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## Wider Professional Experiences: The value of Pre-service Teachers Learning in Wider Contexts

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## Wider Professional Experiences: The value of Pre-service Teachers Learning in Wider Contexts

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*Abstract: Within teacher education, professional standards across Australian jurisdictions consistently note the importance of developing the ability to “engage professionally” with a community (QCT, 2009; AITSL, 2012). Paralleling this however, are calls for more ‘classroom’ time (Australian Government, 2012). This paper explores opportunities to provide students with experiences outside the classroom; both the space made available in professional standards and how this space is taken up in teacher education programs. It will be argued that wider professional experiences are crucial in developing future teachers who are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach.*

### Introduction

Professional standards across Australian jurisdictions consistently note the importance of developing the ability of pre-service teachers to ‘engage professionally’ with communities (QCT, 2006; AITSL, 2012). International research on effective teacher education (Zeichner, 1992; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) notes this ability as critical, suggesting that wide ranging field experiences or placements in settings *other than* schools or classrooms, accompanied by critically reflective pedagogies, can support graduates’ preparedness to work effectively with and for school communities. Paralleling such research however, are calls for more ‘classroom’ time (Australian Government, 2012) with promotion of internships in classrooms following extended periods of traditional practicum in schools.

Calls for reform of teacher education resonate across the globe, with differing responses. In Canada, there has been a noted growth in opportunities for diverse field placements, including international student-teaching practicums and service-learning in teacher education programs (Wiebe, 2012) in response to the 2006 policy document *Belonging, Learning and Growing: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Action Plan for Ethnocultural Equity* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006). This document, written in response to increasing issues regarding diversity and equity, advocated that “teacher education...must address student diversity in meaningful ways and provide more intensive and effective learning opportunities” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 1).

In Australia, the emerging National Curriculum, teaching standards and release of federal government reports on education have intersected in “a crucial point in our development as an educated nation” (Dinham, 2012, “Time for teachers to speak out”, para. 1). The *Review of Funding for Schooling* (Australian Government, 2011) goal of high-quality

schooling calls for “the development of creative, informed and resilient citizens who are able to participate fully in a dynamic and globalised world” (p. xiii). Engaging with the wider community is, then, a crucial element of meeting this goal as such a world cannot be realised within the vacuum of the classroom for either students or their teachers. The review notes the importance of community engagement as acknowledged in the following: “They [teachers] should also forge connections with parents and the community, as key partners in children’s learning and attitudes to school” (Australian Government, 2011, p. xix).

Furthermore, teachers with more holistic views of teaching and young people will be better equipped to negotiate and act on review findings around the equity gap and “complex interactions between factors of disadvantage” (Australian Government, 2011, p. xxi). Simultaneously however, at this federal level it is “more practical classroom experience” that is advocated to get the “best teachers and principals in every school” (Australian Government, 2012, p. 1).

Professional experiences within teacher education commonly take three main forms:

- Supervised professional experiences (in classrooms/schools, under direct supervision of registered teacher)
- Internships (in classrooms/schools with direction from registered teacher)
- Wider professional experiences (in ‘other settings’ for *educational purposes*)

It is the latter, ‘wider professional experiences’, particularly in settings other than the classroom, that are the focus of this paper. Such experiences, it will be argued, are crucial in developing future teachers who are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach. Whilst spending time in school may make pre-service teachers ‘school ready’, ‘learning to teach’ is only a part of ‘learning to be a teacher’ (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). The development of pre-service teachers confined to practice and reflection within the vacuum of the classroom narrows the scope of professional knowledge and risks teaching becoming a technical activity (Zeichner, 1992). Wider Professional Experiences (WPE), however, provide an opportunity for pre-service teachers to consciously engage with the moral, ethical and social issues involved in teaching and to develop, practice and reflect on their professional knowledge in a variety of contexts (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). The development of professional knowledge that extends beyond the classroom is critical to teachers to understand and “address student diversity in meaningful ways” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 1) in a “dynamic and globalised world” (Australian Government, 2011, p. xiii).

This paper presents an initial review of the positioning of WPE across Australian professional standards and teacher education programs. Using document analysis and initial interview data, the paper evaluates the positioning and representation of WPE from a variety of sources.

## Method

This paper investigates the place of WPE within teacher education, enacted through three parts. It begins with a review of the positioning of WPE within teacher education literature. This is supplemented with a review of the ways in which WPE are represented in accreditation guidelines, using a document review of national, state and territory teacher education accreditation standards to determine the dominant narrative of professional experience in teacher education.

