

2013

## Preparing Teachers – The Importance of Connecting Contexts in Teacher Education

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### Recommended Citation

Adoniou, M. (2013). Preparing Teachers – The Importance of Connecting Contexts in Teacher Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(8).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n8.7>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol38/iss8/4>

## **Preparing Teachers – The Importance of Connecting Contexts in Teacher Education**

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*Abstract: Everybody wants quality teachers in schools. How are such teachers developed? In this article a model is presented that describes four contexts crucial to the preparation of teachers: the personal, the university, the practicum and the employment contexts. The ways in which these different contexts can and should work together in the education and development of teachers are discussed. The model was developed as a result of a 16 month inductive study into the first year experience of 14 beginning teachers who were graduates of a Bachelor of Education in Primary teaching in an Australian university. Whilst the findings of the study are immediately applicable to the teacher education course under investigation, congruence with findings in other studies, both Australian and international, suggests the model may have applications beyond the university in the study.*

### **Introduction**

In this article a model is presented that describes the ways in which universities and school partners can and should work together in the education and further development of teachers. Specifically, the model describes four contexts that are present in the preparation of teachers, and presents them in a manner that stresses the importance of connectedness between the contexts. These contexts are:

1. The personal — with reference to the reasons teachers enter the profession;
2. University-based coursework;
3. Practicum experiences;
4. First employment contexts — with reference to school missions and actions.

The model was developed through a 16 month inductive study into the first year experience of 14 beginning teachers who were graduates of a Bachelor of Education in Primary teaching in an Australian university. Whilst the model of teacher education described is pertinent, in the main, to the teacher education institution from which these teachers graduated, it may be that others involved in teacher education will find some resonance with the experiences of these first year teachers and the ways in which teacher education is delivered in their institutions.

### **A Review of the Literature**

Much of the existing literature on teacher preparation focuses on the theory practice divide and the ways in which the divide can be ameliorated. Most of this literature concurs that teacher preparation should include practical skills in teaching, and we cannot ignore the oft repeated cry of the first-year teacher that their courses were not practical enough (Anderson, 2012; Grossman et al., 2000). To answer this call for increased practical skills

situated in real contexts, an emerging phenomenon from the end of the last millennium has been a move towards shifting the responsibility for teacher preparation from Higher Education institutions and returning that responsibility to systems and schools, with the establishment of movements like the Professional Development Schools movement in the US (Cope & Stephen, 2001; Day, 1998). In the United Kingdom, the shift to school-based initial teacher education (ITE) is increasingly the norm (Hodson, Smith, & Brown, 2012). Governments in Australia, the US and the UK are beginning to question the necessity of university preparation for teachers as they instead institute fast-track school-based approaches to teacher preparation which focus primarily on skills development in classroom contexts (DEEWR, 2012; Teach for America, 2012; U.K Department of Education, 2010).

Hodson et al. (2012, p. 183) describe this trend to situate teacher education within the school context as being a consequence of governments' simplistic views of teaching. They claim practitioner approaches to teacher preparation most often result in 'mimicry' of experienced teachers (Hodson et al., 2012). They observe, 'The apprenticeship model, of doing the same as the other teachers, does not readily provide the analytic capability required to develop generic skills to span a range of institutional settings' (Hodson et al., 2012, p. 183). Wold, Young and Risko (2011) also question the consequences of purely practitioner approaches to teacher education. With specific reference to the preparation of literacy educators they ask: if teacher preparation does not include an exploration of theory and its application to practice, 'how is it possible to create the next generation of teachers of excellence who use literacy theories and research to inform their instruction?' (Wold, Young, & Risko, 2011, p. 169).

