



Shadowing, “The Most Valuable Thing You Can Do”: Threading Informal Classroom Experiences into Secondary Pre-Service Teacher Education

By Judith Wilks & Katharine Ross

Introduction

This article describes a venture that arose out of an exciting opportunity for a partnership between a regional university's school of education and an exceptional local high school in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales (NSW), Australia. It presents the findings of a continuous program of 'shadowing' by pre-service teachers of mentor teachers in schools throughout the university teaching session, and the authors' and students' experiences and reflections around this very successful program.

Reform, reformulation, and change are constant features of schools and learning across the globe, more so than ever since the beginning of the 21st century. Innovative schools and schools of education are at the cutting edge of these processes. The discourse surrounding these changes and challenges has seen a renewed focus not only on how students learn today (21st century learners), but also on how the design of learning environments and their associated resources might effect improved learning outcomes (21st century learning spaces). Young

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people are growing up in a different world to that of previous generations, and as education has moved to meet the needs of students growing up in the digital age and Internet culture, teaching practices have had to change.

Darling-Hammond (2006) has asserted what successful teachers need to know is “... invisible to lay observers, leading to the view that teaching requires little formal study and to frequent disdain for teacher education programs. The weakness of traditional program models that are collections of largely unrelated courses reinforce this low regard” (p. 300).

This could be said of many teacher education programs where rather than having evolved as integrated curricula, the individual units of work have developed more along the lines of individualised ‘cottage industries’ reflecting the skills, interests, and professional gaze of narrowly-focussed co-ordinators. For a long time little change occurred in their curriculum from one year to the next. However, the assumption underlying the 21st century learner/learning mantra is that learning programs and learning spaces need to adapt and change to cater for today’s students’ learning needs, contexts, experiences, styles, and tools, and to assist them to become “effective, powerful, lifelong learners” (Lara & Malveaux, 2002, p. 505). Darling-Hammond (2006) summed this up as a “spectacular array of things that teachers should know and be able to do in their work” (p. 300), which for teachers and teacher educators alike constitutes the daunting reality confronting them on a daily basis.

The world is a different place for teachers who may have trained a number of years ago, and many recognize the need to update their thinking and skills in response to the needs and demands of the learners in their learning spaces. A lot is expected of teachers, most especially in the context of the ‘crowded’ curriculum in terms of understanding their students’ learning styles and diverse backgrounds. Both education theory and practice are provoked and contextualized by “creative and radical re-imaginings...in a new age of digital culture, [and] global networks” (Green, 2003, as cited in Perillo & Mulcahy, 2009, pp. 137-138). A significant challenge for teacher educators is to design and provide pre-service teacher education programs that assist teachers to understand a wide variety of students’ cultural contexts, and the needs and strengths of an increasingly diverse range of students in an equally increasingly complex classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006 p. 302).

Designers and managers of education courses must be able to respond to these changes, challenges, and complexities in the delivery of pre-service teacher education programs. Moreover they should regard their role as being one that fosters and promotes adaptability and flexibility in the teams that deliver these programs. Darling-Hammond (2006) asserted that “the enterprise of teaching must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda” (p. 302) including the settings and practice of professional experience. Teacher education programs provide the site for the production and the consumption of research associated with effective teacher preparation, and the experiences described in this article have enriched what we

as teacher educators know and understand about both.

Background

In 2009 a major curriculum review of the secondary education curriculum at Southern Cross University (SCU) commenced. It affected a range of awards including combined discipline/education degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education), a two-year bachelor of education, and a one-year Graduate Diploma in Education. Although the initial impetus for the review was the necessity to meet a newly introduced raft of external accreditation requirements of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT), this review presented a significant opportunity to rethink the design of the curriculum. This led to the introduction of a range of new elements, and the reconceptualization of the entirety of the core secondary education units of work in terms of their flow, connectivity, and integration.

The requirements for teacher education courses in NSW, as prescribed by NSWIT, demand a significant level of accountability in terms of curriculum coverage. Approval of courses rests on demonstrable addressing and achievement of graduate teacher standards, and the integration of ‘mandatory areas’ such as literacy education, ICT, Aboriginal education, teaching NESB (non-English speaking background) students, and classroom and behavior management. The first stage of the curriculum renewal involved the curriculum specialization (‘methods’) units: the Humanities; English; Maths; Science; Music; Personal Development, Health and Exercise studies; and Visual Arts. Curricular in these units of work was rewritten to ensure that they incorporated mandatory areas of study and subject content requirements outlined by NSWIT, and aligned with the relevant suite of NSW Board of Studies (BOS) syllabi.

