

## **BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CAMPUS AND CLASSROOM: RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN TEACHING PRACTICE PLACEMENTS**

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### **Overview of Research**

The main focus of the research was to develop effective and supportive relationships between the three groups involved in pre-service teaching practice (the pre-service teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university tutor) by implementing a strategy aimed at improving the quality of supports for the pre-service teacher of physical education. The study aimed to analyse the effectiveness and reality of each member of the triad being part of a professional learning community and to explore the possibilities for a cost efficient system that will allow continuous professional development (CPD) to be a site-based opportunity. The research sought to identify mechanisms that might potentially enhance existing practice and create closer university-school links to develop the roles of each member of the teaching practice triad.

### **Methodology**

A range of data gathering methods was used. These included one-to-one and focus interviews, the use of observation, the development and pilot testing of a booklet for cooperating teachers and a one-day workshop for cooperating teachers. A key aim of the study was to interpret the views and perspectives of pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers and university tutors and the relationships within the teaching practice triad. Individual interviews and focus groups were the primary data collection methods used to provide an in-depth analysis of the supervision process. Background reading was concentrated on key areas relating to the roles, responsibilities and training of the cooperating teacher and university-school links. The sequencing of the various stages of the research was carefully planned so that the outcomes of each phase were used in the planning of subsequent stages. Appropriate procedures were followed in relation to ethical requirements.

### **Findings and recommendations**

The research produced notable insights and findings at each of the three completed phases of the study. Interesting description and examination of the role of the cooperating teachers features prominently in the analysis. The experiences of the cooperating teachers were positive in general. They developed effective relationships with the pre-service teachers, interacted with them and

engaged in lesson observations on a regular basis. They would however welcome a more formal role in the process that would be supported by appropriate training. Cooperating teachers suggested that the university could provide support and training so that they might become competent in contributing to the evaluation process. Certain areas of concern were also found. Cooperating teachers reported a lack of interaction with the university tutor on the days of observation and with their own school principals who had a reporting role in the process.

A further phase of the research is intended to create a more structured role for the cooperating teachers in the supervision of pre-service teachers. It is hoped that the cooperating teachers would be enabled to take on more of a supervisory role, undertaking structured observations and formalising the delivery of feedback.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of the research is of particular interest for teacher education. Seeking practical ways in which initial teacher training can be enhanced and improved so that confident and competent teachers may be produced each year to the benefit of schools and the community is important. Based on the view that the quality of the teacher in the classroom is the most important factor influencing student learning, the research draws attention to the key area of pre-service placements in schools. The insights provided on the roles of the three groups involved in pre-service teaching practice indicate the need for good practice and appropriate partnership arrangements between the university and schools to promote continuing professional development and improve standards of teaching and learning.