Even within the more traditional models of teacher preparation situated primarily within the university, practicum experiences are considered requisite. This is despite the fact that the contribution of practicum experiences to improved readiness for the first year of teaching is unclear. Studies indicate that some practicum experience is desirable to enhance teacher preparedness for the first year of teaching (Kee, 2012), and pre-service teachers themselves believe that it is on their practicum that they will really learn to teach (Allen, 2009). However the effectiveness of the placement is arguably related to the quality of the placement and the nature of the relationship between the university and the school, with the degree of congruence between coursework and practicum a contributing factor to teacher effectiveness (Flint, Maloch, & Leland, 2010; Helfrich & Bean, 2011). Shortages of placements means there is little moderation and control over the practicum experiences of individuals in most university courses, and thus few links between the theory of the lecture theatre and the practice of the classrooms they find themselves in.

Helfrich and Bean (2011) claim that the integration of the university and practicum contexts is crucial, observing that when coursework and practicums are not matched, a clash of ideologies occurs which is not productive for the pre-service teacher, nor does it prepare them well for their first year of teaching (Helfrich & Bean, 2011). Bullough (2011) describes this clash as one between the traditional culture of the school, which is fixed and resistant, and the culture of a post-modern society, which is changing and evolutionary. This clash of ideologies is further exacerbated when university coursework typically espouses pedagogies of critical and creative thinking which often stand at odds with the increasingly market-driven forces within education which point to more narrow curricula, and increasingly standardized measures of achievement (Apple, 2001; Goodson, 2007).

As well as paying attention to the ways in which university and practicums can work together, teacher preparation must also consider what lies ahead for beginning teachers once they begin to teach (Hong, 2010; McCormack & Thomas, 2003). As Flores (2001, p. 140) suggests, schools are complex and multidimensional, encompassing 'social, personal, organizational and political dimensions', all of which impact upon the ways teachers teach and students learn. The literature in the field of the beginning-teacher experience often refers to this as 'reality shock' (Alexander, 2008; Fresko & Nasser-Abu lhija, 2009; Hebert &

Worthy, 2001), which some observe teacher preparation at university has been remiss in preparing them for (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012).

Finally, teacher preparation cannot ignore the reasons why people choose teaching as a career. The literature suggests, that in many countries, teaching is akin to a vocation, with most choosing to enter for altruistic and intrinsic reasons (Alexander, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2006 ; Watt & Richardson, 2008). This acknowledgement of the teacher as a person, with deeply personal motivations for entering teaching, is described by many as necessary in any examination of the ways in beginning teachers can be best prepared for the challenges of teaching (Huberman, 1993; Korthagen, 2004; Nias, 1989). Indeed, it has been suggested that the inability to fulfill these personal motivations for becoming a teacher may push teachers out of the profession (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Hong, 2010; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007).

In summary, everybody wants quality teachers in schools. Kusmic's (1994) description of quality teachers is an appealing one, they are teachers who 'carefully consider the content of what is taught to children, are active in developing original curriculum based on their own and or their pupils' interests and are able to creatively use materials, personal talents and innovative resources in planning and implementing learning activities' (Kusmic, 1994, p.16). But how are such teachers developed? Are they born that way? Do they learn these skills in the university lecture rooms or on their field experiences? Or does the real learning happen when they step into their first classroom of their own? The literature tells us that the answer lies in each of those scenarios, but in what ways does each contribute to the development of quality teachers. In this article the experiences of 14 beginning teachers provide the basis for a description of a model of teacher education which attempts to reconcile the many contexts which a beginning teacher must navigate on their journey to becoming the quality teachers that everyone expects them to be.

## **Context for the Study**

The study reported in this article examined the first year teaching experience through the lens of literacy teaching. Literacy teaching is often the target of broader political and societal concern about the effective preparation of teachers to teach children to read and write (Stevenson, 2012). Observing literacy teaching provided a focus for researcher observations, and provided a context where teaching challenges, strengths, and issues for beginning teachers constellated and provided a fruitful site for understanding the first year experience in more general terms.

