think maths class it was. That was really interesting, just the difference from the high school to primary school, it’s so different. Then the teacher we observed was really - she was great. She was really engaging and just the different styles of teaching I guess was intriguing.

I definitely wasn’t just stuck to the classroom, which was nice. I also observed the Italian and the woodwork class and stuff. So yeah, I definitely tried to get involved as much as possible and felt like I did experience not just that side of it, so it was good in that way.

I went on a Year 7 excursion to Taronga Zoo. I went to Year 9 camp. I also participated - I helped out at special needs classes. I guess what I learned from those experiences is - from those special needs classes - I haven’t actually worked with those students before. I learned about them in my inclusive
education lecture, but haven’t - it was my first time actually working with these students, so it was a new experience.

Len organised us to go out to lessons from other faculties, like science, maths, special needs, geography. We also had a chance to get involved with a parent/teacher information night. Then, of course, I had the chance to go to the camp and the excursions, so we got to do all these different things. That’s all part of working at a school, right. So it was like not some other people organising these events, but the school teachers, teaching my subject, organising the parent/teacher interview night, for example. So it was good to get a glimpse of what work in a school will actually be like, apart from just teaching in front of the classroom. Because it was towards the end of the year, I could also see a lot of teachers writing reports and writing the assessments - from writing the assessments to marking them and giving the results back to students and things like that.

Barker teachers espoused the school’s values and demonstrated a similar commitment towards improving teaching placements. The following comments suggest ways these teachers view their school’s overarching attitude to working with student teachers;

*It is becoming a more important aspect of the school community [to be more involved in pre-service education]. We want to build our relationships with universities and be a school that preservice teachers want to come to.*

*The school is committed to developing pre-service teachers and encourages teachers to take on the responsibility of accepting practicum placements. It sees the importance of this and hopes Barker will become a recognised institution for its success in such training.*

*It is extremely important that we support pre-service teachers as much as we are able.*

*Supportive environments that promote new teachers to fully immerse themselves into the Barker way. i.e. Involved in the whole person, academic and co-curricular (holistic approach).*

3. **In-school mentor: A different model**

The data gathered for this project contribute to discussion around alternative models of supporting and supervising Teacher Education students during Professional Experience. It is important to explore ways all stakeholders can work together to provide high quality professional experience for Teacher Education students (GTIL 4. All teacher education students will receive high quality professional experience as part of their teacher education programs).

3.1 **The Tertiary Supervisor vs the In-school mentor**

Students and supervising teachers in this study disclosed some mixed past experiences with Tertiary Supervisors who ranged from playing a ‘monitoring role,’ ‘providing instructions on what is expected and how to improve on their difficulties,’ and ‘giving feedback.’ Both Barker teachers and primary students highlighted the apparent limitations of the Tertiary Supervisor in previous placements and experiences they had had.
For the teachers and students who had previously worked with a Tertiary Supervisor, the lack of interaction and communication was cited as a common concern. Students described the lack of contact prior to their teaching placement which made it seem like a ‘random person’ was observing their lesson. One student said she did not have any email contact with her Tertiary Supervisor which made her feel ‘a bit in the dark [regarding] when he was coming or what was happening’. Another described a difficult interaction where a Tertiary Supervisor criticised her lesson without understanding the context or attempting to follow up with constructive feedback. A supervising teacher similarly depicted one Tertiary Supervisor as being ‘a bit distant and not enthusiastic.’

The traditional Tertiary Supervisor typically works with preservice students in a one-off mode, with a single visit to a single lesson unless issues have been raised by the preservice teacher or supervising teacher. This positions the Tertiary Supervisor as an authoritarian stranger and assessor even if the Tertiary Supervisor is genuinely communicative and attempts to respond promptly to their allocated student’s needs.

In-school mentor, by contrast, is able to form a more authentic professional partnership with the preservice student because of the multiple points of contact and relationship building that can occur over a period of weeks. This relationship is more likely characterised by notions of sharing a journey together and getting to know the preservice teacher’s strengths and goals. There is also a large component of the In-school mentor taking responsibility for the preservice teacher’s experiences and feedback, which is an element missing from traditional Tertiary Supervisor relationships where the focus falls on assessment.

Len Nixon commented;

I was on tap, I was dealing with people on a regular weekly basis and they could come to me if there were problems. I could also address problems and I think that was one of the things that I could do.

