

From Rhetoric to Reality – Piloting the Faculty Pedagogical Framework from a Participant Perspective

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From Rhetoric to Reality – Piloting the Faculty Pedagogical Framework from a Participant Perspective

Teacher educators have a responsibility not only to ensure that teachers are responsive to the changing face of schooling, but also to model these new constructions of pedagogy within their Faculty. In order to do this there is a need for teacher educators to re-examine their own pedagogical and organizational structures. In the Faculty of Education under study, this need was conceptualised as a 'Faculty Pedagogical Framework', which emerged from an extensive research based review. This paper describes and analyses initiatives that have facilitated the implementation of the collaborative teaching and learning element of the Pedagogical Framework.

Introduction

In the new ‘learning organisation’ of the post-industrial era, the collaborative team rather than the individual, Hough (1997) argues, is the basic unit of work. Such organizational structures foreground the fundamental democratic principle of shared values including inclusivity, collaboration and social responsibility. In the context of a Faculty of Education, addressing changes to organizational and management structures and pedagogical approaches to enhance learning outcomes for students is a significant challenge. The importance of engaging in ‘critical conversations’ around teaching and learning involving both staff and students has been highlighted by Trowler & Cooper (2002) as an essential ingredient for pedagogical reform in tertiary institutions.

Reconceptualising Pedagogy in a Faculty of Education

The rate of change in what-we-know and what-we-need-to-know puts pressure on educators to focus on the construction of knowledge – teaching skills for investigation, interpretation and communication of understanding. At the tertiary level there is recognition of the need to strengthen the interaction and integration of teaching and research (Zubrick et al, 2001 and FASTS, 1999 cited in Reid, 2001:12). Teacher educators have a responsibility not only to prepare teachers for the changing face of schooling but also to model new constructions of pedagogy within their Faculty. In order to do this there is a need for teacher educators to re-examine their own pedagogical and organizational structures. In the Faculty of Education under study a ‘Pedagogical Framework’ conceptualizes the key elements for that faculty.

Background

The Faculty of Education at this institution recently engaged in a cross-department re-accreditation of its undergraduate Bachelor of Education Programs. It became apparent during this process that there was a need for a faculty-wide review. There were several profound learnings for the Faculty as outcomes from the review process, which demonstrated the significance that faculty educators placed on collaboration. These included:

- The Importance of Shared Responsibility for Leadership
- Celebrating the Value of Diverse Perspectives
- Importance of Dialogue Above Organisational Structures
- Personal Practices Informing Knowledge Construction
- Creating New Paradigms

The Faculty of Education Pedagogical Framework (see Appendix 1) emerged from this extensive research based review. For a comprehensive report of the procedures, processes and protocols undertaken by a faculty developing a Pedagogical Framework see *Towards Pedagogical Consensus: The Early Chapters in a Faculty of Education Strategic Review*

to be published in the ATEA 2002 conference proceedings. The post review action was to develop a number of initiatives that exemplified selected sections of the Framework to begin the move from Rhetoric to Reality. This study is an analysis of the participants' perceptions of these initiatives within the Collaborative Teaching and Learning element of the Framework which includes partnerships, collegiality and both internal and external networking. For the purposes of this research, not all initiatives will be considered. However, we would argue that this analysis will provide a snapshot of the post-review activities and will indicate current perceptions of the relevant stakeholders.

Desired Outcomes:

- Create opportunities for critical conversations around professional practice, particularly how it relates to the Pedagogical Framework
- Promote partnerships, collegiality and both Internal and external networking
- Inform new accreditation process within a number of programs

The Initiatives

1. Collaboration in first level, first semester courses

This group of staff comprises the examiners of the four courses offered as standard enrolment to students in their first semester of the primary course. They have met to discuss the objectives, content, teaching and assessment. The examiners have agreed to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning – a consistent approach that will be promoted in discussion with the students – and to focus on maximum student engagement in their studies. Each course examiner has undertaken to share full course specification information so that assessment types and timing can be negotiated to make them most meaningful and manageable for the students. Investigations are underway to look at how common elements e.g. information literacy, can be seen as a transferable among, and supported across, courses. Two examiners created an opportunity to use the same piece of assessment for both courses, with modifications to address criteria specific to each particular course.