Not unreasonably, everyone wants children to be able to read and write effectively, and they want teachers who can teach these skills. However, interest in teachers' capacity to teach literacy has intensified in recent years, with national and international assessments of literacy (e.g. PISA (Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman, & Buckley, 2010) and PIRLS (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012) providing governments and media with fodder that fuels public debate about the quality of teachers, and each nation's parochial need to win the global education race. As a consequence governments have implemented nationwide reforms designed to improve literacy and numeracy skills, for example, the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (DEST, 2005) and the national literacy assessments in Australia (ACARA, 2012), the National Primary Literacy Strategy and Schools White Paper in England (U.K Department of Education, 2010; UK Dept. for Children, 2003), and the No Child Left Behind policy in the USA (Education, 2001) and its successor Race to the Top (US Department of Education, 2012). Meanwhile, significant reviews have concluded that it is the teacher who is the single most influential in-school factor in improving student learning (Demie, 2012; Grisham, 2000; Hattie, 2009). Thus it is unlikely in-school educational

reforms will have positive impacts upon learning when not implemented alongside reforms to teacher preparation. In Australia, spurred on by a decline in Australia's performance in the international literacy tests as measured by PISA (Thomson et al., 2010), political calls for changes to current models of teacher education are increasingly prevalent (NSW Government, 2012; Pyne, 2012).

It is not only politicians who want changes to teacher preparation, researchers have long criticized the effectiveness of teacher preparation courses (Darling-Hammond & Haselkorn, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grisham, 2000) and have called for more investigation into the ways in which universities and schools may work together to improve the preparation of teachers (Helfrich & Bean, 2011; Lacina & Collins Block, 2011). Currently, effectiveness in teacher education in the university context is primarily measured through student evaluations of the unit and course experience. However, these are measures of student satisfaction with their university experience, rather than measures of their preparedness to teach in classrooms. Helfrich and Bean (2011) suggest that in order for teacher educators to better prepare teachers to teach effectively, teacher educators must be better informed about the transition from the university tutorial room to the classroom. Thus, any measure of the effectiveness of pre-service teacher preparation must include observation and interaction with new graduates as they make the transition into their first classroom. The study reported upon in this article sought to investigate this transition.

## **Description of the Study**

This was a qualitative study that followed 14 beginning teachers through their first year of teaching in government primary schools in an urban jurisdiction in Australia. They were all graduates from the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood or Primary. Specifically, the study investigated the transition from pre-service teacher to classroom teacher, focusing particularly on literacy teaching as the lens through which to observe their first year of teaching.

In order to capture a full picture of the first-year teacher's experience as a teacher, the teachers were observed and interviewed eight times over the first year of teaching, and once more in the first term of their second year of teaching. These interviews were supplemented with researcher field notes. The participants also completed three anonymous online surveys through the course of the study. The online surveys provided additional information to confirm, or otherwise, impressions that were being gleaned through the interview and observation data, and countered the possibility that research bias might result from selective observations by the researcher. A mix of Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions, which reflected the content of the interviews, were used, allowing for both corroboration and comparison to other data being collected.

In the data analysis, the audio of the interviews was listened to, alongside the transcripts, and the field notes were reread and broadly analysed against the original aim of the study. This enabled the identification of categories whilst simultaneously assigning data to those categories 'in a process of mutual fitting between data and categories' (Boulton & Hammersley, 2006). The anonymous survey responses were also reviewed and data assigned to the identified categories. From this iterative process, four main data categories emerged

- Beginning-teacher knowledge and literacy teaching,
- Teacher preparation,
- Beginning-teacher support,
- Beginning teachers' motivation and attrition.

The categories were then examined for significant metacodes and three broad themes surfaced: vision, frustration and knowledge. The data analysis supported the following key understandings from each theme:

**Vision:** Vision of self as a teacher, and the perceived role of teacher, remained stable throughout the 16 month study. However, half the participants felt their vision was unlikely to be realised in classroom teaching and had readjusted their intentions to remain in classroom teaching.

**Frustration:** This sample of first-year teachers were frustrated with their teaching, sometimes through internal struggles with their lack of confidence and lack of knowledge, but very often because of external conditions which paradoxically took away their professional autonomy whilst simultaneously providing them with little support.