Secondly, a desktop survey of 17 universities and 47 undergraduate teacher education programs was conducted to determine how WPE are framed within teacher education programs. A random sample of universities was selected for the desktop survey. The resulting sample was representative of each of the Australian university groupings (Group of

Eight, Australian Technology Network, Innovative Research Universities, Regional Universities Network, and nil grouping). The survey relied on publicly available information, namely program and subject outlines posted to institutional websites. While it is clear that there are obvious limitations looking only at these outlines, the purpose of this survey was to identify the extent to which WPE are represented in programs as a comparative starting point for investigating further the place of WPE in teacher education. These outlines represent the official and consistent aspects of the course as well as a ‘snapshot’ of the conceptual framework of a program, in this instance in what ways do teacher education programs engage with ideas about WPE.

Finally, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with accreditation personnel who participate in the accreditation of teacher education programs. These two state bodies were selected due to inclusion of WPE in accreditation standards and that the bodies accredit over half of the courses analysed within the desktop survey. The focus of interviews was to elicit views of accreditation personnel of WPE. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes and was taped and summarised. Interview summaries were returned to interviewees for checking to ensure accuracy. Summaries were then analysed using a process of categorising which led to identification of key themes regarding views of WPE.

### **Wider Professional Experiences: an Opportunity for Transformation**

Despite a call for more ‘classroom’ time, literature suggests that there is a historical awareness that classroom time alone is not sufficient. Zeichner and Melnick (1996) advocate for more experiential learning to foster critical reflexivity, which “help[s] prospective teachers examine themselves and their attitudes toward others” and “provide the kind of contact that is needed to overcome negative attitudes towards culturally different students, their families and communities” (p.178). ‘Classroom’ time may serve to strengthen some aspects of teacher preparation, however it is not a panacea for all potential deficits and in some ways necessarily neglects key qualities needed by future teachers. As Banks et al. (2005) affirm:

technical competence in teaching skills..., solid knowledge of subject matter, and knowledge of how to teach are essential but not sufficient for effective teaching. Teachers’ attitudes and expectations, as well as their knowledge of how to incorporate the cultures, experiences, and needs of their students into their teaching significantly influence what students learn and the quality of their learning opportunities. (p. 243)

In Australia, this scenario is especially relevant for rural and remote contexts. The challenge for these contexts is highlighted as one in which the practicum model itself may in fact be unsuitable. Such a model:

typically narrows the students’ attention to the classroom...This model is problematic for rural schools in particular, where the ‘classroom focus’ is at odds with a view of rural teaching that locates the teacher in the broader community. Prospective teachers for rural areas need to develop an understanding of the links between the classroom, the school, and the wider rural community – a different set of issues from those that the traditional models of a teaching practicum can provide. (White & Reid, 2008, p. 5)

Butcher et al. (2003) argue for the positioning of community engagement at the centre of debates about how teacher education should be reformed, noting that pre-service teachers’ efficacy for community engagement is an antecedent to their ability to participate effectively within future school communities. There is a clear imperative to ensure pre-service teachers are personally and professionally prepared to address the needs of communities in which they begin their teaching career (Ferfolja, Whitton & Sidoti, 2010; White & Reid, 2008). The

inclusion of settings other than classrooms in teacher education programs, serves to broaden real life experiences and understandings of diversity (Carrington, 2000) and are necessary to “better prepare teachers who are both ‘community ready’ as well as ‘school and classroom ready’” (White, Bloomfield & Le Cornu, 2010, p. 191).

Furthermore, the literature promotes the view that inclusion beyond the classroom should be structured as purposeful workplace learning. Ensuring critical reflexivity is essential as: “Field experiences alone without adequate reflection or critique may have little effect on attitudes” (Butcher et al., 2003, p. 113). This suggests that WPE in teacher education require not only a secure place in programs, but a robust pedagogical framework through which to optimise learning through preparation and structured reflection (Billett, 2009).

### **Dominant Narrative in Teacher Education: a Call to the Classroom**

Within teacher education, the dominant refrain is that time in classrooms should be prioritised. Over a sustained period, government reports include statements such as: “practicums were not given sufficient priority or time by Universities” (Crowley, 1998, p. 183); and “there ought to be more opportunity for trainee teachers to undergo longer periods of practical work in schools. Reforms to teacher training should include a greater emphasis on in-school classroom training experience” (DEST, 2003, p. 137). A review of the standards of Australian state accreditation documents echoes this dominant classroom narrative. Various state registration documents show a consistent focus on professional experiences in school settings and limited mention of wider professional experience. Classroom experience is prioritised, with time spent in schools considered an effective orientation to the teaching profession. These ‘calls to the classroom’ are as much about developing skills as about socialisation into the profession.