The second stage of the curriculum renewal was more complex involving the ‘core,’ (common to all) secondary education units of work. At special planning days the academic teaching team deconstructed the existing course and rebuilt it using an integrated modular structure, retaining certain content from the previous course while adding content that was formerly absent but necessary to meet the NSWIT accreditation requirements. It was also an opportunity to add some contemporary and innovative elements including 21st century skills frameworks; learning spaces design; and emerging pedagogies such as virtual worlds.

Against this backdrop of curriculum reform, this article documents and describes one particular innovation that took place through channels of co-operation between school and university educators—the ‘shadowing’ experience—as a means to bridging the school/university divide (Hammond & McCallum, 2009; Hall, 2005; Hardman, 2009) in the context of pre-service teacher education.

Shadowing: Helping to Bridge the ‘Great Divide’

Hardman (2009) maintained that it is “incumbent on universities to reflect current research on effective teacher preparation and respond to the changing needs

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of the 21st century” (p. 583). One such imperative is for educators in schools and universities to strive to find ways to work together to enhance the performance of all students. Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that it is impossible “to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest that they ‘do the opposite’ of what they have observed in the classroom” (p. 308). She observed a long tradition of pre-service teacher education of separating out theory from practice is only perpetuating the model of constraining students to learn in settings that typify what she regarded to be the very weaknesses of in-school instruction. For example, settings whereby “teachers provide examples of idiosyncratic and atheoretical examples of teaching practice,” and without context, authenticity, or significance (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 308).

One of the key starting points along the road to engendering successful transformations in a professional experience program is in the partnership activity that surrounds and is capable of fostering and sustaining transformation and innovation. Hardman (2009) advocated for the direct linking of university courses to “continuous field experiences” from the beginning of a pre-service teacher education course, and for this be a joint preparation process between schools and universities (p. 585). Darling-Hammond (2006) echoed this, and called for better modes of teacher preparation that include developing stronger relationships with schools, believing this to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of exemplary teacher education programs (pp. 302-305).

In 2011 an opportunity to try something new arose in the way that the SCU School of Education was approaching the professional experience (the practicum). The implementation of the new secondary education curriculum described above coincided in 2011 with the nomination of Coffs Harbour Senior College (CHSC), [co-located with the SCU at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus], as a Centre for Teaching Excellence (C4E) in 2010. SCU and Coffs Harbour Senior College (CHSC) share facilities at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus (CHEC), and this close physical environment enabled open communication and ease of access between the two institutions as the shadowing experience evolved.

The CHSC was one of 36 schools in NSW designated as a C4E under the Australian Government’s Smarter Schools Improving Teacher Quality Program. The Coffs Harbour C4E has since become a site where the next generation of teachers can observe high quality teaching and gain practical experience in a manner that is threaded throughout the teaching session. It also acts as a hub in a cluster of five local high schools to promote teacher professional development and excellence in teaching and learning practices.

To facilitate this initiative, the Australian Government provided the positions of a Highly Accomplished Teacher and a paraprofessional, as well as funding over a three-year period from 2010-2013. Through these resources in late 2010 a dialogue commenced between the NSW Department of Education and Communities

and the SCU School of Education in regard to finding mutually beneficial ways of better addressing the contemporary needs of teacher education programs. Thus the shadowing experience was born.

Getting Started

Shadowing was developed to assist pre-service teachers at the SCU to gain additional confidence in the classroom prior to 'block' professional experience placements at the end of each teaching session. CHSC teachers volunteered to mentor the first cohort of the student shadows.

The opportunity to have more time in the classroom during the instructional part of the session was enthusiastically embraced by the students. Fifteen Graduate Diploma of Education students volunteered to take part in the first CHSC shadowing experience in 2011. Even though the program was new and its parameters were being developed along the way, students were open to and excited about the opportunity to work with experienced teachers. Matches were made between mentors and the students according to their teaching area whenever possible.

At a gathering of teacher mentors early in 2011 their role was explained. Students and mentors met, and individual arrangements were made to find mutually suitable times to organise a weekly shadowing day for a six week period leading up the students' first professional experience block. The understanding was that students would shadow on a day when there were no scheduled university classes. During this period, there were informal checks by C4E and university staff to monitor students' progress, and levels of satisfaction and confidence around their shadowing experience.

