

Promising Practices

Clinical Practice Approaches in Initial Teacher Education in Australia

Country category: Australia

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Equipping teacher candidates with what they need to know and do

Stakeholder category(ies): teacher candidate; teacher educator

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Australia from 22-26 May 2017.

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Promising Practice 5.

Clinical Practice Approaches in Initial Teacher Education in Australia

Context

New teachers in Australia and elsewhere consistently report the importance of practical experience in a school as the most crucial part of their initial teacher preparation (Deakin University, 2014_[1]). According to the OECD, the practical component of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are mandatory in the majority of countries surveyed (OECD, 2014_[2]).

The term “clinical teaching” borrows from the medical model in the sense that it considers teachers (and teacher candidates) as professional practitioners working closely with their students within a community of other professional practitioners who use the evidence and agreed standards of their profession to guide their judgments and actions (Burn and Mutton, 2013_[3]). The general movement towards a “comprehensive clinical approach to the preparation of pre-service teachers” (McLean Davies et al., 2015_[4]) also represents a broader acknowledgement that simply increasing the length of time spent in classrooms is not the panacea to improve initial teacher education. Factors such as rigorous selection and development of mentoring teachers, strong school-university partnerships, early field experiences and ambitious learning goals must also be considered (Jensen et al., 2016_[5]) (Ronfeldt and Reininger, 2012_[6]). These elements are central to clinical approaches to teaching and learning, which are characterised by the following in order to “build capabilities in context-responsive teaching” (University of Melbourne, 2017_[7]):

- a focus on student learning and development
- actions that are based on evidence and research-informed practice
- the use and articulation of processes of reasoning to inform teaching practice.

Current ITE programme accreditation standards in Australia require each teacher candidate to complete a minimum number of days of professional experience in one or more school settings: 80 days for undergraduate programmes and 60 days for postgraduate programmes (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016_[8]). This usually takes place over three periods, which increase in terms of duration and responsibility with each period. There are clear guidelines with respect to the roles and responsibilities of the key groups that share responsibility for a teacher candidate’s professional experience: schools, supervising teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher education institutions (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015_[9]). Teachers’ professional experience is deeply embedded in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teaching Standards), which describe the knowledge, practice, and professional engagement teachers need to develop and use throughout each of four

stages in a teacher's career. Even the earliest benchmark stage, "Graduate" status, requires teachers to integrate theories of teaching and learning and research-based understandings with their subject matter and the needs and demands of their students and their school and community contexts. (AITSL, 2014^[10])

Yet, there is a great deal of variability in terms of the support that teacher candidates receive while completing those experiences. This has led to calls to strengthen the practical experience of teacher candidates (Teacher Educational Ministerial Advisory Group, 2015^[11]).

This case study features two of several ITE programmes in Australia with clinical practice components, both of which were visited by the OECD review team.

Assessment Circles at Deakin University

Deakin University's model focuses on the professional experiences that teacher candidates have throughout the programme. Teacher candidates are immersed in the work and culture of a school. They are involved in school meetings, they plan lessons and co-teach with senior teachers, and they analyse student data and school-level data to contribute to improving teaching and learning at the school. A team of mentor teachers supports each teacher candidate, and the students themselves also work in intergenerational teams to support each other (Deakin University, 2018^[12]).

The Victorian Teaching Academies of Professional Practice (TAPPs) initiative began in 2014 (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2018^[13]). The initiative supports initial teacher education (ITE) programmes to develop and grow networks of school partners. These partnerships enable school leaders, veteran teachers and university-based instructors to systematically work together to prepare new teachers. There are 12 TAPPs on multiple campuses of seven universities in the State of Victoria, including Deakin University and the University of Melbourne. Each academy includes an alliance of schools. They focus on bridging theory and practice for teacher candidates while also aligning initial teacher education with veteran teacher professional development. A goal of the TAPPs initiative is to advance a network of ITE programmes and school partners across the state that could, over time, learn from one another. Within each TAPP there are also possibilities for school and programme improvement, as it formalises a collaborative relationship and offers opportunities for feedback and innovation.

At Northern Bay P-12 College, a partner school of Deakin and part of their Teaching Academy, the OECD review team observed a routine used for promoting pre-service teacher learning called Assessment Circles. In an Assessment Circle, multiple teacher candidates come together with mentor teachers and the site director to analyse and discuss their teaching practice and their progress in their own professional development. The Assessment Circle observed involved five teacher candidates, each reflecting on one of the Teaching Standards and its relation to a recent lesson they had taught or observed. For instance, one master's student shared a maths lesson she had taught in which she introduced an algebraic concept to her students using a Pokemon activity. She considered the ways that the lesson promoted students' engagement and participation according to Standard 4.1 of the Teaching Standards, and then she received feedback from her peers and supervisors. The teacher candidates were supported by a Deakin-employed site director ("boundary crosser", (AACTE Clinical Practice Commission, 2018^[14]) who assisted them in applying theory to practice and who also supports mentor teachers in their mentoring practice.

