Internships: Are they for all?

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**Introduction**

Internships have been offered by the School of Education and Professional Studies (EPS) at Griffith University, Gold Coast campus since 1994 and during that time a comprehensive model has been developed as a result of ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders.

In this paper we examine the internship as an emerging and significant component in teacher education. We are interested in exploring two questions related to the effectiveness of the internship. First, in what ways does the internship prepare teacher education (TE) students for classroom life? Second, how do the benefits of an internship in an 18 month Bachelor of Education (Graduate Entry) program compares to that offered in a 4 year Bachelor of Education (Undergraduate) program?

To answer these questions we make use of case studies to explore the compulsory internship element of a Bachelor of Education -Primary (Graduate Entry) program run over four semesters and an eight semester undergraduate Bachelor of Education – Primary program offered by EPS. Both internships run for 34 days over the school term.

Quantitative data was collected from surveys of mentors and interns on the completion of the 2002 internship to evaluate its key aspects. These included interns’ ability to recognize student needs, show initiative and independence in planning and teaching, assess student learning outcomes, implement classroom management plans and become part of the school community. Preliminary findings indicate that both programs were successful in preparing teacher education students for the challenges and complexities of effective participation in all aspects of the school community. Hence we argue that the internship has the potential to provide sustained and realistic school experiences as the culminating activity in all pre-service teacher education programs.

**Literature review**

Many traditional preservice TE courses do not contain an internship component. Rather there exists an agreement, either informal or formal, between the university, education authorities and schools that enables the placement of TE students in field settings. The school controls the placements although the university proposes the expectations for the practicum in relation to the requirements and the timing of the practicum.

In recent years tensions have existed between educational employing authorities and universities because of the expressed concerns about the failure of university TE programs to adequately prepare TE students for classroom practice. In particular TE programs have been criticised for their failure to develop a link between theory presented in TE programs and teaching practice. At the same time recent education reforms have meant that many universities are beginning to re-examine, refine and implement teacher education programs that are aligned with the curricular, pedagogical and organisational reforms influenced by educational research and decisions made by employing bodies. For example, Gregor Ramsay’s report (2000) of teacher education in New South Wales, Australia, indicted that TE programs included the least amount of practical experience of all professions as well as a
limited range of practicum placements. Further, beginning teachers were placed directly into classrooms where they were expected to take immediate responsibility for the whole class. Thus the Ramsay report strongly recommends that teacher-training programs be workplace oriented so that pre-service teachers spend more time in schools.

An internship offers both an extended period of time in the school context for TE students and provides an induction into teaching and the realities of teacher work in the school community. As well they are able to create learning opportunities that are richer than those provided by a teaching practicum so that a new understanding of teacher’s work and its relation to the education system can be developed. Hence, internships can be considered a means of transition from TE program to beginning teaching. In particular they develop a theory-practice nexus when undertaken over a sustained period of time of at least one school term. Zeichner and Miller (1997) view the internship as a time when TE students are able to engage in a thoughtful analysis of practice. The internship is a time when the TE students are immersed in the real world experience of sustained classroom teaching within a school culture. Sharplin (2001) notes the internship is more than a practicum. It is a classroom experience that is underpinned by authenticity and lack of university assessment. A goal of the sustained period of teaching during the internship is to develop coherence between the theory of the university and the practice of the school. This is not always evident in prior practicum experiences that are unable to replicate the reality of the classroom because of their short-term nature and the requirements.

Various researchers (<biblio>) have discussed a number of models in an attempt to identify the key principles that underpin the internship. Models such as the apprenticeship model (Dobbins & Mitchell, 1995; Pritchard & Ancess, 1999; Sharplin, 2001) reflective practitioner model (Clarke et al, 2001; Zeichner & Miller, 1997) and the collaborative resonance model (Hoz & Peretz, 1996) have been used to conceptualise the various models of internships that are offered.