Commenting on interactions with the In-school mentor role, one preservice student observed;

He was always there, which was also good. … Some of my colleagues said that they didn’t know who their Tertiary Supervisor was. They got the name of the - they were meeting the person for the first time, whereas, with me, I had the in-house Tertiary Supervisor as well as the co-ordinating teacher, who I could always go to for different things, for uni related things or for the classroom related things, so it was very handy, I guess.

3.2 Participation in regular, focused feedback sessions with supervising teachers

Although the focus for the project was on the role of the In-school mentor, this report also examines the role of the supervising teacher to explore the ways that the In-school mentor’s presence affirms and supports this role. The quality of supervising at Barker was very high, with all students commenting very positively about the guidance they received from their supervising teachers. Students described how supervising teachers were willing to sit down with them at the beginning of the week to set out what goals they wanted to achieve;

I told him exactly what I wanted and he was always willing to help me and willing to push me to see those results, as well as providing constructive feedback.
I felt a real positive was the fact that he sat down after each lesson with me and went through what we could do better to improve and always had that long term goal in sight, or in mind.

Regular and timely feedback was appreciated by students as it drew their attention to habits they had no knowledge of, ‘Some of the things that he pointed out included the things that I never even realised’. Students also commented on the practical nature of the guidance and feedback from the supervising teacher;

I remember the first feedback I got, he listed a lot of strategies. He said we could do this, this, this. We went through it and then two lessons later, he even mentioned it was so much better that you’ve done that, that, that. You’ve incorporated different strategies. So it was really good for him to notice it as well, because I did try to use different strategies that he had suggested. Some worked, some didn’t, but that might have just been them responding to me as a teacher and not him.

Students highly respected their teachers’ judgements, with one stating that her supervising teacher would always give her the ‘right advice.’ Another student talked about the how experienced her teacher was in supervising students;

He’s had a lot of experience in the UK schools, so he’s done - he's had a lot of - in the UK they do a lot more supervising of teachers actively who are working. So I think he’s been supervised a lot and he has had a few - like a few prac students already.

Not only did they value their teachers’ expertise, students believed that their supervising teachers had their best interests at heart;

He seemed really keen and eager to get me to understand the real implications of being in the classroom. Like quality teaching and why I was using certain strategies and what I was really doing that for, and how I rated myself, and how I was going to change something else.

The supervising teachers considered themselves to be both coaches and mentors for their students. They found the UTS students to be ‘enthusiastic and willing to listen to advice’. One teacher described how he acted as a mentor by helping his preservice student talk through her ideas, as he provided advice and feedback after observing her teach. He recognised his student lacked confidence regardless of her successful lessons; as a mentor he felt that a strong part of his role lay in giving encouragement and the occasional ‘self-esteem boost’.

Another teacher described his goal as making sure that the student had an ‘enjoyable and beneficial experience’ so that she would be able to realise the impact of her teaching. This sentiment was expressed by a majority of the supervising teachers, who aimed to help students have a positive teaching placement so that they could grow as teachers;

My aim was to give her a good experience [so] she felt like teaching was what she wanted to do; and also to be able to give her a bit of confidence in her own abilities with programming and planning and also a few different styles of how to present things and how to go about teaching.

Supervising teachers also saw themselves in a coaching role. One teacher illustrated how he ‘coached’ his student by asking her critical questions to provoke self-reflection rather than providing the answers;
I think I coached in terms of asking - instead of mentoring and saying, you should do this, my question was coming from around about - round the back in saying, why did you do it? Why do you think they were sometimes not receptive? Sometimes the noise was level up. Sometimes they were slightly disengaged. Why was that in that case? So the coaching part was really important for her, I think.

The In-school mentor and supervising teachers played different roles, engaging with and supporting the students in different ways. In one case, a student described how the supervising teacher actively helped her plan her teaching while the In-school mentor provided additional valuable feedback on her teaching;

Well my - both [In-school mentor] or [supervising teacher] were both really great. The [supervising teacher] was much more actively involved in my lesson planning and feedback. [In-school mentor] was clear with his feedback.

### 3.3 The benefits of having an In-school mentor for students

Although the In-school mentor had less involvement with the planning and delivery of the students’ teaching, he identified a couple of key benefits on his role. First, the In-school mentor organised regular meetings between the students so that could develop a community of learners who could reflect deeply on their practice. These meetings also served to actively engage students in other aspects of school life outside of teaching;

They knew that quarter to 1 on every Monday there’d be a meeting. It was regimented. It was theirs. We talked about what has happened. They went on camps, so I would have organised all of those sorts of things. Outside, couldn’t do that. So things like excursions, camps, musicals, they went to the lot. Things like curriculum planning things – and outside. . .