2. Shared assessment

Concern was expressed regarding the quality of student planning within the field and as assessment within the Primary program. The aim is to have a shared assessment item for students in 3rd year primary program across 3 core courses. This assessment item is a curriculum plan for a series of activities or a unit of work that would indicate how students intend to integrate literacy and technology. Students then reflect on the decisions they have made during the planning process. The shared assessment item is only 1 piece of assessment; all other assessment items will remain separate.

3. Authentic classroom planning

Students in the secondary program completing their final curriculum course will be linked to a specific year 8 – 10 class (preferably at their professional experience school) to plan a unit for term 2 2002. Students were asked to assist the practicing teacher in implementing that unit during tutorial times for the first 3 weeks of term 2 or to teach it during their professional experience. Students were encouraged to plan cross a disciplinary unit with an authentic task at the completion of the unit and will use outcomes from the new QSCC syllabi.

4. Students networking with community and schools

Students in an Environmental Education elective were invited to liaise with a specific class and an environmental mentor from the community to develop an environmental unit of work which will be implemented in the classroom. The outcomes were presented at the Science Expo in Toowoomba in August.

5. Catering for International students

International Doctoral students have limited opportunities for to interact with peers and academic staff within the Faculty of Education in real time. This initiative took advantage of technology to provide flexible meeting structures and times to cater for differing time zones, technology access and student diversity across a cohort of students.

The Research Questions

The primary research question was:

What contributing factors to Collaborative Teaching and Learning are evident in the trial initiatives of the Faculty Pedagogical Framework?

This was answered by addressing a series of sub-questions:

1. Was the initiative worthwhile?
2. What aspects of the trial initiative would you consider to be successful?
3. What factors contributed to this success?
4. What aspects of the trial initiative would you consider to be unsuccessful?
5. What factors contributed to this?
6. Would you consider adopting this initiative in the future?
7. What changes would be necessary to improve the success of this initiative in the future?

Methodology

This research falls within the qualitative paradigm. A Case Study approach was used to describe and analyse several initiatives in relation to their contribution to the Faculty Pedagogical Framework.

An audit procedure was used to establish the extent to which the Collaborative Teaching and Learning element of the pedagogical framework has been operationalised within the current initiatives in the faculty. A reflective dialogue approach within the context of semi-structured interviews with participating staff was used. The interviews were transcribed and coded to allow for the easy identification of common themes. Partial triangulation has been achieved by conducting semi-structured interviews with five volunteer students in each initiative area. These volunteers were drawn randomly from a pool of volunteers, so the data is more reliable and unbiased. These interviews were similarly transcribed and coded.

The data were collected and analysed from a participant perspective. The researchers are both subjects and analysers of the data, therefore the information gathered from other participants in each initiative is used to validate what the researchers themselves say about the initiative.

Results

	Perceived Advantages	Perceived Disadvantages
1 st year collaboration	Time saving, Strengthened student understanding and content knowledge in both courses, Improved future writing, Development of links between courses, Relevant assessment, Students valued staff collaboration, Increased enjoyment and satisfaction when completing assessment, Increased support from both units and across the courses, Increased confidence, Similar expectations across courses.	Students lacked confidence to complete activity, Students felt they were cheating if they took up the opportunity, Initially staff thought that it would be time saving and this was not the case.
2. Shared assessment	Open ended assessment with links across courses, Time saving, Deeper thought processes, Richer task, Students see content from several	Improved direction at beginning would have increased benefits to students, Feeling that students might plagiarize team if use that assignment in another course, Placement of professional experience