#### **Classroom as a Priority**

While there is currently some variation in the number of professional experience days required in pre-service teacher education programs across Australian states, the introduction of national standards will mean a more consistent approach. Standard 5.2 of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures* (2011) outline in national guidelines that programs “must include no fewer than 80 days of well-structured, supervised and assessed teaching practice in schools in undergraduate and double-degree teacher education programs and no fewer than 60 days in graduate entry programs” (p. 15). The New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) Initial Teacher Education supplementary document, *Document 6: Professional Experience* (2009), sets the minimum total number of days of professional experience as 80 days for a four or five year undergraduate program and 45 days for a one year graduate program. It is stipulated that “90% or more of the days must be in schools with no more than 10% of the days being in educational settings other than schools (if applicable)” (NSWIT, 2009, p. 6). The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) *Program Approval Guidelines for Pre-service Teacher Education* (2011) states professional experiences:

will normally represent not less than 100 days of professional experience, with a minimum of 80 days’ *supervised experience in schools* and other equivalent educational settings. Professional experiences in one-year graduate-entry programs will normally include not less than 75 days of

professional experience with a minimum of 55 days' *supervised experience in schools* and other equivalent settings. (emphasis in original, p. 23)

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (2007) mandates 60-100 days of supervised teaching practice for undergraduate programs and 45-60 days for postgraduate programs. These recommendations align with the international trend for more school-based experiences in teacher education programs (Musset, 2010; Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012).

Mention of wider professional experience is absent in the national pre-service teacher accreditation standards. The AITSL *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures* (2011) refers mainly to school partnerships and makes no specific mention of WPE. For example, Standard 5.4 outlines that professional experience should enable pre-service teachers to have an “appreciation of the diversity of students and communities which schools serve (e.g. rural and metropolitan settings, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Indigenous communities, etc.)” (AITSL, 2011, p. 15). This statement appears to hint at the importance of WPE but not to explicitly suggest that these are a necessary inclusion in Australian teacher education programs. There is no detail of settings other than schools for professional experience, though Standard 5.6 does state that supervised teaching practice should be “undertaken mostly in a recognised Australian school setting over a substantial and sustained period that is relevant to an authentic classroom environment” (AITSL, 2011, p. 16). The inclusion of the word ‘mostly’ seems to imply scope for some wider professional experience but that would need to be clarified with the accrediting institution.

Where wider professional experience is acknowledged, it is contextualised as a lesser priority than classroom experience. The QCT *Program Approval Guidelines for Pre-service Teacher Education* (2011) states the professional experiences embedded in pre-service teacher education programs *will include* “supervised professional experiences” and *may include* “wider field experiences” and/or “internships” (p. 23). The NSWIT *Initial Teacher Education Document 6: Professional Experience* (2009) states “professional experience in schools must be the central activity of any initial teacher education professional experience program. Professional experience in educational settings other than schools may provide a valuable contribution to a professional experience program” (p.1). The rationale for settings other than schools “would relate to the nature of the initial teacher education program or the teaching area/s the pre-service teacher is undertaking (e.g. industrial technology, science, agricultural science, primary)” (NSWIT, 2009, p. 1). The Victorian Institute of Teaching (2007) does refer to non-school settings but with restrictions as the supervisor “will preferably be a registered teacher or a person eligible to be registered as a teacher” and “the majority of the supervised teaching practice must occur in Australian primary and/or secondary school settings” (p. 13). This seems to focus on academic learning in a variety of school settings rather than variation in learning experiences in a range of settings. All standards in the *Tasmanian Professional Teachings Standards Framework* (2007) relate to students developing only within the context of an approved pre-service teacher education course or supervised internship.

There is acknowledgement in the various state pre-service program approval guidelines of the period of uncertainty as Australia moves to a national framework. The Western Australian *Initial Teacher Education Programs Accreditation Processes and Standards* (2009) is endorsed as an interim document, “until such time as a national framework is adopted by all Australian teacher regulatory authorities, the College has adopted these interim standards for Western Australia” (p. 1) and makes no mention of practicums in anything other than schools. Similarly, the Northern Territory document, *The Standards, Guidelines and Process for the Approval of Initial Teacher Education Programs: Draft Working Paper* (2008), notes that the Board will adopt national accreditation. It refers to professional experience in “schools and other settings” (p. 4) but doesn’t specify what

these may include. The Board does state that “teacher supervision must be in place at all times” (Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory, 2008, p.5).