Mentor teacher feedback was used to assist students to develop the reflective journal provided to students to record their observations. There was no compulsion for students to use it, but it did serve as a guide to help frame their focus in the classroom. From the mentor teachers' perspective, the shadowing was a non-judgemental process and therefore not threatening. Mentor teacher feedback also highlighted that because the students' observations were not linked to university assessment this was reassuring for them, as they were not going to be 'written about' in a formal sense.

In addition to the CHSC other C4E cluster high schools became involved in the shadowing program in the second half of 2011. We observed that communications within the cluster and C4E strengthened and developed. This allowed pre-service teachers to be involved in observation and mentoring in a further five high schools enabling their access to curriculum over years 7 to 10. Fifteen students were involved in the 2011 pilot, and by the first teaching session of 2012 the number of student participants had grown to twenty-two, as had the number of teachers involved in the program.

A number of students were invited to complete a block practicum with their mentors. It was found that students who had taken part in the Shadowing were

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feeling more knowledgeable and ‘classroom ready’ at the outset of their block practicum, as the findings from the surveys and focus group interviews outlined below demonstrate.

Findings

As mentioned, coinciding with the start-up of the shadowing in early 2011 was the roll-out of a newly developed curriculum. At the beginning of 2011 a pre-course experience survey of the entire commencing secondary education cohort across the three SCU campuses at Coffs Harbour, Lismore, and Tweed Heads, was carried out. The Shadows were a subset of the respondents to this survey but were not identified as a separate group in the response set, as the nominations for taking part in the Shadowing had not been finalised at the time of the survey.

This survey was carried out to collect data on all students’ perceptions and expectations of their course at the outset of their studies, and in the first year of the delivery of the new curriculum. The students were asked to rate 18 elements in terms of how important they considered these to be in contributing to success in their teacher education studies. These elements were chosen by teacher educators who believed the statements represented best—or at least, good—practice in teacher education and in the university academic experience generally. The students (N= 147) showed a high level of agreement with most items which was probably to be expected, rating most of the elements as either important, very important, or essential. These elements are listed below:

1. Clear and concise study materials
2. Clear communication about the resources available to me to assist me with my studies
3. Engaging and intellectually challenging lectures
4. Sufficient and appropriate assistance from administrative staff
5. Working collaboratively with other students
6. Sufficient and appropriate assistance from teaching staff
7. Being well informed about the standard of work required including timely and onstructive feedback on my assignments
8. Acquiring skills necessary for success in the classroom
9. An improvement in my communication skills
10. Opportunities to engage in research
11. Fairness in the grading of assessments
12. Quality teaching in my units of work
13. A stimulating course that challenges me to think in new ways
14. Opportunities to refine and improve my academic skills
15. Consistent application of criteria when grading assessment items
16. Support from academic and admin staff in relation to practicum
17. Supporting me in transition from University to employment as a teacher
18. Facilitating independent learning with minimal interaction with academic

staff

At the end of 2011 a second survey was distributed to students using a similar but smaller list of elements. One of this survey's findings of particular relevance to this article was that whereas in the pre-course survey only 61% of students rated the item 'opportunities to engage in research' as either important, very important, or essential (one of the lowest levels of agreement against the above 18 elements), levels of agreement with the importance of this element in the post-course survey rose to 73%.

Hall (2005, citing Darling-Hammond 1994, p. 200) contended that we need teacher preparation programs that provide settings that model both "state of the art practice" and "an enquiry ethic that sustains continued professional growth." Lara and Malveaux (2002) also stressed the importance of pre-service teacher education curriculum models that include opportunities for action research, reminding us that it can be a "viable tool in providing valuable data that can be used to improve teaching and learning...compiling data on what works will allow students to test ideas and procedures" (pp. 500/510).

Darling-Hammond (2006) cited action research as a powerful and emerging pedagogy in successful teacher education programs (p. 307). Lynch and Smith (2006) put a slightly different spin on action research describing it as a suite of valuable 'portal tasks,' constituting "the conceptual and practical mechanism through which 'theory' is connected to 'practice' and 'content,' and ultimately to demonstrable student learning outcomes" (p. 11).