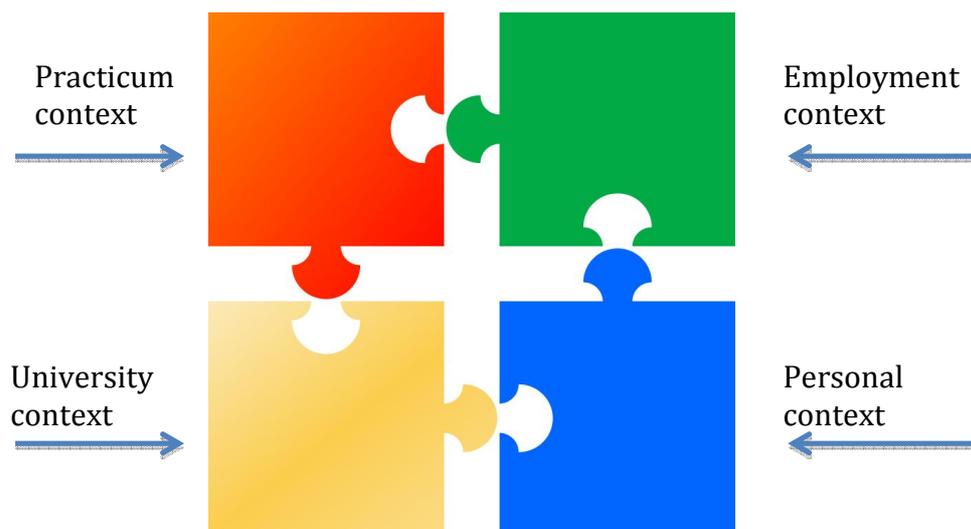
**Knowledge:** Teachers need to draw upon multiple sources of knowledge. Whilst the participants were able to draw upon some of those sources successfully, there were many knowledge gaps which impacted upon their first year experience as literacy teachers, most particularly their 'know how' knowledge — knowing how to convert teacher knowledge into day-to-day teaching.

## Discussion

There was a clear interplay between the themes of vision, frustration and knowledge. Participants were frustrated by an inability to enact their vision of teaching — an inability attributable both to systems not cognisant or not interested in their vision, and their own lack of professional knowledge. The consequence was teachers who were substantially dissatisfied with their teaching, as well as somewhat disillusioned with the profession. Importantly the interplay between the contexts revealed that teaching is not a generic and objective enterprise of meeting externally defined standards. Rather, the ways in which teaching is both experienced and enacted is situated in contexts that are both personal and social, with four distinct contexts emerging:

- The personal — linked to the reasons they entered teaching;
- University-based teacher preparation;
- Practicum experiences;
- First employment contexts — linked to school missions and actions.

Figure 1. represents a model of which positions teacher education as a shared and interlocking responsibility across these four contexts.



**Figure 1. A model of teacher preparation**

In this model, the contexts work in concert with one another as contiguous contexts. A neat alignment between contexts is rarely possible because of the complexity that is bound to occur within and across such broadly different social and personal planes. However, when the contexts operate in ways which are actively cognisant of the others, a connection is built which allows a continuity of experience, learning and conversation for the pre-service teacher and the beginning teacher. By positioning personal motivations, practicum experiences, university preparation and school missions as connected contexts, the model provides a ‘quadrumvirate’ of contexts that are contiguous, continuous and crucial to effective teacher preparation. The model presents teacher education as a shared responsibility and a continuous endeavour, and responds not only to the findings in this study, but also to the observations of others (e.g. Dolan, 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2001) who lament the lack of continuity that exists between the phases of teacher education. Importantly, the model is constructed from a fundamental position that the journey into teaching begins before teacher preparation commences, and continues beyond the completion of formal teacher preparation.

In the following section a vignette of one participant’s experiences is presented as an introduction to the ways in which these four contexts were observed in the study. This is then followed by a more detailed analysis of each of the four contexts (personal motivations, practicum experiences, university preparation and school missions), with reference to further data from the study.