The common principle underlying many of these models is that they depend on a partnership that encourages interaction between the school, university, teachers, interns, and employing authorities. (Mayer 1999). Moreover, the paradigms are set within contexts that are frequently ‘expert driven’, that is expertise is seen to clearly reside with the mentor teacher. As well the internship takes place within a socio-cultural context underpinned by multiple relationships of negotiation that require the intern to become aware of the politics of learning community. It is this sociological context that provides the internship with the perspectives of situated learning and reflective practice of a community of practice model proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and extended by Lave and Wenger (1998). This model clearly moves away from traditional practicum models of teacher education based on teacher isolation and privatised practice (Pritchard & Ancess, 1999).

We argue that this learning paradigm best describes the internship offered by EPS. The model initially described is underpinned by situated learning and reflective processes. These two processes can be identified as interns enter the periphery of the education community of the school as the apprentice, and as they develop competency in the knowledge and skills of teaching, they progress towards the centre of the learning community. Arriving here they have the opportunity to participate fully in
the community not only because they are fully interacting in the socio-cultural practices in the school community but are also contributing to the development of the community through their application of their expertise and knowledge to problem situations. Here the important point is that in an internship the intern not only enters into a community of practice and develops the self through participating in the community, they will often transform the community through their contributions. This can be in the form of introducing new knowledge and practices to the school community, encouraging and challenging the mentors and school community members to reflect on their practice and contributing to problem solving in the school. Thus the internship has the potential to contribute to the development of a community of learners through generating and sharing knowledge across different levels of expertise. Buysse, Sparkman and Wesley (2003) observe that in this case the teaching and learning generated by a learning community is bi-directional.

Politics
One of the key features of a learning community is the political landscape that has requirements and demands. For the internship to be successful the intern must learn to navigate the requirements and demands of negotiation. This is achieved because the recognised expertise of the intern situates them as a co teacher who works in partnership with a mentor teacher rather than as practicum student who is considered to be at an earlier learning stage and is supervised by a supervising teacher and university person. Generally a practicum is conducted within a short time frame specifically within the framework of the classroom with little connection to the whole school context. Expertise flows in a unidirectional way with the practicum student becomes the recipient of the teacher’s knowledge and expertise. On the other hand, the internship situates the intern within a whole school context in which the intern is expected to work as a member of that school community. It is based on a broader approach that emphasis reciprocity and mutual benefits (Hoz & Peretz, 1996). Interns report that the difference they observe between a practicum and internship is the change in the level of external supervision and the level of support and opportunities for independence (Sharplin, 2001).

Mayer (1999) notes that in Queensland schools the internship is differentiated from the practicum by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (BTR) granting authorisation to teach without supervision. In the internship offered by EPS, there is a significant act of symbolism that clearly identifies the transition that the TE student has made from practicum student to co teacher. The transition takes place through formal processes such as the internship launch and public presentation of the Authorisation to Teach document. Further, a deliberate delineation is underpinned by changes in responsibility, expectations and language.

Dobbins & Mitchell (1995) observe the marked shift in power that occurs in the internship when TE students make the transition from student teacher to associate teacher or co teacher. In their study they report that co teachers experienced different treatment and consequently experienced their internship in a different way to when they were on practicum. Co teachers believed that the spoken and unspoken messages conveyed to them during their practicum of powerlessness, subordination and inexperience were replaced by messages of responsibility, professional acceptance and recognition.
The shift in responsibility and changes in expectations (see Diagram 1) occur simultaneously as the intern moves from the periphery of the learning community toward the centre. This takes place through the intern accepting a greater workload in planning, teaching and assessing with the mentor teacher increasingly withdrawing as the key player in the classroom. The changes in language occur particularly with the name change from student teacher to co teacher. There are symbolic gestures by the school community of presenting the intern with a name badge, their own desk, their own photocopying card or number and pigeonhole. We argue that these symbolic acts articulate the message of the community of learners that the intern is accepted in their midst as a colleague. Dobbins (1995) argues that internships enable a development of a broader conception of teaching which allows for an extension, consolidation and refinement of knowledge and skills associated with a teacher’s role. The internship allows for experience within the broader context of the school culture of the classroom, school and wider community. It also allows interns to understand the emotional work of teaching that is related to the relationship with children, other teachers, admin staff, school staff and parents.