Thus with what we believed to be some fairly strong evidence about the utility of action research in teacher education, we enthusiastically introduced a new staged action research assessment into the new course, to be conducted in the context of the students' professional experience classes and also during their two practicums. We were surprised that this assessment turned out to be the most contested part of the overall scheme of assessment by the students, notwithstanding some unresolved questions around ethics. Perhaps we should have foreseen these difficulties in the low rating (a 61% level of agreement) 'opportunities to engage in research' that was given by the students in the pre-course survey

Throughout the year, the students were not shy to dispute with the teaching staff (in classes and in online discussion forums) 'the value' of doing research in a teacher education program. As one academic remarked, "they practically ran us out of town over this assessment." Yet something must have turned the students' attitudes around—possibly the experience of actually doing it! By the end of the course their perceptions of the importance of research in their course rose significantly (by 12% from a 61% to a 73% level of agreement), despite the demonstrable, and often loud, resistance they had shown towards this assessment at the outset and also during the course.

Additionally in the second survey the students were asked some open-ended

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questions, for example to nominate an element that they would like to see introduced into the course to assist them to become ‘classroom ready.’ In ranked order, the elements the students nominated were: more case studies, mock classrooms, role plays, scenarios, more time in schools and high school classrooms; more practice work, and more observations. This feedback was important in the process of reviewing and adjusting the new curriculum in its second year of delivery in 2012.

Our two survey findings perplexed and provoked us. On the one hand the students were protesting the ‘value’ of doing an action research assessment collecting data during professional experience but on the other they were advocating for more professional experience-based authentic tasks and experiences. As the end of 2011 course experience survey results demonstrated, it was only in hindsight that the students began to link the two in a positive way. Thus while it is gratifying that these links were being made by the whole cohort towards the end of the program, what is of particular interest here is that the shadows were making these links along the way, as the focus group interview findings below highlight.

At the conclusion of each teaching session, focus group interviews were held with all students who had shadowed. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with the students noting the role the program had in linking the theory in university lectures and tutorials with the real life of the classroom:

It was the most valuable thing [you] could do.

I learnt how important it is to know your students and how important your relationships with your students are.

I have a lecture on pedagogy and then shadow on the same day and it’s great.

Everything sinks in and I need less revision of my notes.

It was putting all the theory that we learn about into observable practice. We see the teachers in the classroom doing management. They talk to us. They give us advice. We see how the students respond and then we come back to Uni and go to a lecture and see that what he is talking about we have just witnessed...there is a real life relationship between the two

I was going straight from a lecture into the classroom, I was doing the theory in the lecture and going straight into the classroom, which was embedding what I was learning into the classroom which was great.

Academically we can draw on the experiences that we have observed... we can reflectthat this reading (and) that observation has lead us to that conclusion.

Any exposure is good whether it was negative or positive. It all helps you as a teacher to see what strategies are working out what’s not and linking this with what we are being taught about pedagogy. You can see it all out there interacting in real life. If you are observing you can decide for yourself. I am not going to use that, that’s not working well; Or that is working well. I will use that.

As the shadowing took place before their first professional experience placement, students related that they felt ‘the classroom’ had been demystified making them less anxious about their upcoming practicum, with one student commenting that:

It (the shadowing) breaks down the barriers.

And another:

It made me see the realities of teaching and showed me that all teachers have their up and down days.

A few students transitioned from their shadowing to their practicum at the end of the first session at the same school, finding this process seamless. They were already familiar with the students, the school, the teachers, the routines, the expectations, the curriculum, giving them far greater confidence. They were also already familiar with the school’s educational programs, and found preparation for lessons far easier than their counterparts who only had a few days to get ready for practicum after the end of the first session.

An interesting and somewhat unexpected finding from the focus group interviews was that contrary to a common stereotyping of students that they will only put effort into something if it is being assessed, the opposite turned out to be the case. In these interviews students related that they appreciated the fact that their participation and observations were not being assessed, and stated that had their shadowing experience been assessed in a formal sense, they may have not been so willing to take part, as they felt over-burdened by other assessments:

Not linking to assessment means that you can purely observe

It’s more relaxed and you are able to absorb

The students were seeking more flexibility regarding the length of attendance in schools, and the Mentor teachers were keen to see some tighter guidelines around the program, for example in relation to dress code and mentor-shadow communications. Both groups articulated the need to have clearly identified goals and expectations of all stakeholders/participants in the program.

This valuable feedback from the student focus group interviews, combined with that from their teacher mentors at the end of the first session, helped to improve the running of the second shadowing program in 2011. A third took place in 2012 and by this stage all to five Years 7-12 high schools in the C4E cluster were taking part. In 2012 a third program was delivered by which time the numbers of students and teachers taking part had doubled since the program’s inception.