	<p>directions, Reduce number of times students are forced to re-invent the wheel, Collaboration amongst staff, Links and integration to other courses, Beneficial to start with one assessment item and keep expanding that item for 2 other courses, Staff aware of student work load therefore assignments not all due at same time, Some students able to teach unit during Professional Experience, Ability to reflect on feedback from initial assignment, then work on it again before presenting it again in another forum, Assisted students to make connection between information in other courses that may previously been isolated Decreased student work load, Modelled integration of literacy and IT across all courses, Students valued authentic task and authentic assessment, Enable students to develop holistic approach to planning, Turning theory into practice, Able to use assessment after finishing at USQ.</p>	<p>meant that some students were unable to teach unit, Some students found it hard to engage with what shared assessment might mean, Limited number of students took up opportunity, Shared assessment opportunity not communicated to students through course documentation.</p>
<p>3. Authentic classroom planning</p>	<p>Opportunity to plan and teach a unit of work which is valued for academic and field experience, Openness and willingness of mentor teachers to give student feedback on unit even if not taught, Ability to modify unit based on mentor teacher feedback prior to teaching, and modify again for assessment on reflection of teaching,</p>	<p>Some students unable to teach unit during professional experience, Some mentor teachers unwilling to plan and teach using new syllabus outcomes, Uncertainty that planned unit could be taught, Issues with late confirmed of professional experience placement and finding time to meet with mentor</p>

	<p>Worthwhile even if not able to teach on professional experience, Improved links to field, Improved curriculum design, Increased student knowledge of outcomes, Useful resource for when teaching, Increased knowledge in both theory and practice, Students felt exercise was valuable and contributed to their overall teacher development.</p>	teacher
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<p>4 Environmental project</p>	<p>Link schools, teachers and pre-service teachers to real applications, Relevance to real world, Increased realization that organisations like Landcare can be used in a school setting, Practical field work linked to course assessment, Students felt they were contribution to something that made a difference.</p>	<p>Short time line, Unknown implications both short and long term, Difficult to monitor, Communication between pre-service teachers and teachers difficult, Some students dropped out of project due to lack of support, structure and follow up, Some teachers lost interest.</p>
<p>5. International students</p>	<p>Provided an opportunity for staff and students from a range of geographical locations to speak about specific concerns and issues, Students enjoyed the opportunity for professional conversation, Development of a learning community where staff and students treated as equal, Language less of a barrier to verbal communication, Catering to the different time zones was greatly appreciated, Useful in providing an opportunity to share ideas with a "person", as opposed to always using email, Increased personal interaction to make the program meet student needs, The initiative allowed the many different students to come together to feel the collective spirit of a class and a program, Provided a global perspective on the various topics.</p>	<p>Participation rates down, Organised event to coincide with specific time zones and disappointing that they didn't respond, Nothing beats face-to-face contact for increased motivation and effective communication, Technical issues: people dropping out or difficult to hear, Costly, Time constraints making it difficult for an individual to clearly express themselves in English.</p>

Discussion

For the purposes of this discussion, the data will be grouped under three main headings:

1. Shared Assessment – which will include initiatives one and two

2. Authentic Tasks – which will include initiatives three and four
3. Distance Learning – which will include initiative five

Within each of these main headings, the perceived advantages and perceived disadvantages of the initiatives will be discussed.

1. Shared Assessment

Perceived Advantages

The major advantages of these initiatives included the perceptions of students that the staff were explicitly collaborating, which highlighted the links between courses, made their learning more relevant to a classroom situation (where integration is common) and indicated similar expectations for assessment. Students initially believed that the ‘time-saving’ element of submitting one assignment more than once, would be the most attractive element, however they found that it didn’t necessarily save a lot of time, but it forced them to consider the task from different viewpoints and to think more deeply about how to construct it in such a way as to meet the different objectives from different courses. All participants considered this a valuable learning experience, which could be applied in a classroom situation when they set assessment tasks for their students. The feedback provided between submissions was also considered beneficial for future submissions, so the task was not an end in itself, but a step in the learning process.

Perceived Disadvantages

The major disadvantage was that the initiative wasn’t implemented until after course booklets had been printed, so students were a little unclear about their assessment options, or how to modify one task for several examiners. This meant that only a small percentage of students opted to take part in this initiative. Another perceived disadvantage was the students’ perception that this was a form of plagiarism, particularly if they had worked in groups for one assignment, then used that work as a basis for an individual assignment later.

2. Authentic Tasks

Perceived Advantages

The most apparent advantage of this initiative from the viewpoint of those interviewed, was the relevance to real-life practice and the opportunity to really make a difference in

the field. Student engagement in, and connectedness to these tasks was extremely high. It was also perceived that the links between theory and practice were more clearly articulated and demonstrated through the activities.