The Griffith University Gold Coast Internship

In 1994, the Centre for Professional Development (CFPD) in the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University Gold Coast campus offered its first internship as a voluntary program to a small cohort of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students. Since then models of the internship have been designed and now form a compulsory internship component of the Graduate Entry Bachelor of Education (Primary), (B Ed/GE) Bachelor of Education (Primary)(B Ed). The B Ed program differs from the B Ed/GE program in the number of practicums offered and the length of time that the programs run prior to the internship. The B Ed program is an eight semester program that offers six practicums while the B Ed/GE program runs for four semesters and offers two practicums prior to the internship. Both programs satisfy BTR requirements of 80 days before beginning an internship. An important difference between the two programs is that the B Ed interns spend their last supervised practicum in the same classroom, with the same mentor teacher they have for the internship. However, the B Ed/GE students undertake their internship at a different school with a new mentor teacher. Thus B Ed/GE students do not have a long period of socialisation into a learning community prior to their internship. Further B Ed students are immersed in a language of internship for 8 semesters compared to the 4 semesters for B Ed/GE students. Yet, during the internship the expectations of the learning community of both cohorts are the same. Thus we ask the question “Are internships for all?”

In this section we briefly outline the process of the internship as experienced by interns in Gold Coast schools. During the extended classroom based internship the co teacher and the mentor share a class for one school term. The intern shifts from the role of teacher education student to that of co teacher (see Diagram 1). In a small number of internships, co teachers are ready almost immediately to take full responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching at the beginning of the internship. In most cases at the beginning of the internship, the co teacher and the mentor teacher generally start collaborative planning, teaching and assessing with the mentor teacher taking the lead (see Diagram 1 – Phase 1). The ultimate aim is for the co teacher to have complete responsibility for the whole class program in the last few weeks of the term (See Diagram 1 - Phase 4).
Whilst interns work within the classroom context there is also the expectation that they will become active participants in the wider school community. This expectation shifts the intern from the peripheral model of teacher isolation and privatised practice to a more centred and inclusive model of a community of practice.

**Diagram 1: PHASES OF THE INTERNSHIP**

Outcomes
Clarke et al (2001) identify three outcomes crucial to a successful internship as the nurturing of teacher skills, improvement in professional development and the development of the mentor relationship. Nurturing of teacher skills occurs as interns become more efficient, confident as classroom teachers. At the same time they begin to develop interpersonal skills that are crucial to successful classroom practice and become reflective practitioners who work with the individual learning needs of children. As interns become more competent and able to reflect on their practice a noticeable improvement in their professional development occurs. At the same time mentors begin to develop professionally because they have been required to interrogate and reflect on their own practice and often engage in their own practice in a more thoughtful manner. We agree that the three outcomes are crucial to the success of the internship. We also add a fourth outcome of interns becoming active participants in the community of practice.

Evaluation
Both the B Ed and the B Ed/GE internships are evaluated through the use of an evaluation form that is completed by co teachers and mentor teachers towards the end of the internship. Co teachers and teachers are asked to rate statements on a five point scale with 1 being the least and 5 being the most. The evaluation form provides teachers with the opportunity to comment on areas such as initiative in planning and teaching, ability to plan and teach independently, assessing student learning outcomes, implementing classroom and student management plans as well as becoming part of the school community. We also ask for an overall rating for the
internship. The types of questions asked of mentors and co teachers and the results contained in Table 1.

**Table 1. Evaluation of Internship 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interns B Ed</th>
<th>Mentor Teachers B Ed</th>
<th>Interns GE</th>
<th>Mentor Teachers GE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognising needs of individual students prior to Internship</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising needs of individual students at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying initiative prior to internship</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying initiative at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating independently in planning prior to Internship</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating independently in planning at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating independently in teaching prior to internship</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating independently in teaching at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing student learning outcomes prior to internship</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing student learning outcomes at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.33</td>
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<td>Implementing behaviour management strategies prior to internship</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing behaviour management strategies at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing classroom routines prior to internship</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing classroom routines at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming ‘part of’ the school prior to internship</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming ‘part of’ the school at the end of the internship</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overall rating for the internship** | **3.9** | **4.4** | **4.6** | **4.4**
As you will recall our intention was to explore the value of the internship in preparing B Ed/GE and B Ed students for classroom life. We were interested in exploring two questions related to the effectiveness of the internship. First, in what ways does the internship prepare teacher education (TE) students for classroom life and second how does the benefits of an internship in an 18 month for graduate entry program compare to that offered in the 4 year bachelor of education program? It is the results of the evaluation (Table 1) of both internships in 2002 that we now turn to answer both questions.