### **Ursula’s Story**

Ursula’s story (all names are pseudonyms) demonstrates the importance of alignment across the four contexts. When applied to specific circumstances in this way, the model makes gaps and misalignments visible. Ursula went into teaching to make a difference to the children who struggle with literacy. Having struggled herself in the junior years of primary school she wanted to be the person who would make a difference for these children. Ursula had developed a literacy unit of work as an assessment piece in her university literacy unit. It was an approach that sought to develop literacy skills explicitly and in context, within an integrated unit. It had been graded highly by her university lecturer and she had had the opportunity to implement it on one of her practicum experiences. In her initial interview Ursula reflected on the unit of work she had developed at university and had consequently

taught on her practicum, *'Those kids, the work that they produced was top notch so, and I mean they understood by the end. That unit showed me how big a difference direction in a program can make.'* However Ursula's teaching colleague in her first job did not like what Ursula had planned. She felt it focused on unnecessary skills for Kindergarten children — the same skills that Ursula felt were crucial to getting children off to a good start at school, and which were key to her vision of the teacher she wanted to be.

*She [her mentor and teaching partner] hated it. She hated it all. And she's very much... this is rubbish how you're doing this unit 'cause kindy's don't need to know this or that, and she bagged out the whole program.*

Instead Ursula's teaching team pursued a 'letter of the week' approach to literacy which Ursula felt lost with, *'That's why I'm feeling a little overwhelmed at the moment 'cause now I second guess everything from University, because it's not like 'letter of the week' is an approach we did'.*

Throughout the year Ursula continued to reminisce about the approach she had examined at university and implemented successfully on her practicum. She became concerned that she was beginning to teach in ways which compromised her beliefs and that she would not be able to change in the future, and that she would not become the teacher she had hoped she would. For Ursula, alignment between her personal visions, her university experience and practicum experience had helped her develop into a confident graduate, but misalignment in the school context reduced her confidence substantially. This was one experience in a number through her first year that broke Ursula's spirit, and she was concerned it could not be mended and she was looking to fulfill that spirit in a different educational setting, not a school classroom.

Researchers note that practices observed by beginning teachers in school classrooms are given status above both theory and practices gained in the university tutorial classrooms (Allen, 2009) where it is observed that professional knowledge about learning and teaching gained at university is subsumed by the practices of colleagues within three years (Smith & Moore, 2006). Using the model described here, we can understand that phenomenon. If knowledge built in the university context sits alone, and is not aligned with the knowledge built in the other contexts, then it is abandoned. The stronger its alignment with personal motivations, with the practicums the teachers have experienced, and the schools they work in, the more likely it is that university knowledge will be applied in classrooms. The following section describes each of the contexts in more detail, with reference to both the literature and the experiences of the teachers in this study.

## **Investigating the Contexts**

### ***Personal Context***

Personal context is foundational for effective and satisfied teachers. However, this study found it to be the least acknowledged in the first year of teaching, and it is recognised in the literature as being the least investigated (Korthagen, 2004). The beginning teachers in this study did not report being engaged by their schools in discussions about their own beliefs about teaching, and their motivations. Indeed, they, like the teachers reported in other studies (Haggarty, Postlethwaite, Diment, & Ellins, 2011; Hagger, Mutton, & Burn, 2011; McIntyre, Hagger, & Wilkin, 1994), appeared to be employed as 'empty' and then filled with generic system requirements upon their induction. Ursula's story gives an insight into the importance of the personal in the education of teachers. A lack of personal fulfillment is prompting Ursula to reconsider teaching as a career.

Most teachers go into teaching for altruistic and intrinsic reasons (Alexander, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2008). The teachers in this study were no different, however, each individual's motivations differ subtly

from others', and they impact upon the kind of teacher they want to be, and the kind of knowledge they require to be that teacher. Macy, for example, was motivated to become a teacher because of her own difficulties at school. Her own experience as a dyslexic learner resulted in a strong desire to focus on those learners in her class. She measured her success by how well she was managing those learners.