The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (2011) states that it “will continue to work with South Australian teacher education providers to implement the national approach” (Teacher Education – Accreditation section, para. 2). The qualifications requirements of the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (2011) make no mention of experiences other than school settings stating minimum prescribed qualifications include “a practical student teaching component undertaken at a school or pre-school...the duration of the practical student teaching component's duration must be at least 45 days” (Registration – Qualifications Requirements section, para. 2).

National and state registration policies influence the structure and practices of teacher education programs and the knowledge, skills and attitudes of pre-service teachers enrolled in them. Whilst these policies provide a mandate for a particular number of days, there is little guidance regarding good practice for enhancing practicum *quality* or WPE. As previously discussed, time in schools alone is insufficient to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of teachers to address student diversity in meaningful ways. The lack of attention paid to WPE in national policies and guidelines, then, is a serious limitation to the development of practicums supported by pedagogical frameworks that encourage critical reflexivity. It is evident that if state registration authorities are referring to national guidelines and those guidelines make minimal reference to wider professional experience, it is unlikely to be prioritised in future teacher education programs. As such, good practice in WPE is a ‘grey area’ that may influence uptake and implementation.

### Types of WPE

Within the state registration documents the Queensland and New South Wales were the only registration authorities to mention WPE, the types of WPE contexts recorded are analogous. The QCT *Program Approval Guidelines for Pre-service Teacher Education* (2011) specifies that:

The experiences should take a variety of forms and be undertaken in a variety of settings, for example: tutoring in adult literacy programs, industry training, migrant education, exchange visits to schools in other countries, youth camps, sports coaching. The experience should clearly focus on a teaching role. (p. 23)

The NSWIT Initial Teacher Education supplementary document, *Document 6: Professional Experience* (2009), states:

Appropriate settings other than schools may include, but are not limited to, sport and recreation centres, homework centres, museums and galleries, early childhood centres, disability services centres and industry. The focus of experiences in these settings would still be on observing good teaching practice, student behaviour and learning, working with individual students or groups of students, and possibly trialling teaching approaches or collaboratively teaching. (p. 1)

While only two state registration authorities make mention of wider professional experience, a review of teacher education programs indicates a different priority. While state registration policies are narrow in focus, the teacher education institutions appear to value wider professional experience as pre-service teachers are socialised into the culture of teaching. One of the reasons that institutions view WPE as important is that WPE link educational practice to the larger community of which it is a part. This is discussed in the following section.

### Extent of Wider Professional Experiences: 47 programs

The review of the extent to which WPE are included in teacher education programs in 2012 suggests a clear valuing of WPE. Spaces regarding WPE can be defined in three ways: ‘presences’ are mandatory WPE, ‘partial presences’ offer only optional WPE, and ‘absences’ denote where no reference is made to settings other than educational settings. WPE are present in programs across ten institutions, partially present in programs across five institutions and absent in only two institutions (see Figure 1). Of the 17 institutions surveyed, 15 included either mandatory or optional WPE, five of these offering both mandatory and further optional experiences.

Within this analysis a compatibility or ‘blurring’ between WPE and internships emerged. Whereas internships are commonly defined as professional experiences in classrooms or schools with direction from registered teacher, within teacher education program documentation internships were more commonly defined by the duration of the professional experience. Whilst professional experiences in international locations or varied community contexts are defined as WPE for the purpose of this paper, such experiences were included within internship options in some institutions. As such, within this analysis, internship options in international locations or varied community contexts are defined as WPE.

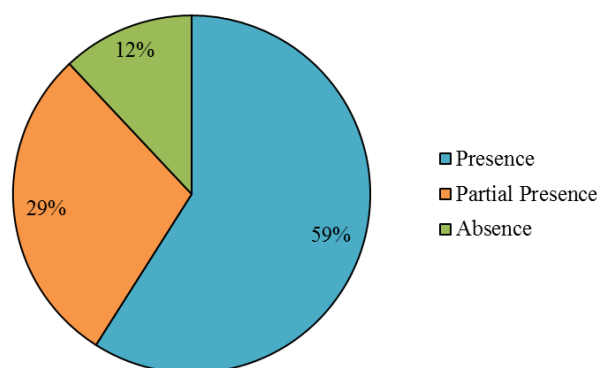


Figure 1: Visibility of WPE Across 17 Institutions.



### Mandatory WPE

The nature of WPE presence varies. Contexts considered appropriate are commonly defined as ‘*non-school based*’, ‘*community-based*’, or ‘*other professional related activities*’. Examples given across two institutions indicate a variety of contexts:

*particular examples include galleries, museums, field studies centres, and zoos, and, settings...include state, regional, and cluster offices; professional associations; union offices, child care or kindergarten management committees or parent and community organisations; local and regional press offices; TAFE and other RTO providers; health and social advocacy agencies; professional networks; parent associations; and migrant services.*

In the latter instance, the onus of placements is to ‘*be able to provide work experience that will help broaden students’ knowledge of, and experience*’, indicating a clear purpose to extend understanding and life experiences (Carrington & Saggars, 2008).