Results
Results indicate that from the beginning of the internship to the completion there was a positive change in all areas evaluated by both cohorts of co teachers and their mentors.

Interns and mentor teachers in the B Ed/GE internship reported a significant increase by the end of the internship in all areas that were evaluated. On a five point scale the interns reported increases ranging from .87 to 1.47. Mentor teachers also reported increases ranging from .74 to 1.44.

The increases for the B Ed interns and mentor teachers were not as significant however it should be noted that in most cases both interns and mentor teachers in the B Ed internship rated all areas higher than the B Ed/GE at the start of the internship.

The area of significant growth observed by both interns and mentor teacher in the B Ed internship was the increased ability to recognise the needs of individual students. This was followed by the ability to teach independently.

Likewise mentors and interns in the B Ed/GE internship rated significant growth in the ability to teach independently. The other significant area of growth in this internship was in assessing student outcomes.

Interestingly the evaluation of the growth of students in relation to becoming part of the school was not significantly higher for either the B Ed/GE interns or the B Ed interns. We now turn to discuss the implications of these results as they relate to our initial questions.

The overall evaluation of the internship for the B Ed undergraduate co teachers was not as high as for the B Ed/GE co teachers whereas both cohorts of mentor teachers rated the internship the same.

Discussion
The significant increase in all areas of the B Ed/GE internship could be the result of students coming to the internship with experience in only two practicums in two settings as compared to the B Ed interns who have six practicums. Therefore ratings in all areas are perceived as being lower than those of the B Ed interns. We argue that the quality of the sustained teaching experience during the internship enables these interns to arrive at a similar level of growth.
The B Ed interns’ ability to recognise the needs of individual students and to teach independently would be expected to grow and develop as a result of the sustained teaching experience during the internship. This expectation is borne out by the results.

Likewise it is the sustained teaching experience that we argue accounts for the growth in the B Ed/GE interns ability to teach independently. One area of growth that was indicated in the evaluation was that of assessing student outcomes. Unlike the B Ed interns, the B Ed/GE interns do not undertake specific courses in this area. Therefore the internship experience provides the necessary understanding and practices for development of this area. This agrees with Prichard and Ancess (1999) who point out TE students who engage in a program similar to that of an internship grow and develop in areas of teaching and learning for understanding; creating a learning community; and thoughtful long-term inquiry into teaching and learning.

Because the B Ed interns had completed their last practicum in their internship classroom, they entered the internship with a marginally higher rating than the B Ed/GE interns for being part of the school community. They were moving from the periphery of the school community towards the centre. The difference in the positioning of the B Ed interns and the B Ed/GE interns in the community of practice was decreased through the internship experience, so that by the end of the internship both cohorts had made the journey to the centre of the community of practice.

We argue that the internship plays a crucial in preparing TE students as educators. Many educational researchers have argued the value of the internship. For example Zeichner (1992) points out that programs run in a similar way to the internship we have discussed are able to prepare TE students to utilise more varied pedagogical methods and practice in the classroom. Book (1996) maintains that TE students who enter into programs such as an internship that such programs feel more confidence in their knowledge and skill as professionals and will experience fewer problems in entering in to the school culture when they become subsequently experiences less "culture shock" when they become practicing teachers. We agree with these observations.

We conclude that the internship has the potential to provide sustained and realistic school experiences as a culminating activity in all pre service teacher education programs. The high rating that all cohorts gave to the internship evidences the success of the internship. Clearly co teachers and mentors view the internship as a means by which TE students can be adequately prepared as active participants in a community of practice.

References