The In-school mentor also saw himself as being easily accessible by being ‘able to deal with people on a regular basis’ and being available for students who were experiencing problems. Through his teaching role at the school, he recognised he could help students address problems as they arose.

The value of the In-school mentor’s role became very clear in the case of the student who was at risk of not successfully completing the placement. The In-school mentor was able to conduct the difficult conversations needed to help this student to realise ways to improve. The In-school mentor acknowledged that it was easier for him to have the difficult but necessary conversations as he was less heavily involved in the student’s teaching. He believed that being more of an outsider allowed him to have tougher conversations without generating awkwardness between the student and the supervising teacher. The student was extended opportunities for additional lesson observations by the In-school mentor and more frequent, day-to-day conversations to gauge progress. The In-school mentor reflected,

. . . but the point is that I was in it. I could see it on a day-to-day basis. I could ring - I could speak, because I knew the people who were [involved]. I could speak to [the supervising teacher] about [the student]. I could talk to [the student] about it. I could - and say, right, well, I’m going to come down again.

These tough conversations between student, supervising teacher and In-school mentor provided valuable impetus to guide the student’s improvement. Noting the supervising teacher adopted a softer approach than the In-school mentor, the student realised both were on the same page with regards to appraisal, support and validation. The student was made aware that another expert teacher had reached the same conclusion.
after watching the lessons and the ‘satisfactory tick’ would not be provided unless improvement became evident.

The In-school mentor was also able to recognise particularly talented students. This point was captured in an interview with the In-school mentor;

*If you weren’t in that role and it was a Tertiary Supervisor doing that observing, you wouldn’t have that opportunity as a talent scout - in reference to [student’s name], . . . I would rate [the student] highly. I’ve been doing this for 16 years from here and you look at [the student], and you went - yeah, righto. Yeah. Sure. ... you’d give [this student] a start.*

Frequent opportunities to connect students and supervising teachers over the Barker campus were invaluable for all parties. Students became more accountable due to the regular points of contact and there was also extensive opportunity to engage in situated self-reflection through weekly meetings and informal pedagogical discussions. In these meetings the In-school mentor would ask students to rate their teaching from 1-10 to help them self-monitor their progress. Casual observations, supervision and quick follow up were the strategies used to provide more support for students and supervising teachers.

### 3.4 The benefits of having an In-school mentor for supervising teachers

The supervising teachers overall responded very positively to the presence of the In-school mentor within their team. One teacher described the In-school mentor as adding to the supervisory experience by providing similar forms of feedback;

*He was great when he was in the classroom. He tried to make it as easy as possible for the two of us. In the end he had no impact on (student’s name) or myself in a negative way. He was great when he was there and gave really good feedback to her as well. I think it’s good for (student’s name) to hear feedback from someone other than myself, especially if it’s reinforcing similar things to work on.*

The In-school mentor was also able to provide support for supervising teachers, especially with difficult conversations and could take a more directive approach and leave the supervising teacher to provide a more supportive role. This special dynamic, where the supervising teacher played the ‘good cop’ and the In-school mentor played the ‘bad cop’, allowed students to receive both the critical feedback needed, as well as the supportive environment to build up teaching confidence.

Supervising teachers were familiar with the In-school mentor as they were already colleagues. This allowed teachers easy access to a second opinion if needed;

*It was good because [he] was a face I knew so it was easy to have someone to contact if I needed to clarify something as well.*

There was also the value of ‘being in touch with’ the In-school mentor and having his input in regards to their student’s teaching progress;

*The other element, the difference was just the whole surrounding experience of having meetings, being in touch with Len particularly and having [student’s name] brought into different meetings and things.*
The In-school mentor acknowledged that such an approach may not be considered equitable as it may not be an option for all schools to implement. Despite this, Len Nixon argues that a group of schools coming together using the same In-school mentor approach, where mentors have access to what students learn at university, could add tremendous value to preservice education and the wider teaching profession. Critical input from a range of educators (tertiary and professional) is useful in helping students bridge the gaps between theory and practice, and identities of student and teacher.

4. Responsive approaches to theory and practice within a context

Professional experience placements should be an ideal site for students to put university course work into practice. Indeed, students spoke about this aspect with anticipation. How this important dimension occurs and the factors which contribute to the effective melding of theory and practice should be the shared concerns of schools and universities, as well as of the preservice students themselves.