Vicki was motivated to ensure all learners achieved to their highest potential and was keen to ensure all classroom activity was directed to achieving that end. She was determined not to waste her learners' time with activities that were not proven to be effective. Vicki needed knowledge and experiences to help her pragmatise these visions.

Cate's motivations for teaching were simple: she liked children and thought she would be quite good at working with them. When she found herself disliking her students, Cate's commitment to teaching faltered, along with her self-belief. Cate needed knowledge that would make her students likeable again, and that involved doing teaching that engaged them and targeted their learning needs.

Those preparing, inducting and supporting beginning teachers should be aware of the core significance of the personal, and be aware that each individual needs to develop professional knowledge, both for practice and in practice, that aligns with their personal motivations for teaching. Positioning the personal as central in this model responds to Korthagen's (2004, p. 94) call to broaden our understanding of the good teacher, and 'counterbalance the somewhat frightening emphasis on specific aspects, such as competencies'.

### *University Context*

Teachers enter teaching degrees already reasonably sure they want to do teaching. They have had past positive experiences with children, and now have come to university to get the official paper that will allow them to teach. They expect they will also learn something more about the professional demands of teaching. The participants in this study all did well in their university preparation. However, the production of an effective, reflective and informed teacher graduate does not automatically translate into the delivery of an effective, reflective and informed classroom teacher. Frieda reflected on the university-school disconnect: *'It feels a bit like you leave Uni and you sort of... it's like when you leave school and you go to Uni and nothing you did at school I guess matters as much, I think you get very disconnected very quickly.'*

University learning is usually posited as 'theory' as opposed to the 'practice' they expect to learn in the classroom. As Hagger et al. (2011, p. 400) observe, 'One profound challenge is that of developing expertise in aspects of teaching essentially inaccessible to student-teachers, however well integrated they are'. Others (Cope & Stephen, 2001; Day, 1998) argue that universities must work harder to close the gap. The data in this study showed that there were indeed knowledge gaps that could reasonably have been expected to be filled in their university degree. Rose was very critical of aspects of her teacher preparation at the beginning of her first year:

*I found myself really, really frustrated a lot of the time at uni, because I felt like so much of it was pointless. I hope that's OK to say. Because it was like the whole time I knew I had so much to learn but like most semesters there would be maybe one or two classes, out of the four, that I felt like were teaching me things I was going to need to be a teacher, kind of thing.*

The model helps us to understand the importance of alignment and coherence in the development of teacher knowledge if it is to be converted into effective teacher practice and improved student learning. The participants were well disposed towards the literacy theory

and practice they received in their university context and were often keen to apply that knowledge in their practicums and in their first classrooms as qualified teachers. This reflects the findings of McElhone et al. (2009) who observed it was the teachers who had had at least one practicum experience where they were able to implement some of the literacy practices taught in their teacher education programs who were able to enact their vision of literacy teaching when in the classroom (McElhone, Hebard, Scott, & Juel, 2009). However, many of the participants experienced the same disconnect between university informed teaching and the teaching they were expected to do in the classroom that Ursula had experienced. Although they had felt strong and confident about how to teach literacy, many were then placed in schools where they were not allowed to teach literacy in that manner. Without the opportunity to apply university knowledge in other contexts it is difficult for beginning teachers to achieve the alignment. The participants in this study did not expect the university context would give them all the knowledge they required. Bea's reflection supports the importance of contingency between the university and school contexts:

*It's almost as if you have to be teaching it in a prac or an internship to really take it on board otherwise you don't remember it.*

They acknowledged that knowledge would need to come from different contexts — they just could not see that shared responsibility for the development of their learning occurring. Ultimately, universities alone cannot prepare beginning teachers for the realities of school. However, they can be an integral part of the process when they find a contingency with the personal motivations of the pre-service teachers and the professional contexts those teachers find themselves working in. Universities cannot operate in isolation from what happens in schools. We do beginning teachers no favours when we do not connect university learning to the other contextual influences on their teaching.

