Ethical Considerations When Using Mobile Technology in the Pre-Service Teacher Practicum

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors revisit the pre-service teacher practicum experience and propose that mobile technology, with its ability to provide instant communication and immediate access to resources, could minimise the “disconnect” between theory and the school classroom and improve the experience for all parties involved. However, before this project began, the wide-ranging ethical considerations surrounding the use of mobile technologies had to be addressed. This paper outlines a range of issues that should be considered whenever mobile technologies are to be employed when researching in schools.

Keywords: Ethics, Mobile Technology, Practicum Experience, Pre-Service Teacher Practicum, Technology in Schools

THE PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PRACTICUM

The practicum has an acknowledged central place in pre-service teacher education programs (Ryan, 1996). Practicum provides an opportunity for pre-service teachers to:

• Apply knowledge and skills in a practical setting;
• Progressively develop competencies through participation in a range of practical experiences;
• Test their commitment to a career;
• Gain insight into professional practice; and
• Evaluate their progress and identify areas where further personal and professional development is needed (Daresh, 1990).

Although there is reported dissatisfaction with the pre-service teacher practicum (Ure, 2009; Loughran, 2007; Dyson, 2005; DEST, 2003; Beck & Kosnik, 2002), the pre-service teachers truly value the experience. When asked about their practicum in a related project (Cameron, Campbell, & Sheridan, 2011), pre-service teachers’ comments were overwhelmingly positive:

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Professional experience was most significant, having real life experience that is not removed from the theory learnt through course work, helped put into practice what works and what doesn’t. It also helped with development of personal style of teaching and exposed me to different and diverse teaching situations.

Professional experiences were definitely an important part of becoming a teacher. It was while physically teaching that I learnt the most.

Professional experiences have enabled me to apply the theory I learnt in the coursework to reality. This enabled me to work out what worked and what didn’t as an up and coming teacher. The practicums were the most beneficial because the length of them allowed me to become a real member of the school, therefore enabling the students to become comfortable with me as a teacher and begin to truly test myself.

The experience I gained on all three of my ten week practicums changed the way I approached teaching as I worked through each prac. By the end of my internship I felt I had grown into my full potential as an up and coming teacher.

The professional experiences helped me the most. By the time I started my internship I was very comfortable with being in a school and being responsible for students’ learning, which left me open to try new things and learn as much as possible.

Increasing the Effectiveness of the Practicum Experience

Although most pre-service teachers value their practicum experience, many could gain much more from the experience. The opportunity for pre-service teachers to reflect on their classroom experiences in light of their current knowledge and understanding is crucial to an effective practicum experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Lyons, 2010). They need the time and space to make connections between the theory they have studied and the experiences they have had in practice. The pre-service teachers themselves recognise there is a “disconnect” between university theory and the reality of the classroom which has led to criticism of the efficacy of pre-service teacher preparation. When surveyed, a number of the pre-service teachers commented on the gap between the theory (provided by the university) and the practicum (provided by the schools):

[I would like] more emphasis on teaching method courses that allow us to bring together our learning in education subjects and our learning.

Teaching methods [instruction by the university] needs to be extended to allow for a more thorough understanding of our KLA and what strategies our colleagues are implementing in their classroom.

Background to the Project

It has been acknowledged for some time that practicum experience for pre-service teachers is not achieving the requirements of a 21st Century education system. As the “Australia’s teachers: Australia’s future” Report (DEST, 2003) stated, “it is time to rethink practical experience”. Financial limitations, heavy classroom teacher workloads and a perceived “disconnect” between university theory and the reality of the classroom has led to dissatisfaction with pre-service teacher preparation (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Dyson, 2005; Loughran, 2007; Ure, 2009).

The solution proposed by both Ramsey and the Australian Education Union (DEST, 2003) is to develop a more comprehensive practicum that also provides for more time in the classroom. The two major limitations to this solution are limited funds and a lack of willing and capable supervising teachers: neither of which is likely to change in the short term (Ure, 2009). Therefore, any improvement
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