4.1 Issues of disconnect between theory and practice

Impetus for this project initially came from the In-school mentor’s recognition of an apparent disconnect between university course work and the pre-service teachers’ learning experiences in schools. He believes professional experience placements are important in bridging gaps between the theory of teaching and its practical application. Thus, improvements in how professional placements are conceived could have important effects on student learning;

What is happening maybe at university is not translated on a day-to-day basis when it comes to the prac. ... I think this in-house thing is a much better method to do. I think - but what I would really like to do and I’m actually going to try it here in the next three weeks is that they come and see me teach and then I have the lecture immediately after. So we’ve [met] theory and practice.

One student noted a difficult relationship with a Tertiary Supervisor from a previous placement and a situation which made it difficult to progress understandings of how theory and practice remain separate;

[My Tertiary Supervisor from] my last prac, oh she brought me down. She came in and the purpose of my lessons - she didn’t understand the purpose of what I’d been working [on]. She took it out of context and was like, no and you’re not doing this enough. Your plan’s not good, ra, ra, ra, and then didn’t actually follow anything up anyway.

Difficult situations can potentially be handled differently by In-school mentors. Despite being confronted by some conversations, a student expressed complete trust in the In-school mentor’s approach;

But it’s just one of those things where he’s (in school mentor) got the best interests for me and he’s being this really strict mean sort of demeanour, just this act he’s putting on but it’s only because he wants us to realise that, hey, wake up, you need to step your game up.

Reflecting on the placement and benefits of working with mentor-aware supervisors, a student outlined what she now preferred in terms of pre-service supervision. This comment highlights a desire to build an active conversation between theory and practice so that the two run together seamlessly in the preservice teacher’s work;
[I would] prefer a teacher to sit down and go, what do you want to get out of this? What do you think are your strengths, your weaknesses? Where do you see yourself as a teacher? What do you want me to help you with? What did you want your first lesson to be? What do you want to do for this prac? What's your schedule like? How do you want to do the planning? Do you want to send me something? Cover that now and then give me feedback on what we work on for planning the lessons.

This theme was observed by another student who noted her relationship with her supervising teacher as pivotal as he was able to draw attention to areas that she could improve on. He used strategies such as questioning and observation to assist her own reflections;

How were you able to see your strengths and weaknesses?

As I was teaching how - my supervising teacher was observing in the back of the classroom, giving me the feedback. Some of the things that he pointed out included the things that I never even realised. He also commented on my classroom management strategies and my level of preparation and organisational skills and things like that.
DISCUSSION

The In-school mentor model represents a subtle but significant shift in terms of the type of support available for pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience.

In summary, the In-school mentor model helps students:

- Integrate feedback and assessment in ways which enhance their professional placement
- Access ‘just-in-time’ support from a wide group of peers and teachers
- Approach challenging situations with resilience and effective strategies gained from the input of teaching peers and supervisors
- Contextualise their classroom based placement in a whole school model
- Benefit from supervising teachers’ training in mentoring and coaching
- Build professional relationships suitable for transitioning to early career teaching

Receiving and having opportunities to apply feedback is crucial for effective learning. Under the In-school mentor model, students received input from both supervising teacher and In-school mentor, which offered two perspectives and greater opportunities to demonstrate ways of responding to critical feedback from teachers within the school. The in-between nature of the students’ status and role in professional experience placements can be forgotten or glossed over by the teachers and advisors in supervisory roles around the student. Students can be managing stressors in their personal lives, work commitments, parenting, course work demands, as well as new challenges provided by the placement.

The In-school mentor role was shown to require careful planning and organisation, as students needed to meet together with the In-school mentor and other students for the group to achieve its purpose. Scheduled observations, as well as informal conversations, also needed to be factored in to get a sense of how the students were progressing. Due to these additional commitments, extra time was essential for the In-school mentor to carry out this work effectively. Len Nixon expressed the possibility of separating the administrative role from In-school mentor role to create more time to dedicate to pedagogy and coaching.

The placement took place within a model of ‘colleagues learning together’ rather than through the binary of ‘expert and student’ or ‘supervisor and supervised’, which characterises traditional models. This was furthered by the coaching courses which responded to practicing teachers’ needs for accredited professional learning. These courses positioned the teachers themselves as learners as they developed skills in coaching and mentoring others. One supervising teacher reflected on his approach which ‘made [him] take a step back, so [he] could do it a whole lot better than [he’d] been doing.’