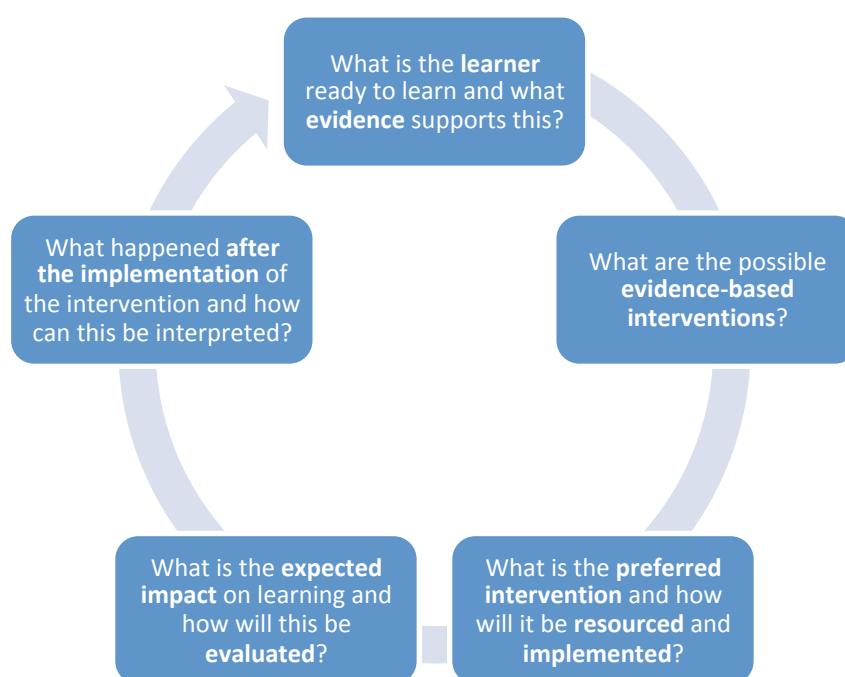
Clinical placement model at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education

Inspired by the discourse on clinical practice models in *Teachers for a New Era* (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001^[15]), in 2008, the University of Melbourne developed a practice-based initial teacher preparation programme, which has evolved into a two-year full-time programme. Ultimately, the university seeks to accomplish three goals through the development of their clinical teaching approach (University of Melbourne, 2017^[7]):

- transforming school-university partnerships
- transforming pre-service curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
- transforming school culture and impacting student learning

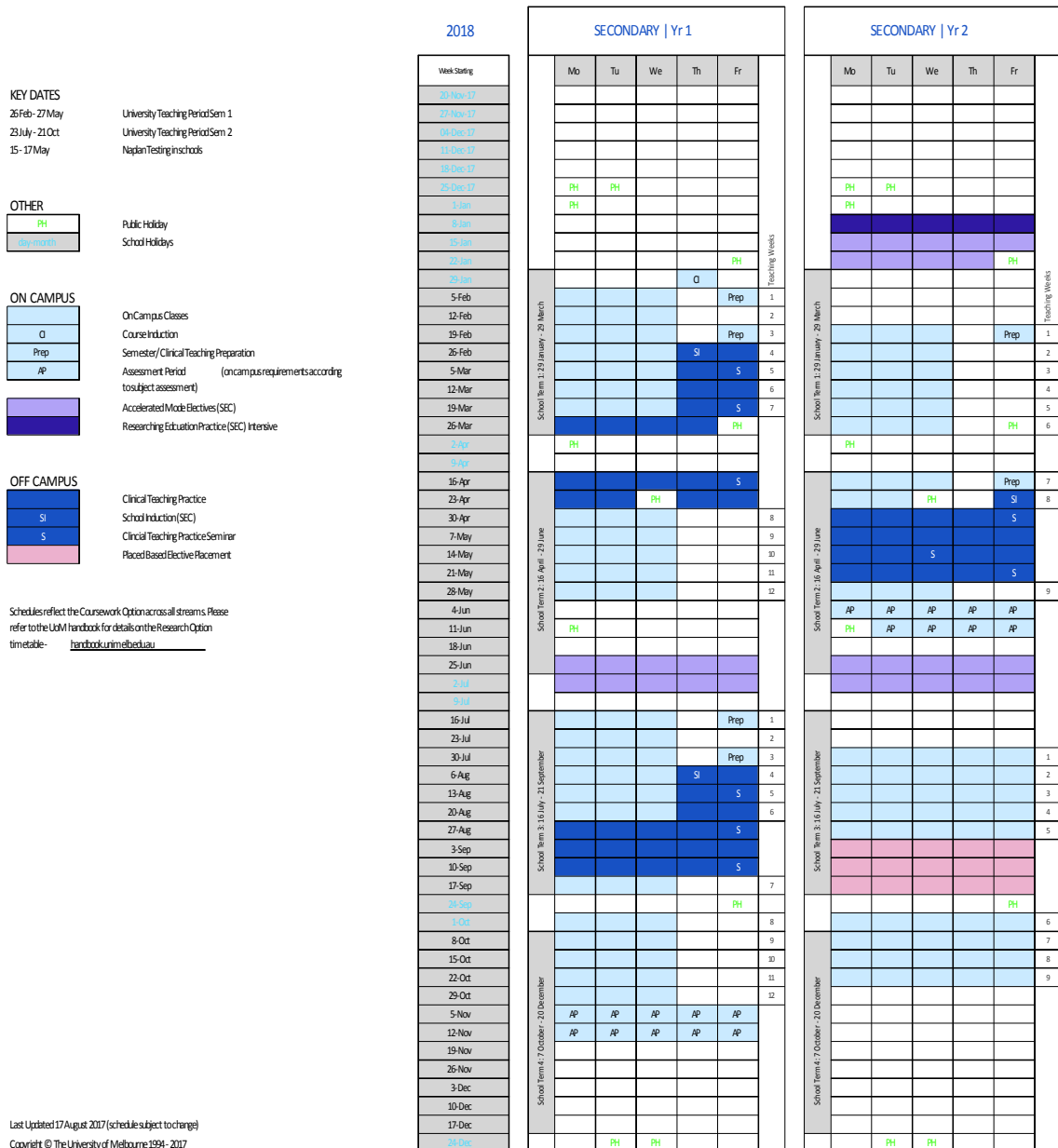
Melbourne's "clinical placement model" is a nested design that involves multiple partnership schools within a "partnership school group". Each partnership school group hosts a cohort of 25 teacher candidates each semester. Teacher candidates are each placed in one mentor teacher's classroom, and they are supported primarily by that mentor. They are also supported by a university-based instructor ("clinical specialist"), who visits the school regularly, and by a school-based partnership group co-ordinator ("teaching fellow") who oversees students' professional experience and the professional development of pre-service teacher mentors. The teaching fellow is employed half-time by a base school and half-time by the university.