### *Practicum Context*

University courses most usually respond to the perceived theory–practice gap with the inclusion of practicum experiences, and certainly there is a strong perception that this time in schools is advantageous during a degree. However, the practicums experienced by the participants in this study had no quality control. As pre-service teachers they were randomly assigned mentor teachers and schools. Very often there are not enough placements for pre-service teachers, and teachers in schools are cajoled and pressured to take them on. Thus, mentoring teachers are of all qualities and have varying motivations. These are not uncommon conditions around Australia (NSW Government, 2012) and internationally (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012).

Lacina and Collins Block (2011, p. 345) found in their review of effective teacher preparation programs that one key message is to 'make field experiences more consistent and more closely tied to program philosophy, programmatic vision and content presented in campus courses'. Yet, the practicum experiences in the participants' degree had no requirement that they see or teach the topics they were studying concurrently in their university course. Matt recounted the following from his own practicum experience:

*You try to bring it in to your prac but it's hard and I think I had this problem with my Language Ed assignment [a sequence of writing lessons] — what was happening in the classroom didn't match what we were doing in Language Ed. ....at times it felt a little bit like a square peg in a round hole sort of thing.*

On occasion, the pre-service teachers in this study finished their practicum reporting they had seen little effective literacy teaching. Ursula claimed she had not seen any effective literacy programming on her practicums,

*I've just never seen direction with literacy. I mean that's my one thing that I want to do for myself as well as those kids, I need a direction as to where we're going in the*

*term. And yes what to cover, but how are we getting there, and why are we getting there, for what purpose, and how are the kids going to put this together in the end. ... I've never seen that, any prac, not internship. It's really disappointing that in four years of university, haven't seen it in practice but true story.*

It is crucial that there is sufficient cooperation between the university and practicum contexts to allow pre-service teachers to build aligned knowledge: knowledge for practice and knowledge in practice. This is difficult to achieve whilst there remains little connection between university lecture theatres and school practicums. Patently, schools and universities must build much closer collaborations; not to have schools stepping in to fill perceived gaps, but schools working together with universities to strengthen teacher knowledge and practice. This requires a deliberately structured link between the university and practicum contexts. When this occurs, both the university teacher educator and the mentoring teacher become responsible for paying attention to all domains of teacher knowledge. This helps beginning teachers build alignment into their professional knowledge in different contexts. The model offered here provides a way forward for negotiating university–school partnerships, built fundamentally upon a careful matching of beliefs between all parties (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1999).

### *Employment Context*

A beginning teacher's first school is crucial to the journey of becoming the teacher they want to become; it is where the beginning teachers decide if they like the final destination. Flint et al. (2010) observed that teachers who went into schools that shared literacy teaching philosophies and principles with the teacher preparation program had the smoothest transition from university to school.

Observations across the 14 school sites revealed that many of the teachers in this study were not able to implement key literacy teaching strategies learned at university, or even successful strategies learned in other schools whilst on practicum. For example, all 5 of the participants who had been placed on Kindergarten classes were required to teach 'letter of the week' programmes which were in direct contrast to the principles of contextual and connected learning they had explored in detail in their university course. Many schools in this study did not acknowledge or make use of the knowledge the beginning teachers brought with them. Brian recounted one experience of trying to get support to implement a vision of cooperative reading groups,

*Take reading groups for example, I told one of my mentors what my plans were and she then spent the rest of the afternoon helping me set up a completely different idea. I guess my problem is that it's really hard to change older people's ideas so I just let them take over.*

Only one participant was asked to share her teaching ideas with colleagues - an approach to teaching writing which she had learned at university and this was after an Executive teacher had been impressed by a wall display of the children's writing. Ursula's experience with her teaching team was closer to the norm for the study participants,

*Headstrong, just a headstrong team where I constantly feel like the intern still, very much. One is eleven years out and one is 17 years out. They are just whopping out resources and saying we'll do this and we'll do that and it's very much taken as an insult if I say anything.*

