Title: Developing a simulation resource utilising problem-based learning scenarios to bridge the theory-praxis gap in preservice teacher education.

One of the key problems facing teacher educators is bridging the gap (in terms of student understanding, knowledge and skills) between theories and practices of teaching. The project aimed to create a reusable resource to help students acquire a realistic understanding of schools as organisations and the work of teachers within them.

Aims of the project:

Develop using the expertise of a small group of classroom teachers a resource comprised of a set of problem-based scenarios to be used with pre-service teachers in their first year, prior to their second stint of professional practice.

Data collection and analysis:

Informal discussions were held with students after their professional practice and they were invited to complete a formal evaluation at this time. The evaluation was in the form of a survey and students were asked to rank each of the five scenarios (including activities and related materials) as either unsatisfactory, room for improvement, satisfactory, good or highly satisfactory. Space was provided for further written comment.

Results:

Four practising classroom teachers worked collaboratively along with two GSE staff members, over two days during semester 2, 2011 to create the resource. The completed resource is comprised of five problem-based scenarios and 16 student-centred tasks. Each scenario was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation and a set of resources. The resource was trailed with a small group comprised of 34 pre-service teacher education students during Semester 2, 2012.

To evaluate the project, informal discussions were held with students after their professional practice and they were invited to complete a formal evaluation at this time. There were 10 responses to the survey (response rate of 29%). Overall, responses were positive with all scenarios and related activities ranked as good or highly satisfactory. Comments also indicated that collectively, students felt that there was benefit to using a simulated school setting in which they could trial their understandings about teaching. Other feedback regarding the combination of individual and group-based activities and modelling of appropriate teaching behaviours and strategies were also positive, a number of students remarking that this was particularly useful to them as it provided opportunities for collaboration and clarification of ideas. This and other student feedback will be used to modify the resource before further implementation in 2013.

Conclusion:

The results so far are encouraging and indicate that there is benefit to utilising a resource which encourages students to situate their learning within simulated real-life contexts.

Future perspective:

Evaluations collected at the end of 2012 will be used to modify and refine the resources for implementation in semester 2, 2014 to a slightly larger cohort of students. Key refinements to be undertaken prior to further implementation will include reviewing the use of a simulated school context and investigating ways to get students to link their activities to the school that they have been placed for their professional practice; due to time constraints (10 hours to implement resource) meant that there was a lot to cover in a short time frame, activities will be reviewed for effectiveness to maximise opportunities for students to apply their learning and at the same time provide sufficient theory to support this learning. Further evaluations of the resource will be undertaken after this time.

Funding and publications:

All funding provided by the ISL Grant was used to support the development of the resource. These funds paid for the time of four classroom teachers for two days. Monies from the grant were also used to provide morning tea and lunch for the four classroom teachers, myself and another GSE staff member over the two days. Please see the budget acquittal form attached.

The project and the results will be presented at the Teaching and Learning Forum to be held at Murdoch University in February 2013. It is also envisaged that after further refinements and implementation in semester 2, 2014, a paper be prepared and submitted.