Figure 1. The clinical teaching cycle at the University of Melbourne



Source: University of Melbourne (2017^[7]), *The University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education*, http://education.unimelb.edu.au/about_us/clinical-teaching (accessed on 11 May 2018).

Figure 2. Master of Teaching Schedule (Secondary) for the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (2018)



Source: University of Melbourne (2017_[16]), *The University of Melbourne Handbook*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, https://education.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2457171/MTeach-Schedules-MASTER-VERSION-2018-SEC.pdf.

Melbourne's initial teacher preparation focuses on developing teacher candidates' clinical judgment within actual practice settings. Teacher candidates learn to engage in the "clinical teaching cycle" (i.e., cycle of reasoning) as teacher candidates make decisions about teaching (Figure 1).

Students' clinical experiences follow a unique schedule in which teacher candidates visit schools for short blocks of time – approximately 3 to 4 days per week during school term – which are aligned with particular learning modules (Figure 2).

Why is it an opportunity?

These clinical practice models are responsive to multiple policy priorities, especially regarding strengthening initial teacher preparation, as identified by the OECD review team. The OECD team in its review of Australia from 22-26 May 2017 noted the opportunities that these models provide regarding:

- *Integrating practice and research/theory into ITE programmes.* In general, there is little time or support given to clinical practice or development of pedagogical content knowledge as a part of ITE. The programmes featured are examples of commitment to strong clinical practice.
- *Aligning the needs of employers with the output of ITE programmes.* Weak workforce planning and feedback mechanisms from schools and system employers to providers regarding match between graduates capabilities and school requirements means providers are slow to adapt their programmes to school needs. Some employers of teachers feel that they have little influence over the content and design of provider programmes. These programmes seek to link the needs of local schools with their preparation efforts.
- *Improving capability of profession to model and support excellent models of practice.* To learn excellent practice, novice teachers require excellent models of practice. As demands and understandings of best practice change, it can be challenging to ensure that novices all have field-based opportunities to learn to provide research-informed teaching. The featured programme highlights ways that university-based and school-based leaders can work together to support novice teachers' development through shared responsibility and ongoing collaboration and that this also has benefits for the ongoing professional learning of existing teachers.

How could it be improved?

The OECD team noted challenges with regard to:

- *Creating feedback loops between ITE providers and schools.* Despite some strong partnerships, teacher education providers are slow to adapt their programmes to schools' needs. Across the system, there are few formalised structures requiring universities to respond to feedback from schools. The featured programmes illustrate the potential benefit of continuing to develop strong feedback loops that inform and are informed by research and context-specific teaching practice. Such feedback loops would ensure the integration of teacher candidates' professional experience with their teacher education coursework and future professional responsibilities.
- *Connecting ITE, induction and continuous professional development.* Across the system, there is a strong focus on initial teacher education with little recognition of the teacher professional learning continuum. The featured ITPs offer insights about how veteran teachers could be supported as mentors and teacher leaders through their collaboration with university instructors to facilitate novice teacher learning.

- *Learning from and scaling rigorous and effective programmes.* There is a need for ITE leaders to share data and approaches and to learn from one another in cycles of design and assessment. Sharing approaches and results across the states and territories could support local and national goals to improve clinical practice models.

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