Schools were also seen to potentially benefit in terms of recruiting better prepared teacher graduates and contributing to the profession through their work. Many supervising teachers prior to the placement commented that ‘giving back to the profession’ was a major motivation for their reason to offer to take on a student. Such altruism is important to foster as it is important that teachers find meaning in their work and that incoming teachers develop their own sense of worth. Thus, participation in professional experience can be regarded as a part of the school’s corporate social responsibility. The In-school mentor approach is not a ‘deficit model’. Rather it is an active way to induct pre-service teachers into the professional in a collegial manner.
Ultimately, the In-school mentor approach as it was researched in this context appears more effective than the Tertiary Supervisor model as it enables established teachers to collectively mentor the school’s pre-service teachers and for all parties to explore notions of professional growth. In this project, the In-school mentor role was also shown to be particularly invaluable in supporting a student at risk of not successfully completing the placement. Completing the placement with a sense of respect for one’s colleagues contributes to emerging notions of resilience and collegiality which are important for all educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the In-school mentor fulfils only one role. In this placement, the In-school mentor was simultaneously a supervising teacher for one of the students. It is recommended these roles remain separate to allow focus on the mentoring role and that the In-school mentor role be carefully defined and communicated to both preservice teachers and supervising teachers prior to professional experience. This is important whatever the number of professional experience placements that the students have participated in previously.

- That prior to any school making a decision to utilise this model rather than the external Tertiary Supervisor model, there should be extensive discussion with members of staff to ensure that all everyone has a common understanding of the purpose of the In-school mentor model and that it is an alternative to the traditional Tertiary Supervisor model.

- That for the In-school mentor model to be most effective, a pool of students, around six at a minimum, should be placed in the school for professional experience to allow a critical mass to create community of preservice learners. In the case of smaller schools who work together collegially on projects, it may be possible to utilise this model with modifications.

- That coaching and mentoring courses are made available for participating teachers and In-school mentors, and that these promote professional learning goals of those involved. In order to maximise the professional experience for students, supervising teachers and the In-school mentor, professional learning to develop skills and understanding about mentoring and coaching is a vital component.

- That linkage with the university Professional Experience office and Professional Experience Coordinator is established and that the university supplies the In-school mentor with a point of contact to raise concerns and discuss feedback. This is especially important in the case of any student who may be experiencing difficulties during the professional experience.

- That this model should be seen as an exemplar of a true partnership between the university and the school as it recognises skills in teacher development that reside within the school. It demonstrates that universities and schools can successfully deliver components of Initial Teacher Education effectively and in partnership.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1

Data collection Instruments

1. Pre Professional Experience online survey Barker teachers
2. Pre Professional Experience online survey UTS students
3. Pre Professional Experience interviews
4. Post Professional Experience interviews

1. Pre Professional Experience online survey Barker teachers

1. What concerns do you have about the professional experience block?
2. How would you describe the role you would like to play as supervising teacher?
3. Describe your own educational background. What sort of secondary school did you attend?
4. Indicate the types of schools at which you have taught during your career
5. In a few sentences, please outline your philosophy of education.
6. What has attracted you to the role of supervising teacher?
7. Make a list of what you see as your key responsibilities as supervising teacher
   (3-5 things) Place an * next to the most important responsibility
8. What challenges do you anticipate in the upcoming professional experience?
9. Describe your level of experience supervising tertiary student teachers
10. Please outline generally what these past experiences have been like?
11. What do you hope to get out of the upcoming supervision experience?
12. If you have previously supervised prac students, how was the University Tertiary Advisor helpful to you?
13. From past experience, did you encounter any difficulties working with the University Tertiary Advisor?
14. What do you identify as the College’s philosophy/approach towards preservice education?
15. What would you like to get out of your participation in the research project?
16. Do you have any questions about the upcoming professional experience or the research project?
2 **Pre Professional Experience online survey  UTS students**

1. Please identify the area of Sydney you call home. This is the area you feel most at home in- it is not necessarily where you live now.