Five institutions included WPE as purposeful workplace learning, accompanied by structured reflection calling for pre-service teachers to integrate workplace learning with academic learning. This is evident in assessment outlines that require pre-service teachers to “reflect on” and “evaluate” their experience. For example, mandatory experience within a subject with explicit intentionality of critical reflexivity involves:

***critical examination*** of relationships and modes of communication within classrooms and other learning environments. ***Unit learning and assessment tasks will require students to reflect on and analyse their broader beliefs about teaching and learning, and the role of language and communication, and to extend their thinking about these aspects beyond school settings to learning within the community.***

Five institutions indicated no structured learning, indicating only a requirement to complete of a set number of hours, varying from 10 to 50. Such requirements are characterised by reflective aims, but are not clearly situated within structured preparation or reflection (Billet, 2009), which is given perfunctory consideration at best:

*Includes 20 hours of community service within a volunteering organisation. Students write a Community Service reflection.*

Often these presences indicate purposeful workplace learning, however fail to indicate how elements of critical reflexivity are incorporated to broaden pre-service teachers’ knowledge and experience.

### Optional WPE

Ten institutions included provisions for optional WPE. Five offered optional WPE as well as mandating WPE and five offered only optional WPE. Options can be identified in three categories: options for service learning within subject assessment modes, options for international professional experience (often referred to as internships in institutional documentation), or provisions for community contexts within internships options.

In one institution an inclusive education subject offered a service learning pathway for assessment. Purposeful workplace learning is encouraged as “*service reinforces and strengthens the learning in the academic unit on inclusive education, and the learning reinforces and strengthens the service*”. This option includes 20 hours of community service culminating in a Service-Learning Reflection log.

In another institution internships in contexts beyond schools are actively encouraged:

*Placements in diverse non-school settings are encouraged. Field Studies Centres, isolated Aboriginal communities in the NSW, Northern Territory and Western Australia and international locations are offered as possible settings for the Internship experience.*

This option also frames WPE as purposeful workplace learning accompanied by structured reflection:

*A professional reflection portfolio outlining students' approach to educational practice, personal professional development and goals for on-going self-review will be presented at a formal conference after their final Internship experience in relation to the Graduate Teaching Standards.*

International professional experiences generally requires pre-service teachers to focus beyond the classroom to engage with the new community and country in which they are placed, in this way serving to broaden pre-service teachers' real life experiences. Only one program, however, indicates a requirement to complete reflective practices while on placement.

In summary, while not being positioned as imperative, WPE are valued in the majority of institutions. Of the 47 programs, only five across two institutions indicated no offering of WPE. The visibility of WPE in programs indicates that it is positioned as worthwhile and appears to be actively encouraged in a number of programs across institutions. Within those programs incorporating WPE, community engagement is foregrounded in experiences expected to be in 'community settings' or 'community-based' in some way. This presence, however, is problematic as purposeful frameworks of structured reflection that would serve to optimise the experience (Butcher et al., 2003) and ensure critical reflexivity (Billet, 2009) are not consistent. Both aspects are necessary to develop an understanding of the links between the classroom, the school, and needs of the wider community (Ferfolja et al., 2010; White & Reid, 2008). Without this intentionality, WPE may do little to facilitate transformation of teachers and their attitudes towards others (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996), particularly the communities they engage with.

### **The Future of WPE: Views from Accreditation Agencies**

Views from accreditation agencies were analysed across three main categories: need and purpose for WPE, implementation factors around situating WPE in teacher education programs, and the value and future of WPE. From these categories, significant themes emerged.

#### **Shifting the Narrative in Teacher Education: a Call to Move Beyond the Classroom**

In alignment with the teacher education programs, the registration authorities valued WPE for varying purposes. In particular, WPE provided opportunities to expand pre-service teachers' knowledge of teaching, learning, students and themselves, as well as a way to respond to the diverse personal and educational histories of pre-service teachers.