It appeared, in the main, the schools did not see themselves as a part of the beginning teachers' professional whole, they saw themselves as the whole within which a beginning teacher would have to fit. When the knowledge built in schools is not aligned with the knowledge built in the other contexts, frustration and dissatisfaction occurs. As Haggarty et al. (2011, p. 939) observe, 'To make the fit beginning teachers are in danger of becoming, or

at least trying to become, the kind of teacher that fits with the school's/induction tutor's/department's notion of a good teacher'. This became a reality for many of the participants in this study, a reality that was frustrating and demoralising for many of them — to the extent that half the group were considering their commitment to the profession by the end of the 16 month study.

The beginning teacher's first school ideally should provide a context that allows for the implementation of knowledge which aligns with the knowledge built in other contexts. An important consideration for the achievement of aligned professional knowledge is a more careful matching of teachers with schools. Currently most government schools in Australia are staffed through a centralized human resources model. However, many states in Australia (Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia) have recently experimented with giving government school Principals autonomy in the construction of the staff profile for their schools. Principals are generally supportive of this initiative because they believe staffing is key to achieving good results. As one claimed in a media interview, 'It's always about staffing. Get this right and nothing else matters' (Stevenson, 2011). The model described in this article gives some guidance to 'getting staffing right'. Teachers need to 'match' their schools; they need to share visions, philosophies and practices in the first instance. Secondary matters such as operational and managerial challenges are more easily dealt with when there is an underlying matching of philosophies.

The model proposed here provides schools with an understanding of their crucial role in the development of teacher professional knowledge, and the development of teachers who will choose to remain in the profession. It positions schools as a continuation of a learning journey, not the end of one, nor the start of one. It also challenges schools to consider how the work they do, and the professional learning they pursue, is aligned to the work done in universities.

## Conclusion

The model presented in this article describes teacher education as contiguous, continuous and collaborative. This provides coherence for teachers over time and as they move between four contexts: the personal, the practicum, the university and the employer. The model prompts changes to the content, delivery and structure of teacher preparation and support. In particular, teacher knowledge and support should be aligned across all the contexts in which teachers are prepared and inducted. As well as alignment, the key feature of this model is the continuous and collaborative nature of effective teacher preparation, where all involved are working in cooperation with one another. Such is the complexity of teaching that one context alone cannot achieve effective teacher preparation. As this study has shown, even if university and practicum contexts find alignment, the employment context is crucial. The beginning teachers in this study were often frustrated by their school contexts, which did not always allow them to teach the way they had been hoping to. Ultimately, this is what threatened to push them out of teaching. As Flint et al. (2010) also observed in their study, those who were most effective, and most satisfied in their jobs, were those who were employed in schools that were most closely aligned with their own beliefs about teaching.

As well as actively considering and using the motivation and knowledge of their beginning teachers, employers should allow for continued connections between the beginning teachers and their university contexts. This will require changed attitudes and processes from both employers and universities. Rose articulated the importance of this continuity:

*Even though there were things about uni that frustrated me or whatever, like it still made me be a teacher and I still learnt so many valuable things and to have a complete break from it and then to be just..... in the big wide world of teaching and*

*to not be connected with those things anymore, I think — I don't know. I just like having that connection.*

Rose's comments also remind us of the importance of the university context in the development of teachers. As systems in England, and to some extent the US, move towards the devolvement of teacher education into schools and employers an important cog in the development of teachers is removed. This study serves as a reminder to Australian teacher education institutions or policy makers who may be considering relinquishing the role of the university in the development of teachers. Teachers value the learning they do in the university context, and understand its difference from what they learn in other contexts.

Who is responsible for developing quality teachers? Is it innate and personal, is it social and learned? Is it the job of universities or schools? These dichotomous positions are not helpful and not reflective of the journey to become a teacher. In this article a model for contiguous contexts is proposed: one that allows those invested in effective teacher preparation and induction, including beginning teachers themselves, to consider who their partners are and begin to build alignment into initiatives to prepare, support and develop quality teachers.

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