Discussion

Programs such as shadowing afford students the opportunity to “learn the fine-

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grained stuff of practice in connection to the practical theories” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 308). Shadowing revealed that novices who had experiences in classrooms were able to make sense of the ideas that are addressed in their academic work and that these pre-service teachers “see and understand both the theory and practice differently if they are taking coursework concurrently with fieldwork” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 307). This has been a very strong outcome for the students from their shadowing experiences.

Shadowing assisted students to observe the bringing together of the three central strands of curriculum, instruction, and classroom management in authentic settings. Students saw these elements demonstrated and observed how they connected up in the classroom, simultaneously with their learning about them in the more theoretical context of university classes. This has helped to assuage student anxiety around classroom management—an anxiety-raising element frequently identified by pre-service and novice teachers.

The shadowing experience represented a significant opportunity for a university and a cluster of local high schools to co-construct a bridge. The ‘divide’ between schools and school of education, teachers and academics, has long been discussed and mulled over throughout the academy and praxis. Hall (2005) urges us to imagine “a professional place where the divide does not exist” (p. 199). He expresses a reluctance to “engage with the metaphor of the divide,” preferring instead to conceptualize spaces beyond the divide where teachers and academics become “different kinds of practitioners, sharing common goals and activities in their search for knowledge about teaching and learning” (Hall, 2005, p. 200).

It is certain that the shadowing has helped to create such spaces and has assisted the development of a rich dialogue evident in the reflective processes and the many conversations that have evolved, and continue to evolve, between the school teachers and the pre-service teachers, among the pre-service teachers themselves, and between the school and university teaching staff.

A number of the mentor teachers reflecting on the conversations they had with their ‘shadows’ observed that having to make explicit to students ‘the reasons for what they just did’ helped them to self-interrogate and to understand and reinforce their own thinking and rationale around their practice. As one teacher commented “students force you to reflect on your own teaching practice and I certainly recommend having them for your own professional development” (Ward & Hart, 2012, p. 7).

Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that strong, effective teacher education programs demonstrate a tight coherence and integration between courses (the teaching at university) and professional experience in schools, possessing both a “clinical and didactic curriculum” (pp. 300/308). Such an arrangement assists students to effectively make important conceptual and pedagogical links between theory and practice, what she called “proactive relationships with schools,” and to further serve to contextualize the modelling of quality teaching and of modes of

catering to diverse learners effectively.

Until recently professional experience placements at SCU were structured along the lines of most traditional teacher education programs where students do a long session of university course work followed by “a short dollop of student teaching at the end of the program—often in classrooms that did not model the practices that had previously been described in abstraction” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 307). Shadowing has broken down the dominance of the block practicum and the formality of the relations between students and their supervising teacher, and between the teachers and the teacher educators. Since the program began a number of the mentor teachers have begun after-school sessional tutoring at the SCU in the curriculum specializations, further reinforcing the strong partnerships that have developed.

Mulcahy (2005), drawing on Shulman (1987), discussed what she called the ‘missing paradigm’ in education, that is, one that “bridges the gap between content knowledge and teaching methods/techniques” (p. 319). Referring to the term ‘working knowledge,’ that is, knowledge that is generated by the work situation she asserted: “like others engaged in professional preparation, teacher educators are faced with co-ordinating and negotiating connections between professional knowledge and working knowledge as well as between the workforces and workspaces of universities and schools” (Mulcahy, 2005, p. 318). What the shadowing has been able to achieve, via the mechanism of the university partnership with the C4E, is the opening up of this kind of connection, and moreover connections on many levels. There has been a layering and a blending of the mentor teacher role into the overall professional experience ‘experience.’

A particular strength of the shadowing program has been that whilst the students were still involved and immersed in their theoretical and methods units they were able to observe and experience classroom and school life, and they are in the position each week to be able to have conversations with their mentor teachers around their observations, and to unpack what they were witnessing. Further reflection and discussion ‘back at uni’ assisted the students to link their observations and their discussions with their mentor teachers to their learning in university workshops and lectures.