Perceived Disadvantages

The major disadvantages of this initiative were due to external constraints beyond the control of those involved, such as the levels of flexibility and enduring interest of the mentor teachers in the field, timetable constraints in the field, and individual situations of some students who were unable to link the activity to their professional experience due to the nature of their placement. Other disadvantages included the short timeline and the lack of follow-up to ensure that the desired outcomes were explicit and subsequently achieved.

3. Distance Learning

Perceived Advantages

There were many advantages of this initiative, the most notable being the opportunity for professional conversation and personal interaction with both staff and other students, where all involved were treated equally. This served to break down the isolation factor, particularly as the discussions were 'time friendly' with the various international time zones, and such personal interaction provided a balance for the flexibility of distance learning. The participants considered that it was a valuable experience also, in that it provided a global perspective on relevant issues, and that oral communication was sometimes easier for the international students where English was their second language. The participation of staff was high, which was quite notable considering some of the discussion times, for example in the early morning.

Perceived Disadvantages

The disadvantages of this initiative related mainly to technical issues such as sound quality and lines 'cutting out', as well as the perceived pressure of time constraints in such a situation in terms of trying to express themselves in English. It was also noted that it was disappointing that the participation rate of the international students was not high.

Future Changes

The data suggest a high level of student satisfaction regarding the collaborative nature of the initiatives undertaken at this point. This emphasizes the need for continued

development along similar lines. Although the desired outcomes have been achieved the stakeholders have indicated that a number of modifications should occur and these are listed under the three major headings below.

Shared Assessment

- Greater lead-in time for any initiatives, particularly those involving assessment
- More explicit expectations and clearer instructions for students
- Need to develop closer links with auxiliary sections of the faculty/university
- Closer links between assessment items and professional practice

Authentic Tasks

- Establishing closer links to the field to develop authentic tasks which are relevant for the field and for pre-service teachers
- Develop mentoring program with practicing teachers
- Opportunities to develop links with professional associations and industry organisations will be investigated

Distance Learning

- More effective use of asynchronous technologies is desirable with more structured discussion forums
- Continued IT support and increased lead-in time prior to future synchronous communications is required
- Opportunities for face-to-face visits are also being investigated on a cost/benefit basis

Conclusion

To date, staff, students and professionals in the field have achieved closer working relationships. During the trial initiatives students felt they achieved improved cognitive, behavioural and affective outcomes due to:

- the increased depth of knowledge realized
- the increased range of “life long learning” skills achieved
- increased engagement with each other, and
- the knowledge and processes required

The shared and authentic assessment opportunities allowed students to learn while completing assessment. Students felt the collaborative nature of the initiatives was valuable as a teaching model and that the learning experiences gained have contributed to their overall teacher and professional development.

Consistent with Devlin's (2002) conclusions, the record of students' perceptions regarding collaborative teaching, learning and assessment, collected through this study, will provide us with valuable information for future pedagogical planning and reform.

As a faculty we continue to reflect on our current practice to improve our pedagogical approaches. Through modeling of effective practice in terms of collaboration we aim to provide opportunities for our pre-service teachers to thrive, and to engage their students, in a knowledge-base society.

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APPENDIX 1

Faculty of Education – A Pedagogical Framework

Our Pedagogical vision: *“Educators empowering educators”*

The pedagogical framework is achieved through a shared vision of best practice and a commitment to world-class performance.

We value and we practise:

Inspired teaching and learning

- Designing creative learning environments
- Motivated learning
- Celebrating successes

Professional leadership

- Lifelong learning
- Ethics
- Mentoring
- Graduate attributes
- Modelling pedagogy across university
- Continuous enhancement of the pedagogical framework
- Influence on educational policy

Collaborative teaching and learning

- Partnerships
- Collegiality
- Networking (Internal/External)

Critical reflection

- Personal theorising
- Authentic dialogue
- Advocacy

Inclusivity and justice

- Pastoral care
- Equity and access
- Diversity
- Reconciliation
- Sustainable world

The generation of new knowledge

- Research
- Technology
- Professional learning
- Multiliteracies
- “Literate futures”
- Sustaining, enhancing and enriching our faculty pedagogical framework
- Integration of theory and practice
- Transferability of learning, knowledge and skills

Learner centredness

- Student engagement
- Responsibility
- Facilitation
- Empowerment

Responsive and responsible change

- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Agents of change
- Innovation