2. Indicate the types of schools you have attended for Professional Experience placements.

3. When you first heard of your placement, how familiar did you feel towards Barker College and schools like Barker?

4. Can you briefly explain the reason for your response to question 3?

5. In a few sentences outline your philosophy of education.

6. What sort of approach do you find most effective in a supervising teacher?

7. Make a list of what you consider to be the key responsibilities of the supervising teacher (3-5 things).

8. Reflecting on your past PE experiences, what role was played by your University Tertiary Supervisor?

9. What challenges do you anticipate in the upcoming professional experience?

10. What do you hope to be able to implement from your work at uni during this PE block?

11. What would you like to get out of your participation in the research project?

12. Do you have any questions about the upcoming professional experience or the research project?

3 **Pre Professional Experience interviews**

**Barker Teachers**

1. Have there been any key issues you have been reflecting on in regards to this project (since the survey, since the professional development training session).

2. What are you looking forward to the most about this project/ the up-coming Professional Experience visit?

3. What challenges do you foresee in regards to the project/ the up-coming Professional Experience visit?

**UTS students**

1. What are your main goals for this Professional Experience?

2. What do you think it will take for you to achieve these goals?

3. In the online survey you mentioned the concern you had about the professional experience block. How do you plan to address these concerns?
4. What are your expectations of the school/cooperative teacher/tertiary advisor/students?

5. How will you measure the success of your teaching practices in this PE block?

6. What opportunities do you anticipate from participating in this research project?

4 Post Professional Experience interviews

Barker Teachers

1. If this is not your first supervisory experience, what made this professional experience different/similar from your previous ones?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your prac student? Why do you think you feel this way?

3. What was your most and least favourite part of this supervisory experience?

4. Do you think you achieved what you set out to do in relation to supervising this student?

5. If you could do this experience over again, what would you do differently/the same?

6. Can you comment on the effectiveness of the role of the In-school mentor model (as opposed to using a university-based Tertiary Supervisor?) Did this role change or enhance the practicum?

7. What did you personally get out of your participation in the research project?

8. Do you have any questions about the professional experience or the research project?

UTS students

1. What did you like the most and least about this prac?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your mentor teacher? What did they do that was helpful? Not so helpful?

3. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher through this professional experience?

4. Did this experience impact or change your philosophy of education? If so, how?

5. Do you think you achieved what you set out to do in the beginning of this prac?

6. What are some goals you have for your next professional experience? What are some teaching skills you would like to develop?

7. What kind of school would you like to go to for your next prac and why?
8. What did you get out of your participation in the research project?

9. Do you have any questions?
Mentoring and supporting teacher education students for a high-quality professional experience: BOSTES registered course

(6.5 hours of accreditation for primary teachers at Proficient level; 8.5 hours accreditation for secondary teachers at Proficient level)*

The University of Technology, Sydney has developed this course in response to the Great Teaching Inspired Learning Blueprint for Action in order to recognise the pivotal role that the supervising teacher plays in the provision of high quality professional experience for teacher education students.

This course provides teachers the opportunity to develop skills and understanding about the role of mentoring and feedback in teacher development. The skills can be refined and developed through active supervision of teacher education students during professional experience but will have wider application in all work with colleagues in schools.

This course will provide teachers who are accredited at Proficient Level the opportunity to engage in professional learning (Standard 6) in order to update knowledge and practice in mentoring and supporting teacher education students. Participants will develop skills in providing constructive feedback that will support their own reflective practices, leading to improved professional knowledge and classroom practice. It will also provide the opportunity to engage professionally with colleagues (Standard 7) to broaden their own knowledge of quality practices in mentoring and supporting less experienced colleagues. Participation in this course will provide impetus towards continuous improvement.

At the completion of this training and development activity, participants are expected to be able to:

a) Apply processes of critical self-reflection to enhance their own classroom practice;

b) Demonstrate understanding of the role of mentoring in developing teacher education students;

c) Select a range of suitable teaching experiences and guide and support the teacher education student in all phases of their professional experience;

d) Provide high quality, formative and constructive advice both informally and as written feedback to the teacher education student; and

e) Apply the Graduate Teaching Standards to the professional experience report.

Components of the course:

Part A: Introduction to mentoring and application to supporting teacher education students during professional experience. (2 hour workshop)
Part B: Supervising 10 day professional experience (primary)/20 days professional experience (secondary); professional discussions with other supervising teachers.

Part C: Reflections on the process and application to the school setting. (1 hour workshop)

Successful completion of the course will result in 6.5hrs (primary) or 8.5hrs (secondary) of registered professional learning at Proficient level.

* The difference in accredited hours between primary and secondary teachers is due to the longer period of professional experience for secondary teacher education students)