Agency A described WPE as "*essentially those opportunities to explore other ways that teaching occurs and also other areas that influence the young people's lives within our rooms*". As such, WPE were considered as "*an opportunity for universities to broaden students' outlook on those, those areas that sort of influence teaching and the role of teachers*" (Agency A). The purpose of 'broadening' "*might have originally been to get insight and empathy to work with agencies*" (Agency A) or, as suggested by Agency B, for pre-service teachers to come to 'know' students and the factors that influence learning. Agency B stressed the importance of pre-service teachers "*seeing children and adolescents in*

*different context[s]...[and] to understand students and how they develop*". In this way, WPE were positioned as providing an opportunity to broaden pre-service teachers' perspectives and come to understand the factors beyond the classroom that can influence teaching and learning. The importance of 'knowing' student backgrounds cannot be understated (Comber, 1998), however, as noted by the two agencies, pre-service teachers must also be cognisant of their own backgrounds and the resultant influence on classroom teaching (Chisholm, 1994). The need for WPE, then, was situated in regards to 'life experience', within which a dual purpose emerged: 'life experience' as a mechanism to broaden pre-service teachers' perspectives, and 'life experience' as a catalyst for challenging pre-service teachers' preconceptions about teaching.

For both Agency A and Agency B the need and purpose for WPE was linked to ensuring teachers are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach. The development of such understandings in pre-service teachers was linked to the 'life experience' of these students. Life experience was positioned as an accumulated resource, with WPE providing an opportunity for building such a resource. As Agency A explained, in some institutions, WPE can be "*more of an experience rather than tightly linked to curriculum*". There was also an acknowledgement that life experience can be resource that may already be 'accumulated' by many pre-service teachers:

*I think we've seen such a change in who is enrolled in teacher education programs, particularly like postgraduate ones, and we see a lot more career change people and a lot more people that are parents and so forth, and so they've actually got a lot of that life experience. (Agency A)*

WPE, then, can be positioned as catalysts for challenging assumptions about teaching and students that may accompany life experiences. In particular, Agency B focussed on minimising the replication of pre-service teacher's own experiences of schooling:

*There's even a broadened gap between their experience of their own schooling and what might exist at the time they go back into teacher education, so, I think that is a real issue. And I think one of the challenges then, for institutions, is to give exposure to the students early on in the program, and say 'Okay. This is the reality of modern day classrooms, despite your presumptions of what you might have and this is the reality.*

Agency B saw WPE as very much needed to challenge pre-service teachers' perception of the status quo and address the educational and personal histories that pre-service teachers bring to their study:

*It's meant as an opportunity to supplement it [the degree program] and perhaps even challenge the presumptions that teacher education students are starting to take about school students and education and schooling.*

Representing WPE as a catalytic 'life experience' that challenges pre-service teachers' assumptions aligns with Zeichner's (1996) key point on the importance of challenging attitudes, specifically examining and overcoming negative attitudes. This also raises an argument for critical reflexivity (Billet, 2009; Butcher et al., 2003) which would support pre-service teachers through this challenging experience and optimise the learning experience. This argument is explored further in the theme of good practice.

### Addressing the ‘Dominant Narrative’

There was consensus between agencies on the purpose of WPE to build key qualities needed by future teachers, however despite links to ‘settings other than the classroom’ justification returned to a focus on the classroom. Greater status was afforded to in-class experience rather than those beyond the classroom – and signifies a return to the dominant narrative of teacher education.

Agency A reinforced that, as a category of professional experience, WPE are “*designed to have that educational teaching focus*” with “*strong links to*” and “*emphasis on*” a teaching role, preferring a “*stronger link there to teaching and to that school-orientated experience*”. Agency B emphasised that WPE were viewed as a potential threat to the ‘core business’, or the “*true purpose*” of teacher education to focus on the classroom. For Agency B, negotiated provisions in state policy for WPE were seen as:

*reasonable middle ground...for formally recognising time outside of schools and a range of experiences, but concentrating on the true purpose of professional experience in teacher education, i.e. that it's about teacher students being in front of students, in classrooms, and more and more taking on the full range of duties of a classroom teacher and being assessed against the standards that relate to, and other requirements, that relate to a teacher education program.*

While some attention is afforded to teachers’ knowledge of how to cater to the needs of students (Banks et al., 2005), there was agreement between agencies on a clear link to the teaching role reminiscent of calls for technical competence, marginalising more “community ready” (White, Bloomfield & Le Cornu, 2010, p. 191) skills and wider community engagement. Whilst WPE were valued for the ‘life experience’ and knowledge development offered, such experiences were in tension with the “*true purpose*” (Agency B) of teacher education – that is, the development of technical skills or ‘learning to teach’. As outlined previously, ‘learning to teach’ is only part of ‘learning to be a teacher’ (LeCornu & Ewing, 2008) and pre-service teacher experiences beyond the vacuum of the classroom contribute to the development of future teachers who are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach. Navigating this tension is potentially one challenge to the implementation of WPE.