Conclusion

The experience and findings of the program described in this article have reinforced research (Darling-Hammond 2006; Hall, 2005; Mulcahy, 2005; Perillo & Mulcahy, 2009; Australian Productivity Commission, 2011; Ure, 2009) that has consistently demonstrated that pre-service teacher education programs are considerably strengthened when their students spend substantial time in professional experience placements, not just in blocks at the end of an intensive teaching session, but threaded throughout the entire program. The shadowing experience is located at the intersection of innovative practice in the design of teacher education curriculum and in the design of professional experience (or the ‘clinical’ or

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‘fieldwork’ element of such curriculum).

Shadowing has responded to the all too often observation by pre-service teachers that their first placement is like being ‘thrown into the deep end’ (Ure, 2009) and that they do not feel prepared for the “types of experiences they are exposed to and expected to master” (p. 49). The depth of the relationships that developed and the students’ positive experiences of shadowing have clearly mitigated these anxieties.

Change is an inexorable and constant feature of any workplace or workforce, none more so than in the delivery of pre-service teacher education programs. Changes are constantly occurring in policy, teacher standards, technology, school organization, procedures and curriculum. Educators must possess the capacity to reflect on, accept, assimilate, and innovate in response to change.

Course review and renewal is an ongoing process and teacher educators must constantly strive to embrace the changes and challenges of 21st century learning and teaching and the myriad of contexts in which these are occurring. The shadowing program has assisted all stakeholders to innovate, adapt, and move with change. No student withdrew from the program, and all communicated effectively with their mentors. These pre-service teachers were being welcomed into schools where there had been prior resistance to pre-service student supervision in the traditional block practicum arrangement.

The shadowing program has helped to open up new modes of “knowing-in-practice” (Gheradi, 2006; Perillo & Mulcahy, 2009) that translate easily for the students across different sites of knowledge generation, helping to break down the traditional ‘divide.’ Moreover, it has stimulated “the production of local knowledge through local language practices” (Bodin 1994, as cited by Hall, 2005, p. 199) via the ‘social interactional work’ of teachers, students, and university lecturers during the construction and maintenance of these partnerships. A particular characteristic of shadowing is that it developed out of the relationships between teachers and teacher educators, it was not a ‘top down’ initiative, rather it grew from the ‘grassroots up’ with the catalyst being the C4E.

With the shadowing transitioning into further iterations in 2013 it remains of ongoing importance to reflect on experiences thus far, examine assumptions, and as a result extend and enrich the program. Questions such as the following continue to exercise our collective consciousness:

First, is it possible that this process might involve modelling of pedagogy that does not reflect best practice or that directly contradicts that which is taught at SCU? Some mentor teacher practice could be reaffirming out-of-date practices or approaches that do not acknowledge diversity or embrace pedagogy that is based on evidence/research but rather is a product of years of isolated habit, unquestioned educational paradigms not reflection. If so, how do we address this?

Second, in what ways can we ensure that Shadowing feeds into the aca-

demic conversation about pedagogy? As Ure (2009) pointed out “pre-service teachers need opportunities to develop deep insights into how they construct their teaching rather than being left to draw conclusions from a series of experiences and good teaching tips” (p. 55). The provision of further curriculum spaces for exploration and engagement in deep reflection of shadowing experiences needs further attention.

Finally, there is the issue, as Katz, Devlin-Shearer, Daly, McCartan & Burroughs (2010) have warned, that while field experiences are “potentially powerful learning tools for secondary teacher candidates, they must be crafted with care and attention to the potential pitfalls of learning from experience within a complicated and, often, contradictory organization” (p. 15). The authors advocate the need for “continuous cooperation and communication between the field sites and the university along with careful examination of the effects on candidates and students” (p.16).

Fortunately the extent of cooperation and goodwill between SCU and the C4E has provided the optimum environment for these communication processes to occur, and for the continued improvement and growth of the shadowing program. The university classroom is proving to be a lively site for debate, and for the interrogation of some of the questions, contradictions, and conundrums that have arisen from the program.

In conclusion, many beneficial outcomes have been achieved in a remarkably short time. The program has not only brought about a re-thinking of the professional experience process, but also profound changes in how the various partners in this process relate to it and to each other at multiple points throughout the professional development of our pre-service teachers.

Through the relationships developed and the partnership opportunities of the C4E, ongoing and rich conversations between the partners have been enabled. These conversations have not only deeply enhanced the experiences of our pre-service teachers, but have also opened up a dialogue and a research space between the local teachers and the teacher educators (as the authorship of this article demonstrates) around quality practices and outcomes in teacher education.

Note

The authors offer acknowledgment to Jon Hart and Michelle Henderson of Coffs Harbour Senior College of Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, Australia.

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