### Challenges to implementing WPE

WPE were clearly valued by both agencies, however dialogue around this value and its future implications varied. WPE emerged as something that is ‘good to have’, but may have a case to defend in more pragmatic conversations about regulatory authorities and minimum mandatory requirements. Challenges for the implementation of WPE were discussed by both agencies and can be categorised in three areas: time constraints within degree programs; the ‘grey area’ of good practice; and the rise of internships.

#### Time Constraints

Whilst WPE were considered valuable by the accreditation agencies, generally they spoke of inclusion in a four-year program as there is the time to structure experiences both within and outside of schools.

Agency A concluded “*there's merit to it [WPE] still being there*”, however reasoned that “*WPE seem to be more a part of undergraduate degrees with recent school leavers, within a four year degree there's more space and time for that development of all those good*

*things that need to part of teacher education*". Similarly, Agency B suggested that WPE are supplementary to a four-year degree program:

*I think that's the reasonable approach to take, and that's what I would urge institutions to consider, that it's part of the early stages of a teacher education program, if we're talking about a four year program, where teacher education students are given exposure to teaching in schools, and also exposure to the learners they're going to be dealing with. And that might mean understanding the developmental side of the sequence of learners and understanding the full range of different settings might assist them...give them exposure to settings that are complimentary to that and complimentary to their role as a teacher.*

Both noted a place for WPE in four year undergraduate programs however its place within graduate programs was not discussed. This leaves the place of WPE in graduate teacher education programs, which are becoming more common, unaddressed.

### **The 'Grey Area' of Good Practice**

For both agencies the value of WPE connected to the development of professional knowledge about teaching and learning. Agency B emphasised a 'teaching link' as there "needs to be a purposeful reason why" WPE are included as professional experience, indicating:

*Where teacher education students are understanding school students in a different context then it's actually going to add value to their preparation as a classroom teacher and give them another dimension I suppose to their teaching and learning strategies and knowledge, relating to young people and how they work, how they operate.*

Supporting pre-service teachers to understand the relationships between learning theories and professional experience is critical for teacher quality (Watson, 2005). As such, WPE are of value when supported by frameworks for purposeful and critical engagement in the professional context.

However, as revealed in the review of national and state policy documents, much of the guidance focussed on a minimum number of days rather than the development of pedagogical frameworks to support professional experience *quality*. This lack of guidance was commented on by Agency B:

*When you look at the national requirements, apart from the basic requirements – the number of days, and that was almost a given, I think, through the policy development process, a lot of the aspects about professional experience aren't even entertained at this point in the national document...There isn't a great deal of text around talking about 'good practice' in professional experience...We've urged AITSL to...develop some elaboration or guidelines or some text around professional experience that adds to the concept of the minimum number of 60 to 80 days in a program.*

For both agencies, good practice was a key implementation factor around situating WPE in teacher education programs. Requirements across both state bodies focussed on time spent in WPE, not intentionality or pedagogical frameworks, however both noted such aspects as expectations of good practice:

*Agency A: Universities that do include the wider professional experience as part of their professional experience component of the program they've shown strong links within the standards, so for example, they show, and they might get the students to actually complete either a piece of assessment or even just like a reflection or something around the standards... so they have*

*to show those strong links to those aspects of the professional standards... While there's no requirement for this [pedagogical framework], it sounds like good practice to me.*

*Agency B: That's an expectation that we have... there needs to be linkages, there needs to be a scaffolding in terms of the developing understanding of the teacher education students... it gives them [accreditation review panel] confidence in knowing the particular institution's approach to the professional experience program and how it's structured, the rationale behind it and also the linkages. So we do scrutinise that.*

These expectations of good practice support calls for such experiences to be grounded in critical reflexivity (Butcher et al., 2003) and solid pedagogical frameworks (Billet, 2009). Complexity arises however when compared with results from the review of extent of WPE in teacher education programs. As already noted, there is an absence of structured reflection in mandatory representations of WPE. In contrast, agency comments suggest that while not required, linkages of some kind are expected and scrutinised. This suggests that the nature of such frameworks and what actually constitutes good practice is a 'grey area' that deserves further exploration. Intentionality is made visible in some programs, however there appears to be varying degrees of what scaffolding is or requires. This is further complicated by tensions between expectations and responsibilities. Agency B states "*the main position of the [agency] is not to be dictating the structure of professional experience, and to almost encourage some sort of diversity and different approaches in terms of that*", noting the agency does not get the level of detail to scrutinise specific frameworks, nor do they require this information. The uncertainty surrounding this 'grey area' of good practice may contribute to the (limited) uptake of WPE within teacher education programs. To highlight the value of WPE national or state guidelines for frameworks for purposeful and critical engagement may be beneficial for universities.

### **Rise of Internships**

Within teacher education programs there has been increasing focus on and uptake of internships. In contrast to findings from the review of WPE in programs that found compatibility between WPE and internships, both agencies considered these types of professional experiences as distinct, yet for different reasons.

Agency A considered the purposes of WPE and internships to be divergent: *An internship is that, you know, **transition to a teaching role**, you know, within what we would call an acceptable setting that, you know, that requires teacher registration, **whereas wider field is something different**. We're sort of asking students to have that opportunity to have that **broader context** where they might see a teaching role in a whole range of areas that might influence, you know, their students... I think they need to be considered as different things.*

Agency A positions internships as an experience that is explicitly linked to and directly transferable to teaching, whereas WPE are something "*broader*" where links to teaching are more implicit.

For Agency B divergent issues similarly contrasted the purposes of the two categories of professional experience. As already established, Agency B saw the purpose of WPE to be challenging pre-service teachers' assumptions and, as such, is better placed early in programs, whereas internships are positioned as consolidation of a program, aligning with Agency A's positioning of internships as "*transition to a teaching role*". A tension between WPE and internships was highlighted by Agency B:

*I think the intent of the internships is that it comes at the end of a program and it would be in a classroom, where the focus is on moving more closely to the full range of duties of a classroom teacher. So, it probably doesn't mesh with the concept of accepting time in settings other than schools.*

In alignment with earlier positioning of the skill set WPE develop, being “community ready” (White, Bloomfield & Le Cornu, 2010, p. 191) and engaging with the wider community is marginalised in the “full range of duties of a classroom teacher”. This adds to the discrete positioning of the two categories, and reinforces contrary representations of their value to teacher education programs.

Furthermore, the value of internships as a ‘consolidating experience’ threatens to over-shadow the value of WPE. Agency A positions internships as a rising ‘threat’ to WPE. Cited as “more common these days...than wider field experiences across most programs”, internships are positioned as a preferred choice and “universities have that ability to structure the professional experience how they see fit and a lot of institutions are choosing the internship at the moment”. The future of WPE, then, may be dependent on negotiation of the tensions between internships and WPE when conceptualised as distinct types of professional experiences.

### **Negotiating Tensions: The Future of WPE**

For the value of WPE to be realised there is a need to negotiate the tensions created through positioning of the types of professional experiences. Agency B highlighted the negotiation between time in classroom and outside; and value of both:

*The prime focus of professional experience in a teacher education program is equipping the teacher education students with the skills of a classroom teacher and also giving an opportunity for those skills to be demonstrated, the standards to be demonstrated and to be assessed, but I think there is a, certainly in [this state], a strong view that we need to take on board a whole range of practices and there is value in structured observations [and] there is value in some time in other settings.*

Agency B concluded that “it’s by no means a mandatory requirement, but it’s a formal acknowledgement of the fact that I think the education community here in [this state] viewed that, you know, those experiences are valued.” Despite this perceived value, it is suggested that a conversation in support of mandatory WPE in emerging national standards are moot: “There is value in some time in other settings. The issue will become though, not so much the...provision, but whether or not it’s counted in the minimum number of days.”

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented an analysis of different perspectives of WPE, highlighting the value and tensions of implementation. Whilst literature notes WPE as an opportunity for transformation, to be transformative such experiences must be supported by robust pedagogical frameworks. The dominant narrative in teacher education and limited guidance on what constitutes good practice in WPE may influence the variable uptake of WPE in teacher education programs. However, the analysis also revealed that teacher education institutions and accreditation bodies perceive value in WPE.

To support future development of WPE a range of issues and challenges are in focus. Given the dominant narrative in teacher education, both nationally and internationally, teacher education institutions need to highlight the value of WPE supported by frameworks for purposeful and critical engagement. Teacher education courses which include WPE

supported by such pedagogical frameworks can be seen to be philosophically sound and providing, as far as possible, the best introduction to the profession for future teachers. In this way, the perceived 'threats' and tensions, such as WPE overshadowing time in the classroom or the incompatibility of internships and WPE, can be overcome.

At a critical moment in teacher education, this paper has focussed on the status of wider professional experiences and the future of such experiences within teacher education programs. As standards regimes emerge and dominate, this paper suggests that professional experiences beyond the classroom appear to be minimally sanctioned. For teacher educators, and accreditation agencies, it may well be time to take stock of how trainee teachers will come to know different realities, to be equipped to understand a complex and diverse world and in turn prepare their students for varied futures.

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